

# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

## PROCURING THE RIGHT PRODUCE DISTRIBUTOR



JULY 2012 • WWW.PRODUCEBUSINESS.COM • VOL. 28 • NO. 07 • \$9.90

### INSIDE:

THE PURDIE LOOKS AT INTERSHIPS • BACK TO SCHOOL  
CALIFORNIA GRAPES • GUACAMOLE • NEW YORK STATE VEGETABLES  
DISTRIBUTION SOFTWARE • HERBS • GARLIC • REGIONAL MARKET: DALLAS  
APPLES ON THE MENU • DATES AND DRIED FIGS  
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**THIS MONTH'S WINNER**



**Stephen Armellini**  
**Armellini Express Lines**  
**Vice President of Sales**  
**Miami, FL**

Stephen Armellini has been working at the family business since 1976. While that may seem like eternity, Armellini Express Lines actually dates all the way back to 1945, when his father, Jules "Toots" Armellini, started transporting flowers with his wife Sarah. "He's 89, and still comes to work for four hours every day," he says proudly, referring to the family patriarch.

As the vice president of sales, Armellini oversees the sales and marketing department, along with the four national salespeople who work with the company's 800 customers on a daily basis. "Our business is generally cut flowers," he says. "We are 160 trucks strong."

Armellini got hooked on the business some time ago. "I really enjoy the floral world," he says. "It's about a tenth of the size of the produce business, and not as competitive. Everyone knows everyone. It's a very loyal, tight-knit business." That close-knit, family feel is one of the things Stephen likes best. "It's great working with your family. My brother, David, runs the business. I handle the sales portion. The business is split between all the siblings, as well as some nephews."

Armellini began reading *PRODUCE BUSINESS* "some time ago, when there was a small floral section in the back of the magazine," he recollects. "I enjoyed that very much. Now I read the quarterly *FLORAL BUSINESS*, which is great."

**How To Win!** To win the *PRODUCE BUSINESS* Quiz, the first thing you have to do is enter. The rules are simple: Read through the articles and advertisements in this issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, and either cut along the dotted line or photocopy the page, and send your answers along with a business card or company letterhead to the address listed on the coupon. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our September issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

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**QUESTIONS FOR THE JULY ISSUE**

- 1) What is the name of Mann's latest lettuce offering that is aimed directly at the foodservice industry? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Who is the produce chain specialist at Nunhems? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Who is the founder of Top Brass? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What is the fax number for Morris Okun Inc.? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What company has created Taste Me Do Good for shoppers to learn about its sustainability efforts? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Where are the headquarters for Western Fresh Marketing? \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_  
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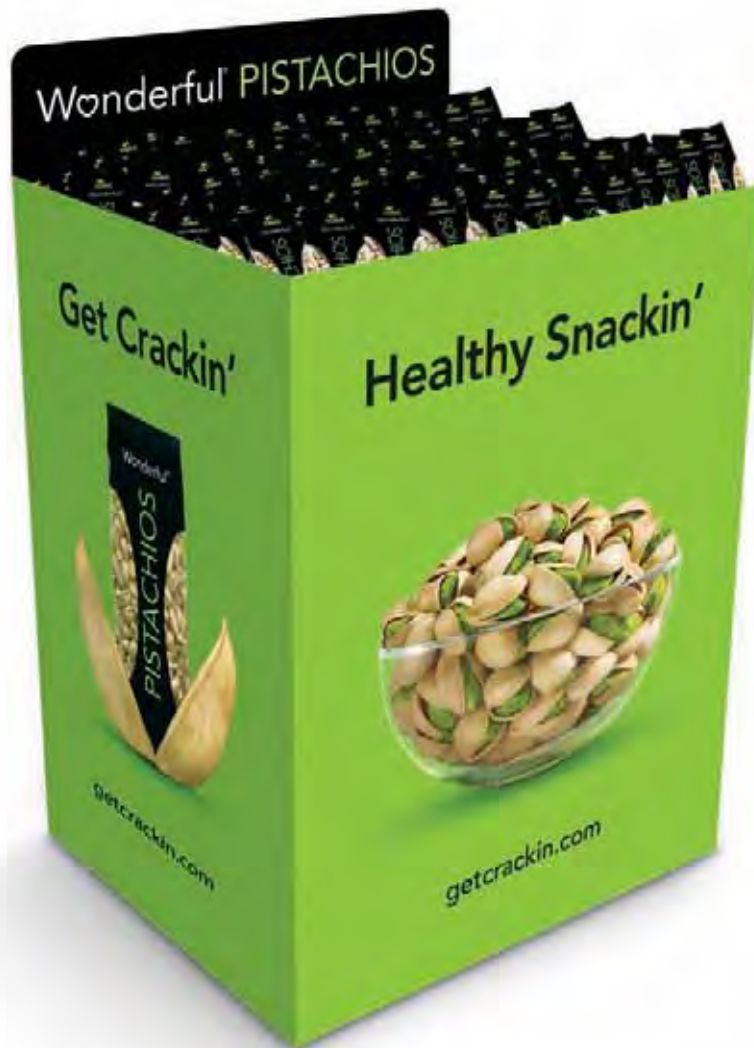
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# FARM BILL MAKES HEADWAY FOR PRODUCE INDUSTRY

By Ray Gilmer

Vice President of Communications, United Fresh Produce Association

If nothing else, the Senate passage of the Farm Bill in late June helped lawmakers feel good about themselves and our legislative process. Senate leaders from both sides of the aisle praised each other and their colleagues for having a civil, constructive process for passing this massive bill. And with savings of about \$24 billion over 10 years, it's one of the few bipartisan measures that could help put our national budget in check.

I'd like to think that the Senate's spirit of cooperation was due, in part, to the example set by United Fresh and other members of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance. Alliance members, meeting at United's Pennsylvania Avenue headquarters each week, have worked hard to develop legislation and garner support for the industry's priority programs — state block grants, research, market promotion, nutrition.

The Alliance is a national coalition of more than 120 organizations representing growers of fruits, vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, nursery plants and other products. It's more than just fresh produce, but these specialty crop industries have proven that by working together we can help Congress make the right choices for produce and more.

We did it with landmark success in the 2008 Farm Bill, and we're working to continue that progress in 2012. And don't forget that it's an election year, so that's probably helping us a bit this time.

It was gratifying to work with Senator Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, as well as the rest of the Senate, to get the bill done. The chairwoman invited United Fresh to participate on a call with reporters to outline the key provisions of the bill. She commended United's Robert Guenther, senior vice president of public policy, for the many years of working together to advance farm policy. I didn't realize Robert was that old!

The Senate Farm Bill's top provisions for the produce industry include:



At weekly meetings in United Fresh's offices in Washington, D.C., representatives of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance share information and develop policy strategies.

- Specialty Crop Block Grants funded at \$70 million per year
- Specialty Crop Research Initiative funded at \$25 million in FY13; \$30 million in FY14-15; \$65 million in FY16; \$50 million in FY17
- Plant Pest and Disease Program funded at \$60 million in FY13-16 and \$65 million in FY17
- Market Access Program and Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops fully funded at 2008 Farm Bill levels
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program funded at \$150 million per year
- Hunger-Free Communities Grant Program for fruit and vegetable SNAP incentives
- Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program
- Section 32 specialty crop purchases funded at 2008 Farm Bill levels
- DoD Fresh program fully funded at \$50 million per year

Additionally, United is pleased by the Senate's acceptance of an amendment, sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), which calls for a feasibility study of insurance products that could cover recalls, quarantines and market disruptions. It's a small but significant first step in our efforts to develop better solutions for businesses that can suffer widespread market losses associated with a recall event, even if those businesses have no connection to the recall itself.

The Senate's passage of S. 3240, The Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012, by a vote of 64-35, gets us halfway to the finish line. The next step will be for the House Agriculture Committee to release the Chairman's Mark, which may have already happened by the time you read this column.

Our colleagues at United agree that the Senate has sent a strong signal to the House that this legislation deserves to be acted on quickly, and we will keep encouraging the House to move forward as soon as possible.

We expect the House to look for more budget cuts than the Senate version. Whatever final form the House bill takes, a panel of negotiators will need to reconcile the differences in the two bills in a Conference Committee.

And a deadline looms. The 2008 Farm Bill generally expires on September 30, 2012, or with the 2012 crop year. Without an extension or a new farm bill, several discretionary programs might not have statutory authority to receive appropriations in future years. So there's a strong incentive, we would hope, for Congress to get this done and to the president's desk.

One of the best ways to get involved on the produce industry's many policy issues and priorities is to attend United's Washington Public Policy Conference, October 1-3. Visit United's website at [www.unitedfresh.org/wppc](http://www.unitedfresh.org/wppc) to sign up for this great event.



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# TWO CHEERS FOR BACON

By James Prevor  
President & Editor-in-Chief



Each July, the industry's attention turns to foodservice, as PMA's annual Foodservice Conference is held, and so all eyes turn to the pledge, made jointly by the Produce Marketing Association, the National Restaurant Association and the International Foodservice Distributors Association, to double produce consumption in 10 years. The pledge was made in 2009, so we are now three years in, and the

one thing we can say for sure is that nobody has the foggiest idea whether any progress has been made toward reaching the announced goal. No research was ever done to establish a baseline usage number, so we are left with highly suspect research metrics, such as the number of mentions of produce on menus, to use as a proxy for usage.

The National Restaurant Association entered into the pledge enthusiastically with NRA chief Dawn Sweeney shrewdly seeing the alliance with PMA as a way of positioning the restaurant industry on the "side of the angels" in the public health controversy over the role restaurants play in the national obesity problem. Despite the enthusiasm, in fact the NRA has done virtually nothing to help achieve this goal. If a restaurant goes to the NRA homepage, it finds zero mention of the initiative, and even a search for the word "produce" brings up exactly two mentions in all of 2012 — a speech Sweeney gave to the PMA board of directors and a nutritionist mentioning some ideas for incorporating summer fruits and vegetables into summer menus.

Indeed, the NRA's efforts have been so miniscule that if one were a skeptic, one would surmise that the NRA couldn't care less about increasing produce consumption, but cares a great deal about being able to say it is in an alliance with the produce industry to boost produce consumption.

This actually makes a lot of sense. The NRA doesn't want restaurants to be blamed for obesity, but its members really care very little about whether they sell more or less produce. If consumers want seafood or pasta, restaurants are happy to sell those products, and they have no particular reason to want to persuade consumers to eat less of one thing and more of another.

The produce industry, of course, has substantial reason to want to sell more of its products, though there is some question as to whether

current strategies are likely to boost consumption. The long discussed merger between PMA and United seems likely to happen very soon, as industry leaders look to rationalize the trade's cost structure. Surely, the next focus of attention will be on the Produce for Better Health Foundation.

Whatever its one-time merits may have been, it is an organization that time has passed. There is just no evidence that its efforts are achieving anything at all. The reasons are many, but one is that the whole philosophy of promoting healthy eating may be inhibiting produce consumption. The day this column was being prepared, the home page of the Fruits and Veggies More Matters website featured items such as "Healthy Eating Tips," "Healthy Desserts & Drinks" and "Healthy Summer Parties" — all this medicinal marketing is built around meals that not only have a lot of produce but also have restricted fat, sodium, sugar, etc., in line with the nutritional guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It is a nice ideal, and PBH is restricted in what it can promote by government funding sources,

so you can't blame the organization. But, bottom line, this is not going to increase produce consumption and, as such, this insistence on puritanical eating may not result in healthier diets.

Want to get children to eat more vegetables? Try adding cheese. We've had an extraordinary boom in consumption of Brussels sprouts over the past five years, and we can credit one very important ingredient: Bacon. All over the country, top chefs are adding pancetta, braising in bacon, topping with prosciutto bits, not to mention olive oil, Pecorino Romano, crumbled blue cheese and Parmesan.

There is so much attention paid nowadays to the idea that produce breeding programs need to be focused on producing flavor, and certainly nobody can argue with this — though the economics of the business mean that seasonality, yield and an ability to survive transit will always have an important place in breeding considerations. Breeding in flavor is, at best, a very long-term proposition, and no variety will meet the fancy of every palate.

The most immediate and flexible way to bring flavor to produce is through cooking techniques. Maybe the health department wants to offer three cheers for steamed vegetables, but I say let us offer two cheers for bacon... and by selling more flavorful produce, diets will be overall healthier than if we try to enforce an asceticism that turns people away from produce and toward less healthy alternatives. **pb**

We've had an extraordinary boom in consumption of Brussels sprouts over the past five years, and we can credit one very important ingredient: Bacon.

# Mann's Better Burger Leaf™

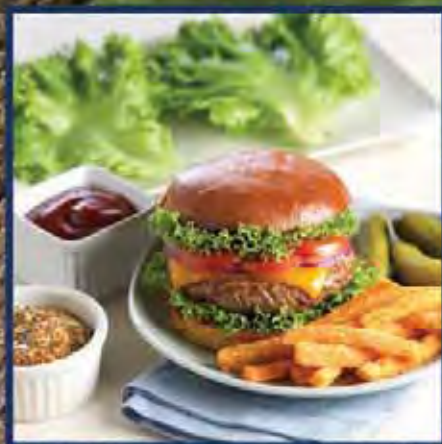
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\*Mintel Menu Insights \*\*Technomic

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**JULY 17, 2012****FRESH PRODUCE AND FLORAL COUNCIL EXPO**

Conference Venue: Disneyland Hotel, Anaheim, CA  
 Conference Management: FPFC, La Mirada, CA  
 Phone: 714-739-0177 • Fax: 714-739-0226  
 Email: [info@fpfc.org](mailto:info@fpfc.org)  
 Website: [www.fpfc.org](http://www.fpfc.org)

**July 20-22, 2012****PMA FOODSERVICE CONFERENCE AND EXPO**

Conference Venue: The Monterey Conference Center, Monterey, CA  
 Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE  
 Phone: 302-738-7100 • Fax: 302-731-2409  
 Email: [solutionctr@pma.com](mailto:solutionctr@pma.com)  
 Website: <http://fsc.pma.com>

**AUGUST 15-17, 2012****TEXAS PRODUCE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION**

Conference Venue: Grand Hyatt Hotel, San Antonio, TX  
 Conference Management: Texas Produce Association  
 Phone: 956-581-8632 • Fax: 956-584-3307  
 Email: [sparkslaura@hotmail.com](mailto:sparkslaura@hotmail.com)  
 Website: [www.texasproduceassociation.com](http://www.texasproduceassociation.com)

**August 16-18, 2012****APPLE CROP OUTLOOK**

Conference Venue: Ritz Carlton, Chicago, IL  
 Conference Management: U.S. Apple Association  
 Phone: 703-442-8850 • Fax: 703-790-0845  
 Email: [lstephens@usapple.org](mailto:lstephens@usapple.org)  
 Website: [www.usapple.org](http://www.usapple.org)

**August 22- 25, 2012****AMHPAC 2012**

Conference Venue: Presidente Intercontinental Hotel, Jalisco, Mexico  
 Conference Management: Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico  
 Phone: (33) 38-23-36-52  
 Website: [www.amhpac.org](http://www.amhpac.org)

**SEPTEMBER 4 - 9, 2012****JOINT TOMATO CONFERENCE 2012**

36th Annual Joint Tomato Conference  
 Conference Venue: Ritz Carlton, Naples, FL  
 Conference Management: Florida Tomato Committee, Maitland, FL  
 Phone: 407-660-1949 • Fax: 407-660-1656  
 Email: [diana@floridatomatoes.org](mailto:diana@floridatomatoes.org)  
 Website: [www.floridatomatoes.org](http://www.floridatomatoes.org)

**September 18 - 21, 2012****FFVA CONVENTION 2012**

FFVA 69th Annual Convention 2011  
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 Conference Management: Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, Maitland, FL  
 Phone: 321-214-5200 • Fax: 321-214-0210  
 Email: [information@ffva.com](mailto:information@ffva.com)  
 Website: [www.ffva.com](http://www.ffva.com)

**September 20 - 22, 2012****SEPC FALL CONFERENCE 2012**

2012 Annual Fall Conference  
 Conference Venue: Grove Park Inn, Asheville, NC  
 Conference Management: Southeast Produce Council Inc., East Ellijay, GA  
 Phone: 813-633-5556 • Fax: 813-653-4479  
 Email: [info@seproducecouncil.com](mailto:info@seproducecouncil.com)  
 Website: [www.seproducecouncil.com](http://www.seproducecouncil.com)

**September 24 - 25, 2012****AMERICAS FOOD AND BEVERAGE SHOW 2012**

16th Annual Americas Food and Beverage Show  
 Conference Venue: Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami, FL  
 Conference Management: World Trade Center Miami, Miami, FL  
 Phone: 305-871-7910 • Fax: 305-871-7904  
 Email: [afb@naylor.com](mailto:afb@naylor.com)  
 Website: [www.americasfoodandbeverage.com](http://www.americasfoodandbeverage.com)

**OCTOBER 1 - 3, 2012****WASHINGTON PUBLIC POLICY 2012**

The produce industry's most powerful public policy event  
 Conference Venue: Hyatt Regency Capital Hill, Washington D.C.  
 Conference Management: United Fresh, Washington D.C.  
 Phone: 202-303-3400 • Fax: 202-303-3433  
 Email: [united@unitedfresh.org](mailto:united@unitedfresh.org)  
 Website: [www.unitedfresh.org](http://www.unitedfresh.org)

**October 14 - 17, 2012****SIAL PARIS 2012**

The 25th global international food products exhibition  
 Conference Venue: Paris Nord Villepinte — Pac des Expositions, Paris, France  
 Conference Management: IMEX Management Inc., Charlotte, NC  
 Phone: 704-365-0041 • Fax: 704-365-8426  
 Email: [EricH@imexmanagement.com](mailto:EricH@imexmanagement.com)  
 Website: [www.imexmgmt.com](http://www.imexmgmt.com)

**October 26 - 28, 2012****PMA FRESH SUMMIT 2012**

Conference Venue: Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA  
 Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE  
 Phone: 302-738-7100 • Fax: 302-731-2409  
 Email: [solutionctr@pma.com](mailto:solutionctr@pma.com)  
 Website: [www.pma.com](http://www.pma.com)

**NOVEMBER 1 - 3, 2012****NOGALES PRODUCE CONVENTION 2012**

Conference Venue: Rio Rico Resort & Tubac Golf Resort, Rio Rico, AZ  
 Conference Management: Fresh Produce Association of the Americas, Nogales, AZ  
 Phone: (520) 287-2707 • Fax: (520) 287-2948  
 Email: [freshfrommexico.com](mailto:freshfrommexico.com)  
 Website: [www.freshfrommexico.com](http://www.freshfrommexico.com)

**November 11 -14, 2012****WESTERN GROWERS ANNUAL MEETING 2012**

Conference Venue: Fairmont Resort, Scottsdale, AZ  
 Conference Management: Western Growers Association, Newport Beach, CA  
 Phone: 949-863-1000 • Fax: 949-863-9028  
 Email: [info@wga.com](mailto:info@wga.com)  
 Website: [www.wga.com](http://www.wga.com)

**DECEMBER 4-6, 2012****NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE**

Conference Venue: Pier 94, New York, NY  
 Conference Management: PRODUCE BUSINESS, Boca Raton, FL  
 Phone: 561-994-1118 • Fax: 561-994-1610  
 Email: [info@nyproduceshow.com](mailto:info@nyproduceshow.com)  
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THE NEW YORK  
PRODUCE SHOW  
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## TRANSITIONS



### THE OPPENHEIMER GROUP VANCOUVER, B.C., CANADA

**David Wazny** was hired as part of the sales team, and will be responsible for marketing the full range of Oppenheimer products to customers in Western Canada, while also providing general support to the marketer's Canadian sales strategy. Wazny worked as a produce department manager for four years at Vancouver-based Save-on-Foods where he controlled inventory levels of around 200 lines of product, while executing merchandising programs and product placement throughout the department.

### KINGSTON & ASSOCIATES MARKETING LLC IDAHO FALLS, ID

**Yvonne Marpert** was hired as the company's new product manager for pineapples. Marpert has 25 years of produce sales experience including an 11-year tenure at Chiquita Brands, where she spent eight years as the sales manager for pineapples. Her focus at Kingston will be managing the Golden Pineapple sales program, expanding key accounts and developing new markets.



### COLUMBIA MARKETING INTERNATIONAL CORP. WENATCHEE, WA

**Jeff Niesz** has joined the domestic sales team at CMI. He has 16 years of experience selling apples, pears and cherries in the Northwest, and has accumulated a wide range of sales experience representing Washington shippers of fresh apples, pears, cherries and apricots.



### BAERO NORTH AMERICA INC. ST. LOUIS, MO

**Lee Rhoades** has been promoted to the role of chief operating officer and will be responsible for all business activities within North America for the German-based global lighting company. Lee had served as director of sales and marketing for more than three years, and assumed the reins in June. BAERO specializes in providing lighting products, including LED, that are exclusively engineered for super-market illumination.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### NEW YORK APPLE/MARZETTI-SPONSORED DECA DISPLAY CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

New York Apple Association (NYAA) announced the six winners of its 2012 contest promoting commissary in-store displays of New York state apples and Marzetti products. Six winning commissaries were named including, Harrison Village, Indianapolis, IN; Gunter Air Force Base, Maxwell-Gunter Annex, AL; Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, AL; Hurlburt Field, Hurlburt Field, FL; Ft. Leonard Wood, Ft. Leonard, MO; and Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, FL (pictured).

## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### CAL GIANT WINNING RECIPES ANNOUNCED

California Giant Berry Farms, in Watsonville, CA, chose the winners of the Sweet Taste of Spring consumer campaign. The eight winning recipes will be featured on the company's website. Winning recipes included Blueberry Corn Fritters, (Grand Prize-Best Overall) Fresh Raspberry Tiramisu, (Best Raspberry Recipe) and Sweet Berry Shrimp Salad (Best Healthy Recipe).

### GIUMARRA GROWER OBTAINS FAIR TRADE CERTIFICATION

Gilberto Salazar, a grower for The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, was recently certified to sell Fair Trade watermelons and grapes. Giumarra customers who purchase watermelons or grapes grown on the Salazar ranch now have the option to buy fruit bearing the Fair Trade label. The product is sold at a premium, with the additional funds going to a worker council fund for the employees of the family-owned and operated company.



### MEDJOOL DATE GROWERS GEAR UP FOR SUMMER

Growers of Bard Valley Natural Delights Medjool Dates in Bard Valley, CA, have created six delicious new guilt-free recipes for the summer, including Medjool Date Whole Grain and Oat Bars (pictured) — sweet and nutritious bars that combine cinnamon and honey with chewy Medjool dates and crunchy whole-grain oat cereal — Peanut Butter, Banana and Medjool Date Pitas — a delicious and nutritious snack combining creamy peanut butter, bananas and naturally sweet Medjool dates, stuffed in a pita pocket.

### NEW LEADERS TAKE HELM OF FPAA

The Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) held its annual membership meeting on May 17 in Nogales, AZ. The meeting concluded with the election of eight distributor directors and two associate directors to the FPAA board. Pictured are Jose Luis Obregon of IPR Fresh, Christian Reyna of Divine Flavor LLC, and Rod Sbragia of Tricar Sales, all of whom were newly elected to the board for a two-year term.



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## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### DOLE FRUIT PAIRINGS PUT AN ASIAN SPIN ON THE MENU

Dole 2012 Fruit Pairings developed 30 recipes around fruit and ingredient combinations from Korea, China, Japan, Vietnam and Thailand that explore the flavor nuances of each cuisine with exciting versions of noodle and rice dishes that include Beef Noodle Salad with Orange-Anise Dressing, a Mango and Avocado Wasabi Pizza (pictured) and a Saigon Cinnamon and Banana Rice Pudding.



### SCHNUCKS NAMES "BEST PRODUCE MANAGER" FOR PROMOTION SPONSORED BY FRIEDA'S INC.

In April, all Schnucks, Loggi and Hilander stores participated in Frieda's first-ever Love Your Produce Manager event. The month-long promotion put the spotlight on exemplary customer service in the produce department. Pictured are John Benenati, Schnucks' produce merchandiser; Jeanne Belcher, who won a \$500 Schnucks gift card from the promotion; Mike O'Brien, vice president of produce; and Scott Buell, assistant produce manager.

### ELEVEN RIVERS WINS THE NATIONAL EXPORT AWARD 2012

Eleven Rivers, of Guadalajara, Mexico, has won the prestigious Mexican National Export Award 2012. The winning companies have managed to compete, grow and diversify their sales of goods and services internationally, based on their consistency, efforts, perseverance, creativity, quality and innovation. Pictured are Heriberto T. Vlaminc, Eleven Rivers President; Felipe Calderon, President of Mexico; and Fernando A. Mariscal, Eleven Rivers Coordinator.



### PURE HOT HOUSE FOODS KICKS OFF SUMMER WITH PURE FLAVOR GRILLER TRAYS

Pure Hot House, Leamington, ON, Canada, is ready to kick off this summer with their exclusive full line of Pure Flavor Griller trays, just in time for BBQ season. This easy and convenient product saves consumers time and prep work washing, slicing and dicing vegetables for the grill. There are over 15 different blends and three different sizes available.



### DANZIGER SHOWCASES 400 VARIETIES AT EUROPEAN FLOWERTRIALS

In Beit Dagan, Israel, 'Dan' Flower Farm displayed its creative breeding efforts with 400 varieties from 37 different crops at the annual FlowerTrials that took place from June 12-15. FlowerTrials are a platform for the European breeders spread between three different areas in The Netherlands and Germany, where crops and novelties for the new bedding-season are displayed.



### A NEW DAWN IN ORGANIC DISTRIBUTION

Renaissance Organics LLC, a certified organic distributor south of Atlanta, GA, proudly announces the launch of its business led by president Dee Dee Digby. Renaissance operates in a state-of-the-art facility that has more than 30,000 square feet of refrigerated/freezer storage space. Renaissance will service large and medium retailers, independent health food stores, co-ops, buying clubs, restaurants, institutions and schools.



### L&M EXPANDS MICHIGAN VEGETABLE PROGRAM

L&M Companies Inc., Raleigh, NC, will be representing various Michigan growers, as well as consolidating a full line of vegetables in its new location on Michigan's Benton Harbor Market. Michigan has played a role in L&M's summer vegetable program for years, complementing its own farms in the Southeast. In a continued effort to provide top quality customer service, the company has formally expanded into the region.

### OPPENHEIMER AVOCADO PROGRAM REACHES NEXT STAGE

Coquitlam, BC, Canada-based Oppenheimer Group has launched an avocado ripening service to better accommodate Eastern U.S. and Eastern Canadian customers. This service complements the ripening protocols Oppenheimer implemented for its western customers in 2010. Oppenheimer began marketing Hass avocados from Mexican producer Mevi two years ago, giving the company a 12-month program for the first time.



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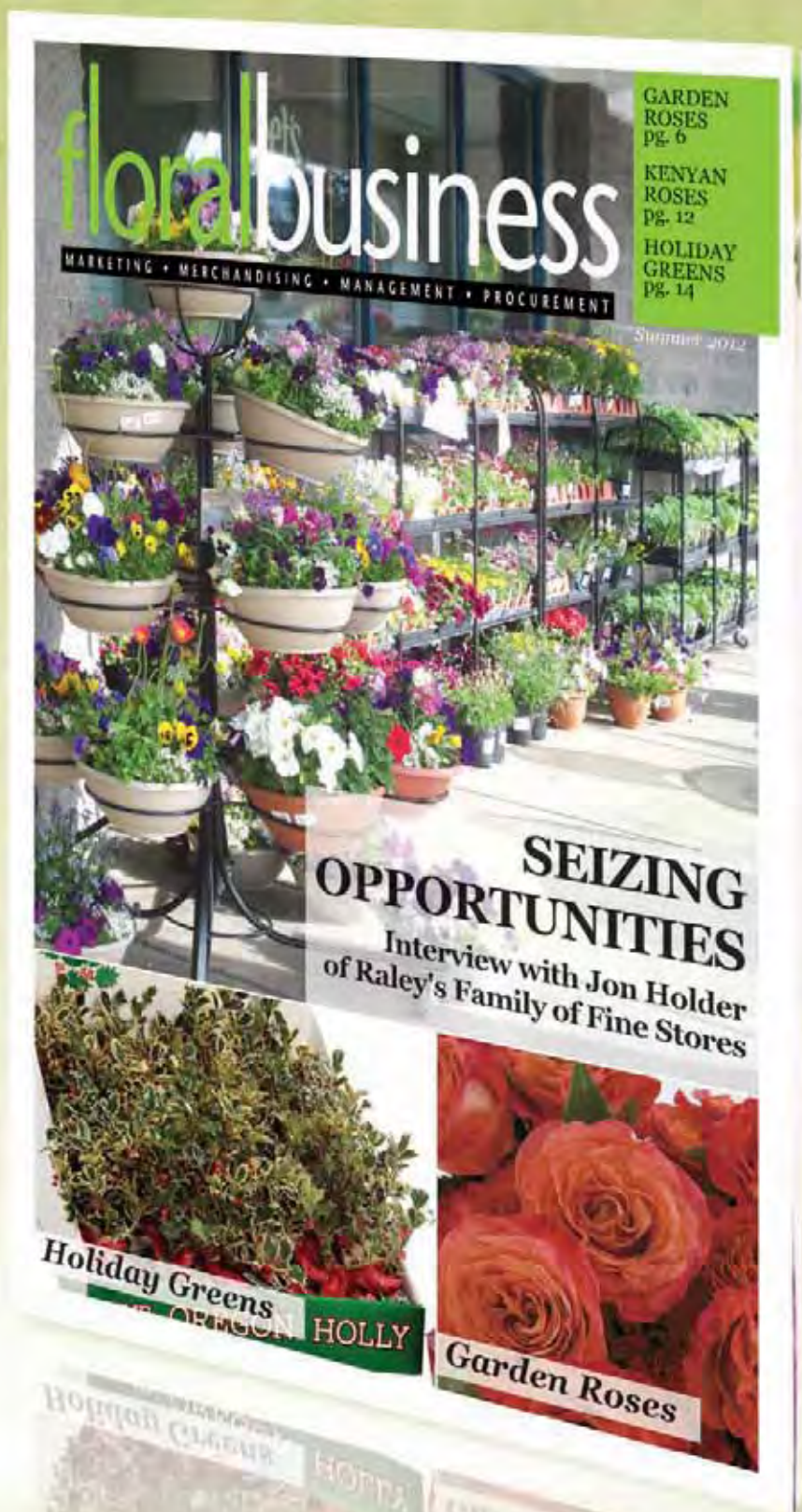


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NEW PRODUCTS



**KICK OFF YOUR SUMMER WITH LITTLE BLUE DYNAMOS**

The Folsom, CA-based U.S. High-bush Blueberry Council (USHBC) launched a national marketing campaign to engage the next generation of produce shoppers by highlighting

the performance and lifestyle benefits of blueberries. Many blueberry producers are featuring the iconic Little Blue Dynamos seal on their packaging to remind shoppers of the myriad nutrition and lifestyle benefits blueberries have to offer.

**NEW KITCHEN PICK LINE ALIVE WITH FLAVOR**

Kitchen Pick's line of fresh living herbs is expanding to include pea shoots, Daikon radish shoots, wild arugula, spicy micro mix, lemon balm and chervil, which began shipping throughout this spring. The Maple Ridge, BC, Canada company's herbs are grown in a protected greenhouse environment using biological insects to fend off pests. All Kitchen Pick Living Herbs are sold 15 plants to a master carton.



**MANN PACKING INTRODUCES NEW SWEET POTATO PRODUCTS**

Mann Packing Co. Inc., Salinas, CA, has recently changed the cut of its sweet potatoes to a crinkle style, making the sweet potatoes look more like French fries. The company has also added more on-pack information and activated more direct-to-consumer communication activities to increase awareness of the product.



**EMERALD COAST GROWERS' MOST POPULAR VARIETIES IN ONE ASSORTMENT**

The Pensacola, FL-based Emerald Coast Growers is making it easier to do business with a new Sedum Color Mix that takes the guesswork out of buying. The Color Mix joins the popular Chicks Mix, an assortment of the most-asked-for Sempervivum varieties. Each tray contains 10 starters each of five varieties. Use as groundcover, in containers and rock gardens.



**POTANDON PRODUCE INTRODUCES NEW KLONDIKE EXPRESS VARIETY AND PACKAGING**

Potandon Produce's newest addition to its growing family of Klondike Brands is Klondike Goldust Express, which will join Potandon's shelf-stable line of microwaveable fresh potatoes. The Idaho Falls, ID, company's new line combines cutting-edge package technology with two market-proven potato varieties, enabling convenience when preparing food.



**HOORAY PUREE OFFERS A NEW WAY OF HEALTH**

Hooray Puree, Chicago, IL, has announced its line of 100 percent organic and conventional vegetable purees. These products are the convenient way to add the nutrition and taste of fresh vegetables to meals and snacks, perfect for a variety of foodservice operations as well as home-cooked meals. Hooray Puree's new attention-grabbing packaging celebrates the fresh, natural, single ingredient and helps retail consumers immediately recognize the product.



**B&W GOURMET FARMS CREATES NEW BRAND FOR BABY LEAF CATEGORY**

B&W, a 140-plus-year-old family-owned farming operation, has recently changed its name to B&W Gourmet Farms. The Fellsmere, FL, company's retail and food-service branding have changed from B&W Quality Growers to B&W Gourmet Farms, the category leader of Distinctive Baby Leaves™. B&W Gourmet Farms is specializing in Distinctive Baby Leaves™ with seasonal farms in eight states and year-round processing facilities in Florida.



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# When Did Internships Become Slave Labor Instead Of Opportunities To Develop Relationships And Knowledge About A Chosen Field?

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 04.24.2012

**T**he *New York Times Magazine* has a regular column called *The Ethicist*, which is currently written by Ariel Kaminer, whose previous job was editor of the Arts & Leisure section of *The New York Times*.

The title of a recent column was "The Internship Rip-Off." As is customary, the column was built around a letter received from a reader:

*I took an unpaid internship that I figured would give me experience and help me land somewhere in six months. Instead I'm picking up coffee and dry cleaning and performing other tasks that the company would otherwise have to pay someone for. I know this is the status quo for internships, but it violates the law, and it feels deeply unethical. Taking legal recourse would hurt my career prospects. Is there anything I can demand of this company in exchange for my slave labor?*

— Name Withheld, New York, NY

Ms. Kaminer goes on to blast unpaid internships as inherently unethical because the internships can only be taken by people who don't need a paycheck, and thus, give an advantage to the rich.

Although she acknowledges the practical difficulties of enforcing any such rights, Ms. Kaminer feels the letter-writer, as "a matter of ethics," has a case. Ms. Kaminer states that the letter-writer "should be able to demand, or at least expect, that the internship offer a worthwhile return on the time and money you put into it — namely, a better sense of whether and how to pursue a career in that field, and the skills or relationships with which to do so."

Ms. Kaminer also claims that unpaid internships are illegal under the Fair Labor Standards Act, and since being upfront about his or her complaints could ruin the intern's reputation in the field, Ms. Kaminer suggests that the intern consider making a confidential complaint to the Labor Department.

The piece is interesting for several reasons. First, the whole approach has little to do with ethics as conventionally understood. For example, a core ethical issue is truth-telling. Yet this letter never says the intern was deceived or misled.

We don't actually know what field this internship is in, but very possibly the letter-writer, rather than revealing a flaw of the internship, is revealing that he or she doesn't know how to take advantage of the internship. In many cases, internships are valuable not because of the actual skills one learns while interning, but because of the opportunity to develop contacts and make an impression on people in one's chosen field who might be able to help one's career.

The letter-writer also shows no evidence of any initiative. In other words, if one gets an internship at *The New York Times*, and if one has ambitions to be a writer, perhaps one can work late nights on a story,

then drop off a manuscript with an editor who one sees every week while delivering her Venti Soy Latte. At the very least, one could ask if there was any way one could get a shot at doing some other work.

We have the strong suspicion that since this letter-writer has persuaded himself or herself that he or she is providing "slave labor" — although, of course, the intern is free to leave any time if he has a better offer or even if he doesn't, which makes this comment an insult to slaves throughout history — this intern has already been typed as having a "bad attitude," and nobody wants to spend time with the intern on substantive work.

After all, although the letter-writer acknowledges that doing various non-work-related tasks is "status quo for internships" — meaning the intern knowingly accepted a position doing exactly what he or she is doing — the intern has somehow decided that he/she "feels deeply unethical," and although the legal status of the internship would not be any different if the intern were typing manuscripts or getting coffee, the intern really would like to pursue legal recourse against the firm that offered the internship opportunity.

The allegations of illegality are not really very meaningful. Yes, for-profit companies are not generally permitted to have interns work for free — the exception generally being if the program is university-sponsored and the student is getting credit for it. However, non-profits and government are generally permitted to have volunteer interns. The requirement, though, is just to pay minimum wage. There is little indication here that this particular intern would be

all that much happier by getting minimum wage.

One could argue the law a bad one and should be changed. If two people come to a deal, where one wants exposure or experience and the other wants help getting coffee, it is not completely obvious why this should be banned. Still, for now, the law is the law.

Ms. Kaminer's critique of non-paid internships as sops for the rich strikes us as not the critique it used to be. Today, there are substantial student grants and loans available, and the alternative is often not working in the coal mine or even Starbucks; the alternative is doing another semester at the university.

*The New York Times* actually ran an article titled, "Placing the Blame as Students Are Buried in Debt," which told the story of Cortney Munna, who racked up almost \$100,000 in debt getting her degree in "religious and women's studies" at NYU.

Is it completely clear that allowing Ms. Munna to pay good money for a semester studying such a subject is less abusive than giving such a person the opportunity to meet influential people in a field of her choice? *The Ethicist* ought to ponder that for a while.

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# Creating The Tasti-Lee Tomato: A Marriage Of Plant Breeding And Consumer Research

BY JOHN BEUTTENMULLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FLORIDA FOUNDATION SEED PRODUCERS INC.

The University of Florida has some of the most active plant breeding programs among the nation's land-grant institutions, and releases numerous fruits, vegetables, ornamentals, forages and other crops developed by UF researchers. These cultivars are often licensed to producers who sell seed and plants to growers.

The Florida Foundation Seed Producers Inc. (FFSP) is a UF direct-support organization responsible for the licensing of such improved plant varieties. In fiscal year 2010-11, FFSP's licensing income from all UF cultivars totaled \$4.41 million, and 70 percent of that money was reinvested into the breeding programs that developed the licensed cultivars. Despite this success, our plant-breeding programs are largely unknown to consumers, due to some practical considerations.

For starters, many food crops are branded and advertised using the marketer's name. That name may be widely recognized, generating sales on its own merits.

Generally speaking, there is little value in conveying the name of a particular cultivar to consumers. Many new varieties are bred and selected for traits that only producers would notice, such as better disease resistance. The average shopper can't fully appreciate the importance of traits that make production of a particular crop easier or more profitable.

One of FFSP's biggest success stories is a new hybrid tomato sold under the Tasti-Lee brand. This unique genotype was developed to give Florida growers a foothold in the premium tomato market and to offer a high-flavor tomato to consumers. When FFSP licensed this variety and the brand, FFSP worked with our licensee, Bejo Seeds Inc., to establish the Tasti-Lee brand and plan a large-scale promotional campaign that would spotlight the University of Florida.

The Bejo marketing team was eager to help. Together, we spent a great deal of time developing labels, displays, print advertising, recipes and other materials needed to grab consumers' attention and convince

This is my opinion of the three tomato samples:

	1 - Best	2 - Average	3 - Worst	Rating Average	Response Count
Sample A	20.4% (10)	43.0% (40)	36.6% (34)	2.16	93
Sample B	44.9% (40)	32.0% (29)	22.5% (20)	1.70	89
Sample C	38.2% (34)	24.7% (22)	37.1% (33)	1.99	89

them to try this unique product. Usually, this kind of work is left completely up to our licensees, because they have made an investment and want the freedom to promote sales in whatever ways seem best.

We took the unusual step of working with Bejo on this marketing campaign because we believed Tasti-Lee was worth bragging about. We knew how consumers complained that store-bought tomatoes tasted bland. After 10 years' development by UF tomato breeder Jay Scott, Tasti-Lee was ready to quell those complaints. It had a deep crimson color, high lycopene content and a balance of sweetness, acidity and aroma likely to impress tomato-lovers.

We believed that by branding and promoting such a unique variety we could generate a great deal of sales, and a great deal of positive publicity for UF. What's more, we believed growers might need a little convincing to produce Tasti-Lee tomatoes because, unlike average supermarket tomatoes, this variety ripens on the vine and requires hand-picking — a costly alternative to machine harvesting that necessitates a premium price.

Before the variety was commercialized, we wanted empirical evidence that the Tasti-Lee brand would be a hit. So in spring 2009, UF began a two-year marketing study on the new variety. Aided by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we worked in partnership with Bejo and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. One of the study's main objectives was to gauge consumer reaction to Tasti-Lee brand tomatoes in several dimensions: the fruit's sensory qualities, consumers' willing-

ness to pay premium prices and so forth, and then make projections about the potential market demand for Tasti-Lee.

Consumer reaction was assessed with a survey and taste test that involved a total of 100 self-described tomato-lovers from major cities in Georgia, Indiana and Virginia. Each participant answered questions on their produce buying and consumption habits, opinions about store-bought tomatoes, and favorite tomato traits. They also provided demographic information.

Then they tasted samples of three tomatoes — Tasti-Lee brand and two varieties commonly found in supermarkets, one average-priced and one premium-priced. The participants gave written comments on each sample's flavor, texture, color and overall appeal.

The Tasti-Lee brand trumped the competition, being rated "good" or "excellent" by 71 percent of the participants. The store-bought premium tomato earned those ratings from 62 percent, and the average-priced store tomato was rated "good" or "excellent" by 51 percent of participants.

These results encouraged our belief that branding and advertising Tasti-Lee would be a worthwhile investment, and promotional efforts went forward as planned. Commercial release of the Tasti-Lee brand began in August, 2011, throughout the southern United States, and sales have been impressive, with supermarkets often selling out their entire supply within a day or two. Plans are also underway for retail promotions and displays in major grocery store chains, such as Wegman's and Whole Foods.



The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) is a federal-state-county partnership dedicated to developing knowledge in agriculture, human and natural resources, and the life sciences, and enhancing and sustaining the quality of human life by making that information accessible. For more than 60 years, Florida Foundation Seed Producers has been responsible for releasing crop cultivars developed at the University of Florida.

# Model For The Future?

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

**T**he Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 gave universities intellectual property rights for things such as university-developed varieties of fruit. This meant that what was traditionally a kind of public service provided by land grant institutions to growers within the state in which the institution was located now became a revenue-producing activity.

We can give personal testimony that Tasti-Lee is a pretty tasty tomato, though the claim of premium pricing should really be qualified. This is a field-grown tomato, and although the price may be premium compared to most field-grown tomatoes, it is typically less expensive than most hothouse tomatoes. So good taste at a decent price sounds like a winner.

Indeed, Bejo Seeds hopes to use this format as a model for its own growth: Get the rights to a proprietary variety, brand it for consumers and offer farmers a way out of the commodity trap.

Tasty varieties are important, of course, yet being tasty doesn't in and of itself escape commodity pricing. After all, the new variety can just become the new commodity. Driving consumer recognition and preference through marketing is helpful, but the marketing efforts being done on behalf of Tasti-Lee are very small-scale. There is no \$50-million-dollar-a-year TV advertising program to make consumers demand Tasti-Lee.

The real key to this business model is restricting production and limiting competition. That sounds like something evil but, in fact, is the only way to increase returns to growers.

Traditionally, land grant institutions simply made new varieties available to all comers and let the market sort itself out — remember they had little financial stake in the outcome. This had two negative consequences:

First, it had a negative impact on quality — when anyone can grow something, some of what is grown will be planted in climates, soils and under conditions that are sub-optimal, so the product will suffer. Flavor and other desirable attributes are not typically qualities inherent in a magical seed; the fruit quality will vary based on where, when and how it is planted and what horticultural

practices are used to raise the crop. Even if the quantity of off-flavor fruit is low, it can have enormous impact on the price consumers are willing to pay.

Nobel-prize-winning economist George Akerlof wrote a seminal paper called "The Market for Lemons: Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism," and it is not, literally at least, about the fruit. It is playing off the slang term for used cars that are discovered to be flawed after they are purchased. It deals with two variables — variable quality, as in when tomatoes of the same variety taste differently — and asymmetric information — when the sellers know more about the product than the buyers — say whether it was grown in an area that produces the most tasty fruit.

The comeuppance of Akerlof's article is that consumers won't pay a premium for a product because they will not be certain they will get a premium product. So by carefully selecting who can grow a proprietary variety and then ensuring it is not grown in sub-optimal environments, consumer confidence in the quality of the variety can be increased, and thus consumer willingness to pay a premium will increase.

Second, allowing unrestricted planting and marketing of a variety led to a predictable cycle for even the best fruit. A new variety would be introduced; it would attract a premium price and attract high demand. This would lead to more plantings of the desirable variety and ultimately, as supply rose, the markets would become flooded, prices would drop and what was once a premium item would become, at best, the new normal and, often, a loser.

In theory, by licensing the variety exclusively to Bejo Seeds and then Bejo selecting key growers in different areas, assurance can be found that the tomato will only be planted in optimal conditions and the quantity produced will be restricted so as to avoid saturating the market and putting downward pressure on price.

It is a great play, and may well be the future of the entire industry.

Yet it is not without its challenges. For the

**The real key to this business model is restricting production and limiting competition. That sounds like something evil but, in fact, is the only way to increase returns to growers.**

universities, the model is a challenge to the land-grant culture. These institutions get taxpayer funding and typically sit on land given to them by the taxpayers — with the ethos that they are there to help all the farmers in their state. This approach challenges that ethos in two ways: first, often these varieties get licensed out of state, and second, even within state, they are licensed to specific growers.

The model also is a challenge for seed companies. Seed companies make money by selling seed; the more they sell, the more money they make. It takes an enormous discipline focused on long-term value to restrict plantings so as to boost grower returns — when simply meeting demand would mean a big boost in profits for the seed company.

There is much to be hopeful about in this effort. The focus on the consumer; the focus on flavor; the use of research — albeit small-scale — to ascertain consumer perception; the use of marketing, again albeit small scale, to differentiate the product. The open questions are how land-grant institutions can reconcile restricted marketing with their public service mission and whether new ways can be found to price seed so that seed companies won't constantly be driven to increase plantings.

# 30 DAYS *(Roughly)* In The Life Of The EPC

Between the dates of May 15 and June 12, the Short Hills, NJ-based Eastern Produce Council stacked three powerhouse events into a great opportunity for networking, fun and good deeds. Starting at the new Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market on May 15, more than 200 of EPC's 500-plus members gathered to tour the new facility and present a \$2,500 check to hunger-relief organization, Philabundance. On June 9, EPC's 37th Annual Golf Tournament took place at the Royce Brook Golf Club in Hillsborough, NJ. The golf tournament supported the Tomorrow's Children Fund at the Hackensack University Medical Center. Finally, on the evening of June 12, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture hosted EPC members for a dinner at Demarest Farms in Hillsdale, NJ.

## PHILADELPHIA PRODUCE MARKET TOUR AND DINNER, MAY 15



## 37TH ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT, JUNE 9







**25TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING WITH THE NJ DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE, JUNE 12**





# PROCURING THE RIGHT PRODUCE DISTRIBUTOR

A few key fundamentals make for a successful produce partnership.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**U**nique challenges and opportunities faced by the \$595 billion foodservice industry (USDA statistics) in recent years have placed greater importance on produce sourcing. “In the foodservice business we always push center-of-the-plate or protein,” says Ed Carpenito, produce, at Performance Foodservice, based in Elizabeth, NJ. “But in produce is the rest of the plate and a significant part of our business. So these flavors, colors and different textures that bring the plate to life are critical.”

“The use of fresh produce is growing in foodservice overall,” relates Gene Harris, senior purchasing manager for Denny’s Corp., headquartered in Spartanburg, SC. “We have added several fresh produce items to our base menu over the past couple of years and our product development team has been instrumental in adding fresh produce to our LTO promotions [limited-time offers] throughout the year. We also offer a variety of fresh fruit and veggies on our kid’s menu.”

Defining the ideal criteria on which to choose among produce distributor options is a complex matrix. Tim York, president of Markon Cooperative Inc., in Salinas, CA, explains, “Specific criteria for

sourcing relates to the type of restaurant, what’s important to the chef or owner, and who the customers are. For example, a family dining or casual chain may be looking for the full menu of services a broadliner can provide in a cost-efficient consolidated drop. However, an upscale white-tablecloth restaurant would gravitate toward specialists for bakery, protein or produce. Finally, an independent, value-driven restaurant may be more price-conscious.”

## VALUE AND REPUTATION

Most customers, and especially large buyers, are looking for overall value. “Customers want the distributor they deal with to provide good value,” says Joel Panagakos, executive vice president of produce with J. Kings Food Service Professionals Inc., headquartered in Holtsville, NY. “We’ve been in business for 37 years, and over that time we’ve come to realize our description of value is quality and service and then price. Customers expect a fair and affordable price, good service as it pertains to the delivery and picking of orders and the best quality.”

“Excellent quality and service are two of the most important attributes we take into account when selecting distributors,” agrees Jerry

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## “Food safety, quality and supply are the most important criteria. Pricing is certainly important, but if we don’t have the first three, price is irrelevant.”

— Gene Harris, Denny’s Corp.

Cerand, supply chain director for produce, seafood and dairy at Avendra LLC, in Rockville, MD, with over 5,000 customers in the hospitality industry. “Our customers require the highest grade quality with a good yield. In addition, we implement unparalleled service levels to address the variables our customers deal with on a daily basis. A common challenge is sourcing enough distributors that meet our rigorous standards and still offer these products/services at a value.”

“We look for the ability to meet all required food safety requirements, an excellent reputation of outstanding customer service and their distribution range and capabilities,” details Scott Sargent, senior purchasing manager at Chick-fil-A Inc., in Atlanta, GA. “We consider their ability to grow in supply capabilities ahead of CFA’s growth, their honesty and transparency in all business dealings with CFA, and their ability to provide consistent supply of all CFA-approved brands of produce.”

“Food safety, quality and supply are the most important criteria,” says Harris. “Pricing is certainly important, but if we don’t have the first three, price is irrelevant. We also look at a company’s attitude and approach to change — do they do the right things and strive to be the best because they want to, or because they have to?”

A distributor’s reputation and ability to comply with requirements are essential. “Each buyer has a slightly different approach, but generally, the most important consideration is the reputation of the distributor,” says Steve Grinstead, CEO of Monterey, CA-based Pro\*Act LLC. “Are they known for effectively delivering the right product at the right time and living up to the value proposition they promise?”

“Our top considerations are if the product is sourced from reputable growers and processors and how well the distributor understands and executes the proper handling of produce,” reports Janet Erickson, executive vice president of supply chain with Del Taco LLC, in Lake Forest, CA, with about 536 operating restaurants. “Produce is the most sensitive ingredient category moving through a distributor, so they must have some specialized knowledge and training to do it properly.”

“The foundation of our business is built on

integrity and serving others with a spirit of honesty and humility,” says CFA’s Sargent. “We look to align ourselves with distributor partners that embrace similar core values and who always put the needs of the customer first. We pride ourselves on the quality and service that we offer our operators and customers each and every day; we demand the same from our supplier partners.”

### CONSIDER THE WHOLE PACKAGE

As in any business, price counts, but true success in procuring produce measures other factors. “Competitive pricing is the table stake, then it’s a matter of what else we can bring to the table,” says Markon’s York. “It’s so competitive right now in the marketplace and margins are so thin. It’s about finding the balance.”

Avendra uses several criteria to evaluate regional produce distributors. Cerand explains, “They must possess the ability to provide the number of deliveries needed and acceptable delivery times, provide recovery deliveries when needed, ensure reliable food safety and traceability practices, source or produce value-added/cut produce, demonstrate sustainable best practices, deliver strong price management, provide specialty produce including herbs, organics and ethnic varieties, offer a local produce program, and provide online ordering.”

“We really sell the entire value proposition,” states Grinstead. “Expectations are high on numerous aspects a supplier can provide. Our extensive distribution coverage, food safety and price verification are just a few of our many services that make up Pro\*Act’s value proposition.”

As operators look for creative solutions to challenges, personalization has become increasingly important. “Service is a big consideration in our market,” says Michael Muzyk, president of Baldor Specialty Foods Inc., in the Bronx, NY. “There was probably a time in our history when it was price, but with the cost of labor and worsening traffic in New York, if we can’t hit a delivery window, it doesn’t matter how much they’re saving. We talk to the customers to make sure they understand the different options we bring to the table and help them identify what they need.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARKON COOPERATIVE INC.

**John Galvez, Markon’s quality assurance director, takes temperature readings of finished packs of Ready-Set-Serve Salad items to verify they are meeting Markon specifications.**

“One of our main selling points

is to customize a program to the customer need,” adds Peter Grannis, director of produce for Maines Paper & Food Service Inc. and Maines Produce Express, headquartered in Conklin, New York. “We have some customers who want their produce once or twice a week with groceries. Others want additional produce items while others want value-added products. We’re very flexible and willing to work with our customers to create the solution they need.”

### EVALUATE QUALITY

Quality of product has been and remains a key consideration. “We look for a distributor with a robust produce program,” says Erickson of Del Taco. “They need to have sufficient volume flowing through their facility in order to ensure the product turns quickly. Our ideal produce distributors would have excellent cold chain control. They would rotate rapidly and never misrotate produce. They would handle every box carefully and get the freshest product delivered to the stores that is practical. And they would bring in the closest quality per our specs as is humanly possible.”

“We at Performance AFI emphasize quality,” says Carpenito. “It not only has to look great, but it has to taste great as well, and do so consistently. That’s why we pulp-test, laser-test and perform Brix tests for sugar content.”

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contribute to the product's value," says Panagakos of J. Kings. "A customer should value that our trucks are always refrigerated and that we're focused on food safety, because if not, it ends up as an expense or liability."

Avendra's grower-shippers program rele-

gates the number of suppliers from which the distribution network can buy from for high volume/high risk commodities. "This offers tighter controls to ensure the best quality produce for high volume commodities as it moves from the grower through regional

distribution," explains Cerand. "Coordinated distributor reviews bring together Avendra field support and customer relations managers and quality assurance professionals at the distributor locations for a comprehensive evaluation of the distributor's capabilities and

BY JENNIFER LESLIE KRAMER

# THE POWER OF FRESHPOINT

**W**ith roughly \$200 million in annual sales, Pompano Beach, FL-based FreshPoint South Florida is one of the market leaders in fresh produce distribution. Business is spread among foodservice, retail and cruise ships at both the Port of Miami and Port Everglades, and it's clear FreshPoint certainly has its finger on the pulse of industry. According to Alan Lieberman, executive vice president of FreshPoint South Florida, "Of our \$200 million in sales, 55 to 60 percent is with our local foodservice and retail clients. The balance is split between cruise ships and exports to the Caribbean."

While the cruise ship business is seasonal, local retailers — both farmer's markets and independent supermarkets — and restaurants throughout South Florida provide a sense of stability for the business. In fact, Lieberman reports that FreshPoint's retail business has "grown tremendously, starting at ground level two years ago to roughly \$600,000 a week."

So how did FreshPoint rise to the top of the fresh produce distribution totem pole? Purchased by Houston, TX-based Sysco Corp. in 2000, FreshPoint immediately got a leg up on the competition, leveraging Sysco's purchasing power with its own, and gaining the ability to offer customers a wealth of specialty products that were previously unavailable. It doesn't hurt either that Sysco earns nearly \$40 billion annually, and currently occupies spot No. 69 on the *Fortune* 500 list of American's largest companies.

Since the Sysco acquisition, FreshPoint has been in non-stop expansion mode, purchasing Austin, TX-based City Produce; Oklahoma City, OK-based, Thomas Bros. Produce Inc.; along with A-One-A Produce and Dairy Inc., and Incredible Fresh

Produce, based in Pompano Beach and Fort Myers, FL, respectively. The buying binge continued over the next few years, with FreshPoint picking up another handful of locally dominant companies.

With 330 employees and 179,000 square feet of warehouse space, the South Florida location does the most volume of any FreshPoint distribution center in the country. "Los Angeles has a similar size building, but we definitely do the most business of all the FreshPoints," says Lieberman. "I think this is due in part to the diversity of the business and where we're located — the South Florida markets are pretty busy in season — plus the fact that we service numerous cruise ships. Even if other locations have cruise ship business, it's nowhere near the scale that we do."

More than just the produce and other items found within, the warehouse itself is equally impressive, with a number of safety certifications, including Primus and AIB. A refrigerated loading and receiving dock ensures an unbroken cold chain, and is large enough to accommodate more than two-dozen truck beds simultaneously. In the area dedicated to FreshPoint's latest fresh-cut venture, large, built-in floor drains allow the entire space to be cleaned and sterilized on a daily basis.

## More Than A Distributor

With only a \$200 minimum, no order is too small for FreshPoint. However, don't mistake the company's come-one-come-all attitude as greed for business. The company is based on long-lasting relationships, and considers its clients part of the FreshPoint family. "We're not interested in the guy that is invoicing three or four different distributors," admits Lieberman. "If you're spread-sheeting suppliers, we're probably



Alan Lieberman,  
executive vice president



Eric Sorenson,  
manager of cruise ship  
and export sales

not the company for you. We're about relationships; we're about partnerships."

To that end, FreshPoint's associates are well trained on the products and ready to educate their customers. Lieberman contends, "We have everything they need, without a doubt, and a product-knowledgeable person will take them through the produce step by step, go into their cooler, go into their pantry, and flesh it out. Customer education is key."

Those educational efforts are clear even in the Pompano Beach warehouse, where an entire room is dedicated to product spec sheets, flavor guides, recipe suggestions, seasonal charts, POS material and more. Associates make a habit of dropping by to send their customers whatever useful infor-

performances. This is where action plans are developed with the distributor's management team to address any inadequacies. All distributors are required to provide insurance and indemnification, which limits our customers' liability and exposure to risk."

"Our ideal distributor delivers accurate orders of safe produce in a timely manner at the proper temperatures," says Denny's Harris. "It's also terrific if they have friendly drivers and a customer service staff with the autonomy to resolve issues quickly when they occur."

## LOOK FOR INNOVATION

After the basics are met, procuring the right produce distributor comes down to meeting an operator's specific needs. "The perception of value varies by customer," says Markon's York. "The bottom line is to articulate and



mation has just been produced — in house, of course — on the products they are purchasing. Eric Sorenson, manager of cruise ship and export sales, points out, "The company-wide marketing department is actually based out of this office, so if a FreshPoint in California wants to create a flyer for one of its clients, they let us know." Whether that means a flavor chart for Northwest apples to hang in a retailer's backroom, or a recipe pamphlet with suggestions for including fennel in all day-part meals for their foodservice client, it's all there, at their fingertips.

As a rule, FreshPoint has always tried to differentiate itself from the competition. As such, the company relies heavily on specialties, whether that's micro-greens, edible flowers or truffles. "Over the years,

we've always tried to differentiate ourselves with specialties, being that anybody could carry an onion or a potato, but we tried to stock specialties as a regular item and capture business by differentiating ourselves," explains Lieberman.

In addition to the tons of whole fresh produce and specialty items FreshPoint supplies to its customers, there is also its latest division: FreshCuts, which began two years ago. Produced in a state-of-the-art HACCP-certified warehouse, fresh-cut options run the gamut from diced mixed peppers to sliced tomatoes to peeled cantaloupes and potatoes. "Additionally," Lieberman notes, "This past January, we added a tomato repack operation that we moved from Jacksonville. So we now do all

of the tomatoes and split packages for the FreshPoints and Syscos throughout the state of Florida in this facility."

Undoubtedly, FreshPoint is keeping pace with its customers' needs, and word gets around. "We're getting a lot of references," adds Sorenson. "You know, the best sale is a referred sale — when customers are referred to you. That means our reputation is preceding us and when that happens, you morph into a sales company that's not really 'selling' its products anymore. You're selling your seven certifications for safety and sanitation. You're selling your systems. You're selling your people. You're selling your processes. You're selling your honesty." From the looks of it, FreshPoint is doing just that. **pb**

**“Our top considerations are if the product is sourced from reputable growers and processors and how well the distributor understands and executes the proper handling of produce. Produce is the most sensitive ingredient category moving through a distributor, so they must have some specialized knowledge and training to do it properly.”** — Janet Erickson, Del Taco LLC

accentuate the things you do well that are important to a particular customer. For some customers, food safety is of utmost importance; other customers may be more interested in what we have in terms of sustainable or organic or local offerings. Another customer may be more interested in being on top of trends. A multi-unit may want us to provide information to their franchisees.”

“Innovation and differentiation are critical,” says Carpenito of Performance Foodservice. “Suppliers differentiate themselves in many ways including service, logistics and products, adding to the value of the product line.”

“We are always looking to partner with produce distributors who are innovative and

constantly look to bring business solutions to Chick-fil-A,” says Sargent. “We prefer a food-service distributor who truly understands the meaning of collaboration and constantly looks for ways to help CFA with menu creation, packaging and distribution innovation as well as freshening our restaurant operators.”

Fresh-cut solutions and locally grown programs are key areas of value. “Operations are squeezing in more tables, but sacrificing storage,” says Baldor’s Muzyk. “They’re faced with questions of how they keep fresh, rotating, in-stock products. We provide a solution by selling smaller-pack products repacked under HACCP conditions and also offering fresh-cut options. These provide additional cost savings and efficiencies for



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARKON COOPERATIVE INC.

many operators.”

“One of our unique services is a kitchen-cut business that does slicing and dicing of fruits and vegetables,” says J. Kings’ Panagakos.

Carpenito reports, “We also have our own pre-cut lineup developed to our own specs

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“We offer over 300 fresh-cut products to suit almost every size and type of customer need as well as a comprehensive local program,” says John P. Groft, vice president of operations for Kegel’s Produce, based in Lancaster, PA.

## HARNESS GOOD ADVICE

A savvy distributor can aid operators tremendously by helping them better understand product needs with respect to markets and availability. “We value the ability to keep customers abreast of product availability and market trends,” says Avendra’s Cerand. “We consult on how to maximize savings opportunities through optimal product utilization.”

“While food safety is absolute, quality is a relative term,” purports Del Taco’s Erickson. “The quality of a product at a QSR is different from fine dining. It’s important to understand customers’ operations and how they use something. For example, we buy a lot of tomatoes. Several years ago, we looked at what our specs really needed to be since we chop most of them up for salsa. This allowed us to find some real efficiency in our tomato purchasing since we can go back and forth among quality levels and varieties depending on the market. In a more competitive world you have to be smarter about what your standards are and make sure they’re applicable to the use of the product.”

“We seek out a strong collaborative relationship with our customers so that together we can provide them with the very best value proposition appropriate for their operation,” says Pro\*Act’s Grinstead. “If you really want to come up with the best value, you have to understand the entire supply chain and how it relates to their operation. If the buyer or seller becomes unprofitable, the relationship is destined to be short term one way or the other. Collaboration allows you to provide the needed service in which both buyer and seller can be successful.”

Operators can look to their distributor for produce expertise. “We have a team of produce consultants and customer service agents to answer questions and concerns,” says Groft. “We help direct each customer as to which products would be best for them.”

Baldor’s Muzyk adds, “The customer or chef wants to know when they call their produce supplier the plethora of product available that can satisfy their particular application. For example, a thick-walled

# SPECIALTY VERSUS BROADLINE

The foodservice industry presently faces a conundrum of cutting delivery costs while increasing focus on quality, fresh product. “We see customers looking at the cost of processing every invoice and delivery that comes through and analyzing if it’s worth it to have multiple distributors,” says Peter Grannis, director of produce for Maines Paper & Food Service Inc. and Maines Produce Express, in Conklin, NY. “However, the increasing trend in foodservice to focus on local, specialties and organic really lends itself to a distributor that specializes in produce. We have more flexibility in being able to source and provide even small amounts of something unique.”

Preference for a specialty, broadliner or multiple distributors is very operation-specific. “Our preference is that our produce comes from the same distributor as our other food and packaging,” says Janet Erickson, executive vice president of supply chain with Del Taco LLC, headquartered in Lake Forest, CA. “We have a fairly streamlined produce program with a limited number of items. We do have some small markets where our systems distributor doesn’t have the volume or experience in that market, so we will use a produce-specific distributor in those markets.”

“We ask our produce distributors to deliver directly to our restaurants,” reports Scott Sargent, senior purchasing manager at Chick-fil-A Inc. in Atlanta, GA. “In some markets we will have more than one approved distributor if the market is large enough or where we feel we need to infuse a competitive landscape. Our distribution model is built solely on specialty distributors. We do not include broadliners in our distribution model.”

“Every one of our customers has a broadliner as a supplier and us for their produce,” states Michael Muzyk, president of Baldor Specialty Foods Inc., in the Bronx, NY. “Some will have multiple produce companies, but those are typically the operations looking to piecemeal based on price.”

In response to this dilemma, produce distributors have focused on maintaining the specialty nature of the business while increasing their offerings. “As operations look to cut costs, they’ve analyzed how

deliveries require time and effort at the back door,” says Joel Panagakos, executive vice president of produce with J. Kings Food Service Professionals Inc., in Holtsville, NY. “We put a lot of effort into building a company like ours where you can offer many services under one roof and one delivery, yet not lose the specialty orientation. We see the trend going from multiple distributors down to a few.”

“I still see produce as being one of those hands-on, specific products,” says Granis. “For a broadline distributor, we do a great job, but it’s because we recognize it needs specialty care. That’s why we created Produce Express. I don’t ever see produce completely going away from having the specialty touch.”

“We are a broadliner, but we also provide expertise in produce because of what Markon provides,” says Tim York, president of Markon Cooperative Inc., in Salinas, CA. “We provide brands with a high degree of quality and food safety, innovation in terms of bringing new products to the marketplace, innovation in bringing culinary trends and new ideas, and our whole information sharing. We can provide high quality fresh produce along with our broadline offerings. And, there are things we can do that other companies can’t, for example, our investment in the Center for Produce Safety to conduct research in food safety on fresh produce.”

Ultimately, the choice comes down to finding the distributor that best serves the need. “Our focus is to be their fresh food source and solution,” says Steve Grinstead, CEO with Pro\*Act in Monterey, CA. “That way, they know this category is in good hands so they can focus more on other areas of their responsibility.”

“If we don’t have what you need, put us to work, and we’ll strive to satisfy you,” says Ed Carpenito, produce, at Performance Foodservice in Elizabeth, NJ. “We can grow it, design it, chop it, dice it and make it happen.”

“I remind myself that even a pickup truck delivering bok choy is our competition,” says York. “We have to continually evaluate our value proposition and why a customer would choose to work with us.”

pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF APPLEBEE'S

Holland seed pepper is a great roasting pepper, but it may not be the pepper you puree to make a coulis. A good distributor needs to be able to answer the question of what product is best for the application."

"Our ideal customer recognizes the value of what we provide in fresh produce," says York. "They look for that Markon brand to come in and appreciate the value behind it."

Many distributors serve as an educational resource for operators. "We employ corporate chefs to help with menu development and specialists to help with other categories," explains Maine's Granis. "We cover areas outside of what you'd consider normal food-service education — like solutions for hiring, scheduling employees, and help with food safety audits."

"We have 33 outside salespeople, but it's not their job to take orders," states J. Kings' Panagakos. "It's their job to help the customers build business. We have meetings every week and frequent educational seminars so they can help our customers with menu development, new items, business plans and other challenges."

## VERIFY FOOD SAFETY

While food safety has long been talked about, there is now more action in practice. "We're seeing, in general, a more direct connection between food safety, traceability and operator decision-making," reports Markon's York. "We see customers really wanting to dig more into details. It does depend on the operation's size and what its food safety looks like. A smaller operator really depends on us to make sure the food safety bases are covered, whereas larger operators will have us deal with their food safety experts."

"Food safety is a must," states Erickson of

Del Taco. "There is no 'good enough' in that regard because one mistake can ruin your business, and we've all seen examples of that."

"Food safety and traceability is at the top of most customers' list," agrees Grinstead. "Protecting their brand is paramount to their future success and even existence."

As customer interest increases, distributors are taking extra steps. "We've definitely seen a huge growth in food safety interest among customers," reports Granis. "With some of our customers, it's their first question. They want to know if we're involved in PTI and how we keep up with it. We're currently going to a scanning system so we can scan products all through the system."

"There are some significant challenges but food safety is here to stay," says Baldor's Muzyk. "We do a lot of fresh-cut, and after last year's food safety issues we decided to make the investment and add an in-house lab to be able to test produce before we send it to fresh cut. It's costly and time-consuming, but we're safer because of it."

However, the industry is still divided at some levels. "We have a comprehensive food safety program and offer audit scores," reports Kegel's Groft. "Large chains and management companies have shown increasing mandates for this. However, many independent and local restaurateurs do not yet stress the need."

"Right now, the market is really split over those who pay more for the food safety value," says Maine's Granis. "We find a lot of operators who truly care about and understand this area. But we also find some who say it's important but when it comes down to the wire, they're not doing the due-diligence to ensure their suppliers comply."

## PROMOTE COMMUNICATION

Distributors and operators alike stress the importance of effective communication. "Our ideal customers have a high level of communication with us about their needs, challenges and wants," says Granis. "This helps us make sure we're creating a program that meets their needs."

"Chick-fil-A views all of our suppliers as partners; therefore we insist on continuous open and honest communication," states Sargent. "The produce industry and the supply chain that supports it is constantly evolving and is quite fluid, thus communication should be as often as necessary."

"A distributor must spend the time asking questions of the customer to learn what it is we're looking for," says Del Taco's Erickson. "A lot of distributors have been doing business



a long time and have very good processes in place, but they also need to understand that sometimes their procedures may not fit into a particular customer's needs or expectations."

Distributors value a customer who is open to interaction. "We like a customer we can communicate back to," says Granis. "A customer who is willing to listen and understand issues in the area of produce like crop or weather conditions makes the working relationship more enjoyable and profitable."

"An educated chef or owner who really wants to partner with a supplier will make it profitable for both companies," agrees Panagakos. "When you can work together with the owner or chef and reinvent the business as needed, you can create a win-win and keep the business successful."

"Operators should understand seasonality and how what we sell is affected by weather," says Muzyk. "They should be proactive in reaching out to us to see how the product's season is looking or open to hearing when we give that information. When there is information flowing back and forth it's an ideal situation."

Information sharing can lead to profitable solutions. "When operators communicate their needs and expectations, we can better help them," says York. "They're in the kitchen working every day. They can provide us tremendous insight in how they want to see products packed. A good example is how we just launched an eight 1-lb. strawberry pack because operators expressed they wanted a more manageable pack. We can better meet specific needs when they provide information to us."

"Customers who are open to communication on specials, and local and new products will benefit," says Groft.

pb



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF READY PAC PRODUCE INC.  
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF CRUNCH PAK LLC

# Six Ways To Score An A-Plus For Back-To-School Produce Sales

Back-to-school is a ripe time to catch kid's and Mom's attention when it comes to healthful eating by positioning fresh fruits and vegetables as convenient lunchbox solutions. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

**T**he opportunity to shine the spotlight on fresh fruit and vegetables during back-to-school time is huge. According to data supplied by the Alexandria, VA-based School Nutrition Association, over 24 million, or 37.7 percent, of U.S. K-12 students didn't participate in the National School Lunch Program during the 2011-2012 school year, eating instead a packed lunch from home.

Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets Inc., headquartered in Lakeland, FL, says, "Back-to-school time provides an opportunity to make eating and learning fun for kids and families. We provide snack packs that incorporate fresh produce for great lunch ideas. Whether it's carrots and dressing, grapes and apples, or custom snack packs of juice boxes and assorted fruit, parents can offer healthy snacks in every lunch."

Here are six ways retailers can score an A-plus in fresh produce sales at back-to-school time.

## 1. Position Kid-Friendly Produce Front And Center

Apples, pears, mini-cucumbers and snack-size tomatoes are a few of the lunchbox-ready produce items featured at back-to-school time at Meijer Inc., a chain based in Lansing, MI, says senior buyer and produce merchandiser, Brian Coates. "This is a time when fresh produce is vying for customers' dollars along with notebooks and school clothes. It's a challenge. However, we tap into the change of eating habits that happens in our part of the country in the fall and this also lends itself to back-to-school promotions. For example, there's the apple harvest. We're in middle of the California grape deal, and grapes are a perfect snack. Last year, we had success with Chiquita Banana Minis. Kids have only a limited time to eat lunch, so small portion sizes are ideal."

Nutrition, taste and convenience are mainly what parents look for when they purchase lunch-box items, according to Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc., in Coral Gables, FL. "Sweet, whole fruit that is easy to



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHIQUITA BRANDS INTERNATIONAL INC.

peel and handle such as apples, clementines, grapes and bananas always top the list," he specifies. "Bananas, for example, require no preparation and you don't have to worry about bagging it or putting it in a container."

Kid-sized apples and pears are the focus of Stemilt Growers LLC's Lil Snappers, a premium line of 3-lb. conventionally and organically grown bagged whole fruit. Roger Pepperl, marketing director for the Wenatchee, WA, company, reports, "We see a big uptick in sales of this product just after Labor Day, especially when retailers display the product in our pre-

**“We tap into the change of eating habits that happens in our part of the country in the fall and this also lends itself to back-to-school promotions. For example, there’s the apple harvest. We’re in middle of the California grape deal, and grapes are a perfect snack.”**

— Brian Coates, Meijer Inc.

printed, high-graphic, display-ready carton. It gives Mom the ability to have fruit for a week’s worth of lunches.”

Dried fruits like raisins are another lunchbox staple. Jane Asmar, vice president of sales for the National Raisin Co., in Fowler, CA, reveals, “The two traditionally popular products for lunches are the 6-count 1½-oz. box and

14-count ½-oz. box. Due to supply limitations, we’re downsizing the 1½-oz. box to one ounce.”

Chiquita Brands International Inc., in Charlotte, NC, offers its new Super Crunch Fruit Chips, says spokesperson Andrew Ciafardini. “The new fruit chips are dried using a proprietary patent-pending technology that provides consumers a texture similar to traditional snack



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEMILT GROWERS LLC

chips, but they are made with only 100 percent fruit.”

Innovative packaging now allows a non-traditional lunchbox fruit like blueberries to go back-to-school. Naturipe Berry Quick Blueberry Snacks contain fresh pre-washed blueberries in 3-in-1 single serve trays with a shelf-life of 21 days, which kids can hold, pour and eat. Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for the Estero, FL-based Naturipe Farms LLC, says, “The berries are a consistent flavor and size to appeal to kids. We tested the product last year with a few retailers with good success. We’re looking at testing this game-changing packaging technology on other berries like strawberries in the near future.”

**Side Note** **KIDS IN KENTUCKY LEARN HOW TO CHOOSE A HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCH**



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**E**lementary school children in all 34 of Kentucky’s Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS) learned how to choose a healthy lunch this past year thanks to a standout nutrition program called Connect the Dots. This innovative program color codes school lunch menu items with the colors on the new MyPlate food guide by placing colored dots over each food item on the serving line. In addition, colorful posters that explained the food groups, key nutrients each group provided and correct portion sizes were made to help students learn what comprises a balanced meal.

The program’s success is evident in the way it has spiraled throughout the school system. For example, kindergarten teachers at one school incorporated the program into their existing curriculum. At another school, the cafeteria manager

decorated the wall leading into the serving line with the dot posters to help children make good choices. At yet another school, a teacher wrote the menu on the whiteboard in the corresponding colors so students would make the connection. The result? Connect the Dots has made eating healthfully fun and attractive to young students.

Marty Flynn, SNS, the FCPS district coordinator, said in a release, “The Connect the Dots program is fun and colorful, and simplifies food choices for children, while teaching them a system for creating a balanced diet. What they learn in the cafeteria, the children take with them.”

The Connect the Dots program, designed by Monica Fowler, RD, during her internship with FCPS, earned the 2012 Little Blue Dynamos Health Halo Award. **pb**

**2. Offer Mom’s Fresh-Cut Convenience**

According to Ciafardini, consumer focus groups show strong qualitative preference for snacks that are prepared (washed, sliced, cored, etc.) and packaged for single use. “Parents commented that saving time in preparation is key, and that kids are more likely to eat fruits and veggies if they are easier to eat,” he says.

Advances in packaging technology over the past few years have made it possible to add fresh-cut produce to lunch boxes. Del Monte’s Christou points out, “Our fresh-cut products such as grapes, apples, grape tomatoes, celery, carrots and pineapple are available in convenient single-serve containers and perfect for parents who want to include nutritious snacks in their child’s lunch box but don’t have the time.”

Meijer’s Coates knows the challenge of selling snacking produce over a grocery item like chips is the higher retail for the fresh product. “Still, we’ve found a group of items that work well for us and we highlight them for back-to-school,” he says. “These include multi-pack pre-sliced apples, baby carrots and

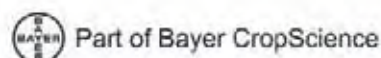


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dip, and fruit we cut at store-level such as pineapple and melon. We've recently introduced a single-serve line of these fresh-cut items."

Manufacturer innovation and product development is going gangbusters in the area of fresh-cut snacking produce perfect for lunchboxes. A sampling of new items available this

fall includes:

- **Del Monte 4 Pack Fresh Cut Fruit Cups:** These four single-serve 100 percent all-natural fruit cups without preservatives, additives, or sweeteners have varieties including pineapple chunks, red grapes and mixed fruit. "We are also featuring fresh fruit and yogurt parfait cups with our fruit at the bottom," says Christou. "All of the parfaits are 6½ ounces and have vanilla or strawberry yogurt and granola."

- **Reichel Foods Dippin Stix Pineapple Chunks with Tajin:** Single serve or 3.3-oz. plastic trays of fresh pineapple spears come

**“For new items like our Berry Quicks, make an introductory offer of, for example, 2-for-\$5. You want individual packages to retail for around \$1, which is what consumers are paying for a single-serve size of chips.”**

— Jim Roberts, Naturipe Farms LLC

with a dry packet of chili-lime flavored Tajin seasoning. "Focus group research told us pineapple was more popular than apple slices with Tajin," says Greg Wilson, vice president of sales and marketing for the Rochester, MN-based company.

- **Crunch Pak LLC Flavorz:** "We are launching the line this fall with three flavors: peach/mango, grape and strawberry vanilla cream," says Tony Freytag, managing member and director of marketing for the Cashmere, WA-based company, of the apple slices infused with natural flavorings. Five 2-oz. packets of flavored apple slices will sell in a master clamshell. Graphics on each packet feature a Disney character. In addition, a scratch-and-sniff sticker on the clamshell lets kids get a whiff of the fruit flavor inside.

- **Ready Pac Produce Inc. Cool Cuts**

**Disney-branded Mini-Meals/Snacks and Salads:** These lunchbox meal replacement mini-meals and snacks come in four varieties including Apple Yogurt Ham & Cheese, Pizza Bites, Turkey Cheese & Crackers and Veggie Chicken & Pretzels. Targeting kids ages six to 12, the salads also come in four varieties: Pizza Salad, Taco Salad, Caesar Salad and Turkey Apple Salad. "Each product," says Tristan Simpson, director of marketing for the Irwindale, CA-based company, "has a selection of great tasting foods, that together, meet the strict Disney nutrition guidelines. In addition, a Disney character was matched to each mini-meal/snack and salad based on the character's personality and color palette. Inside each product, kids will find a 'fun factor' that matches the Disney character on the label, like a sticker or temporary tattoo."

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### 3. Create A Snack Set In Produce

“Progressive retailers are creating a healthy snack section in the produce department,” Naturipe’s Roberts says.

Sergio Baez, food category licensing manager for Glendale, CA-based Disney Consumer Products, the business segment of The Walt Disney Company and its affiliates that extends the Disney brand to merchandise including foods and fresh produce, agrees, adding, “Ideally, we’d like to see retailers build a statement with all snack produce in one location 365 days a year with a banner over top to call attention.”

The optimal size of this set will vary by store. “However,” says Crunch Pak’s Freytag, “Two to four feet minimum is optimal in stores that average four to five SKUs. In stores that carry 11 to 12 SKUs, we’ve seen two to three shelves of product at least three feet wide. Increase display size or implement a secondary display to attract shoppers and cover volume needs during promotions such as back to school,” he suggests.

Product variety is important when developing an eye-catching back-to-school display, and Ready Pac’s Simpson maintains, “Retailers that put together a back-to-school display with a vast assortment will win the most lunchbox dollars. It’s also important to illustrate what a healthy lunchbox looks like. Providing signage that illustrates ways to include healthy fruits and vegetables as half the servings in the lunchbox will motivate parents to prepare a more healthful lunch for their children on a daily basis.”

“Innovative and eye-catching displays can drive impulse purchases,” acknowledges Del Monte’s Christou. “Educational POS material promoting the healthful aspects of produce as a snacking alternative are always a strong selling tool.”

In addition, Freytag recommends keeping displays in a consistent location so shoppers know where to find fresh cut items.

### 4. Offer One-Stop School Shopping

Cross-merchandising fruit with other lunch items such as deli meats, 100-percent fruit juices and yogurts provides easy meal and snacking solutions to time-starved but health-

conscious parents, Christou adds, “Having lunch boxes next to these nutritious products will help parents visualize them as possible lunch items.”

Bundle three or six 2-oz. guacamole snack packs with other items in the supermarket such as tortillas, ground beef and chicken strips in a secondary display, suggests Tracy Altman, the Saginaw, TX-based vice president of marketing of Fresherized Foods, makers of Wholly Guacamole. “This is a great way to give Moms lunchbox- ready ideas.”

Similarly, Reichel Food’s Wilson advises, “Cross-merchandise our fresh-cut fruit and vegetable products in the deli next to the sandwiches.”

“Retailers can also add shelf-stable boxes of raisins to big displays of notebooks,” suggests National Raisin’s Asmar.

### 5. Advertise And Promote To Gain Trial

Attractive pricing is one type of promotion that can gain trial of snack produce. “For new items like our Berry Quicks, make an



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# México

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## Year Round Quality Mexican Greenhouse Products Build Sales

Mexico's protected horticulture industry offer year round production to help retailers and foodservice operators with a steady, stable supply of popular items. Budding from just around 1482 acres in 1999, the Mexican Protected Horticulture (greenhouse) industry has made great strides now boasting over 40,000 acres of protected production and becoming a significant supplier of high quality produce items 365 days a year.

The Protected Horticulture industry in Mexico is made up of growers using covered crop technologies that vary from passive to semi-active and active greenhouse technologies. Growers of protected horticulture employ some of the most advanced technologies and production practices available to provide safe, high quality and sustainable products to the marketplace. These technologies are used to control weather variables like temperature, air humidity, radiation, and CO2 levels, as well

as protect from pests, cold fronts, precipitation (rain, hail etc), plant disease, and high winds.

Using protected technologies results in better yields, higher percentages of export quality crops, extended production windows, sustainable practices and a cleaner and safer product. These production technologies have much higher controls and promote a contamination-free environment during the production cycle, allowing for higher food safety and security standards. Additionally, all resources are used in a more efficient manner so a great quantity of high quality items can be produced with the use of less land and water, making it an environmental friendly industry.

Presently, Mexico is divided into five production regions encompassing 25 states. By combining the production timeframes, these states provide year-round supply to the U.S. The Northeastern part of Mexico supplies produce from late October

to early June. Areas in the Central Pacific Coast have a similar supply time frame but some states can run a year round program.

The Mexican protected industry's active and successful association AMHPAC (Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture) represents more than 260 growers. Members are involved in the production, packaging, distribution and marketing of fresh produce grown under greenhouses and other covered structures from 25 of the 32 states in Mexico.

The best and most responsible growers are well integrated in the organization and are responsible for 75% of Mexico's horticulture exports to the U.S. and Canada. The association's members represent a combined production area of 19,000 acres with an annual output of 1,150,000 tons (35% of the total indoor production). Greenhouses account for 68% of the production while net or shadehouses account for 32%.

## Mexico's Protected Horticulture Quick Facts

- 40,000 acres are under Protected Horticulture in Mexico.
- Greenhouses accounts for 44% of acreage in Mexico. 51% is shadehouse.
- 79% of greenhouses are semi or active GH's. Yield ranges from 65 tons/acre for passive GH up to 243 tons/acre for active GH.
- Protected Horticulture sustains 100,000 direct jobs and 250,000 indirect jobs in Mexico.
- Mexico's protected horticulture exports 90% of its production to the U.S., 8% to Canada and the rest to Europe and Japan.
- In 2008-2009 Mexico exported 515.7 thousand tons of tomatoes to the U.S.





# INSIGHT FROM MEXICO

An interview with Eric Viramontes, Chief Executive Officer of the Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC)

**Q:** What are the most unique or innovative products coming out of your industry currently?

**A:** The main products from Mexican Protected Horticulture are tomatoes, bell peppers, hot peppers, lettuce and cucumbers. Other products include eggplants, melons, and some specialties. But the fact remains that using protected agriculture practices and with the great diversity of climates Mexico has, there is no product that can't be grown. So, our growers are open to exploring any niche, Asian, or exotic product that our customers may require. Many of our grower members already have programs on such items.

**Q:** Can you give us an update on the food safety programs you've been implementing?

**A:** Mexico's protected horticulture is a key supplier of produce to the U.S. (\$600 million). Our organization is aware of the significant contribution needed to address numerous safety, quality and sustainability issues. Food safety, security and quality are no longer an individual effort – The entire supply chain is accountable!

AMHPAC has taken the initiative to implement a strategy for the development of our industry by raising the performance bar for all our members in several areas, including technological resources, marketing, food safety, security and quality.

On February 6, 2009, we formally launched an initiative called "Quality and Food Safety Program for Mexico's Protected Horticulture". The program is built on the commitment of the Mexican protected horticulture industry affiliated to AMHPAC to:

- Provide the highest assurance of product quality and safety,
- Meet or exceed all federal mandated food safety, security and quality standards in both export and domestic markets,
- Promote social and environmental practices within our membership,
- Adopt food defense policies, and
- Be certified by a recognized, third-party, independent certification body.

**Q:** What makes AMHPAC different from other greenhouse growing association in North America?

**A:** Our association is built with the support of more than 260 forward-thinking, second and third generation grower-shippers who have the knowledge, capability and passion for growing under the most advanced agricultural practices, resulting in a highly competitive organization that keeps growing and is driven by the market expectations.

**Q:** What advances from the industry can buyers expect to see in the future?

**A:** By being part of the greenhouse industry today, we must recognize that we are not alone, and that we are part of a complex chain within a global market. Since our individual actions can affect this entire industry in a positive or negative way, the added value that we seek must be in working together as an organization.

AMHPAC takes a leadership and proactive role in order to reach a common goal for our produce distribution chain: To minimize food safety risk for consumers while enhancing sustainability for our industry. Today our growers are working on a plan that could result in a universal, harmonized food safety, security and quality standard for the greenhouse industry, pursuing the goal of increasing food safety practices throughout the entire distribution chain.

Also we want to support consumer education programs that will distribute helpful information on practices that can be carried out to keep the produce clean and families healthy.

**Q:** What can buyers do to better source products from your exporters?

**A:** AMHPAC is an organization made up of the best grower/shippers in Mexico. If you need a supplier, we would highly recommend you to talk to any of our members. Also, AMHPAC is the perfect vehicle to check out any supplier a buyer intends to work with. You can become an associate member of our organization; we will be glad and honored to help you achieve successful business operations in our industry. Please allow us to help you.

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introductory offer of, for example, 2-for-\$5,” says Naturipe’s Roberts. You want individual packages to retail for around \$1, which is what consumers are paying for a single-serve size of chips.”

Multiples like 10-for-\$10 can encourage shoppers to try new flavors, suggests Wilson. “Or, promote one of our Dippin Stix products with a sandwich and beverage for \$5, for lunch the next day.”

Consumers shop circular ads in the fall so Ready Pac’s Simpson suggests “creating an ad

block outlining the items parents need for a successful back-to-school.”

Suppliers also offer special themed promotional opportunities. In August and September, for example, Fresherized Foods will offer its *Wimpy Kids* Back-To-School promotion by offering a \$5-off coupon for a *Wimpy Kids* DVD on its snack-sized packs of guacamole. In-store channel strips and an FSI will support this promotion. In addition, during the same time period, the company will also offer an IRC for its guacamole on



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATURIFE FARMS LLC

packages of Hormel Natural Choice-brand turkey as a natural sandwich tie-in.

## 6. Market In-Store Events

The use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter can help to promote lunchbox fresh produce. Online coupon websites tied to a back-to-school theme provides value across many categories, and Simpson says, “In addition, traditional marketing tactics such as in-store programs work to educate consumers on the value of pre-packaged produce for the lunchbox.”

Retailers who want to set up in-store back-to-school programs can take advantage of a number of marketing toolkits provided by the Hockessin, DE-based Produce for Better Health Foundation. The toolkits provide ingredients such as ad slicks, pledge cards, radio scripts, POS information, recipes and recipe photos.

Retailers who participate in the Produce for Kids (PFK) fall campaign often tie in this in-store promotion with back-to-school time. “For example,” says Meijer’s Coates, “we’ll kick the program off right after Labor Day and run it over the next four weeks. In-store events include demos of one or two Produce For Kid’s Ideal Meals recipes. We’ll also display two shippers with these recipes in each produce department.”

Kim Avola, vice president of the Orlando, FL-based PFK, says, “The educational focus of our fall campaign is perfect for back-to-school time. This year, we’ve introduced new produce-rich Ideal Meals recipes that make great lunchbox fixings. These include a beany pita power pocket, hummus sandwich, and peanut butter and fruit roll-up that’s cut like sushi. Each recipe comes with suggestions of additional items needed to make a complete meal.”

New this fall, PFK will make it easier for retailers to donate funds raised to their local schools. “Retailers can go to Donorschoose.org and find projects that teachers in their area would like to implement,” details Avola. “We do specify that these should be nutrition or sports-related projects.”

pb



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Mixing colors, sizes and varieties boosts sales of grapes.

# California: The Perfect Place For Growing Table Grapes

With new varieties abounding, retailers have plenty of options for providing customers with sweet, succulent grapes from California. **BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ**

It's a well known fact that wine lovers flock to California, particularly to Napa Valley, where lush vineyards boast thousands of acres of grapes destined to become some of the world's most renowned wines. But it's not just wine aficionados that benefit from the state's grape-growing prowess. Table grape fans have also developed a particular fondness for the little orbs of goodness produced by California. And with good reason. The state possesses the ideal climate for growing grapes.

Especially in the southern San Joaquin and Coachella Valleys, the area's Mediterranean climate — cold winters and long dry summers — makes it the perfect location to grow grapes. The valleys' 300-plus days of sunshine, low humidity and warm, dry conditions throughout much of the growing season allow for ideal fruit ripening, according to Karen Brux, vice president of marketing communications for the Fresno-based California Table Grape Commission (CTGC). Those same conditions also prove inhospitable to many pests and diseases, adds Brux, helping to improve yields and ensure high quality grapes.

While other states have tried to get into the table grape business, California is the only place in the entire country that consistently produces high-quality commercial table grapes, according to Steve Kenfield, vice president of marketing and business development at The HMC Group Marketing Inc., headquartered in Kingsburg, CA. "It's not like tree fruit where you've got 42 states growing peaches," he says.

Granted, table grapes are grown in a number of countries throughout the world — South Africa, Chile, Spain and Italy, just to name a few. But even those distributors who deal in grapes from such exotic locales say there is something about the California growing environment that simply cannot be duplicated. "I don't know if I can come up with a growing area anywhere in the world that has better conditions," says Tim Dayka, managing member of Dayka & Hackett LLC, headquartered in Reedley, CA. "We are a significant importer from Mexico, Chile, Brazil and Peru, and I've had the good fortune to be able to travel to all those locations and observe the growing conditions. Frankly, California is about as perfect as it

can get for grapes."

The state's warm, dry spring season aids in berry maturity and size, while the hot summers equate to good sugar levels, explains Nick Dulcich, owner, president and director of sales and marketing at Delano, CA-based Sunlight International Sales Inc., the marketing arm of Jakov P. Dulcich & Sons. Meanwhile, the relatively cold winter provides an adequate number of chill hours, which Dulcich considers the equivalent of a good night's sleep, as it allows the vine to go dormant and get some much needed rest.

It's not just climatic conditions that lead to stellar table grape production, adds Brux. "Uniformly fertile soils and high quality irrigation water across the table grape growing areas ensure healthy grapevines and yield year after year," she says. Whereas wine grapes thrive in rocky hillsides with lime and clay soil, table grape production requires fertile ground, consisting of a sandy, loam soil.

## Record Crop

By all indications, this year should be no exception. Despite early warnings of a potential California grape shortage,

producers and distributors say the state has weathered the late season frost and hail storms that plagued the area this spring. As a result, California is expected to move beyond the roughly 97 million boxes produced last year, surpassing the 100 million mark for the first time, according to John Pandol, director of special projects for Pandol Bros. Inc., in Delano, CA. Industry

**“We are seeing an explosion of varieties relative to the stable of varieties the table grape industry has had in the past. It’s driven by the pursuit to give the consumer a better experience in terms of a bigger, firmer, crunchier berry.”**

— Steve Kenfield, *The HMC Marketing Group Inc.*



estimates have this year’s crop coming in around 103 to 104 million boxes. Conventional grapes account for fully 98 percent of that total, says Pandol, with organic making up just two percent. Because of the higher retail price of organic grapes, that equates to 97 percent and three percent, respectively, when it comes to dollar sales, he details.

Brux attributes the larger crop to a longer marketing season due to an earlier start and an expected extension of late harvest fruit. Whereas last year’s mid-summer rains postponed the start of the harvest by approximately one week, this year’s harvest is expected to begin on time, during the first week of July. Normally, California table grape supplies start dwindling by the end of December or first part of January. This year, however, Brux anticipates supplies lasting through the month of January, and perhaps even into February.

While all indications point to a higher than normal yield, Jim Pandol, president of Delano, CA-based Pandol Associates Marketing Inc., has observed bunches that are smaller than normal, which does have the potential to lower volume, possibly to something in the range of 95 million boxes. “While they might be less volume, there will still be

plenty of grapes to promote and market,” he says. Besides, he adds, smaller bunches are actually better for clamshell packaging, which remain one of the most popular means for packing grapes, despite the economic difficulties of the past few years.

### **Packaging Trends**

The trend toward packing table grapes in clamshells began approximately eight to 10 years ago with a “limited offering” and has evolved into “a whole number of SKUs of clamshells,” says Dayka. He expects packaging innovations to continue driving growth in the category, as even retailers who did not previously carry table grapes are now embracing them, largely thanks to new packaging options. “The evolution of packaging in the table grape category has been very significant in the past five to seven years, and we think it will continue to evolve over the next five to seven years,” says Dayka. “It provides unique opportunities to further distinguish the category.”

While consumers have been more cautious about their spending, that doesn’t appear to have impacted the grape category too much, especially when it comes to packaging choices, according to Jim Pandol. In

addition to an increased focus on environmentally friendly packaging, there have also been a number of new, more expensive packing options that have captured consumers’ and shippers’ attention.

Brux of the CTGC contends there is room for a number of packaging options in the table grape category. “They each have their place and what works best is due, in great part, to the particular format of a retailer and the customers they’re serving,” she says. “The perfect packaging for a regional chain in the Midwest might be different from an independent retailer in New York City.”

While fixed weight zip-lock or slider bags continue to dominate the category, there have been many requests for the new clear stand-up pouch, says HMC’s Kenfield.

With their eye-catching graphics, flat bottom and convenient grab-and-go handle, they provide good retail presentation, points out Atomic Torosian, managing partner at Fresno, CA-based Crown Jewels Produce Co. “It’s a more expensive way of putting up grapes because the packaging is about three times the cost of a normal bag, but I think it will have its place, much like the clamshell container does,” he says. “I think you will see shippers like us packaging more grapes in those kinds of containers.”

Dulcich takes credit for inventing the new stand-up bag. The impetus for the bag’s development was the need for a packaging option with a “big mouth.” In other words, it had to open wide enough to accommodate big bunches of grapes. The resulting bag, which is often referred to as “the Dulcich bag” by those in the industry, accommodates two to 2.2 pounds of table grapes, and serves as an attractive means of selling the fruit.

“Retailers want to have a nice presentation,” says Dulcich. “These bags lift sales because they are a better-looking package. They stand up, look nice, present themselves well and are better for the fruit.”

One of the selling points of the new stand-up bag is they allow shippers to mix and match different kinds of grapes in the same package. Fortunately, there is no shortage to



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choose from, as California's table grape growers produce over 70 varieties of grapes, both seeded and seedless, according to Brux. Current popular varieties include Autumn Kings, Vintage Reds and Scarlet Royals, which together account for 10 million boxes, roughly 10 percent of all California-grown table grapes.

**Explosion Of Varieties**

Development of new varieties is focused on consumer preference for full-flavored,

vibrantly colored fruit with pliable green stems, reports Brux. That product development is split between private initiatives and industry-led initiatives. Case in point: The USDA has developed a new white grape called Valley Pearl, which will be ready to plant next year. Meanwhile, various companies are busy developing their own proprietary varieties. Delano, CA-based Jasmine Vineyards Inc., for example, has a new red variety called Sweet Celebration, along with a new white grape called Sweet Sunshine, according to company

**“Companies and stores looking for different angles to set themselves apart are starting by promoting grapes by variety so they have something different than their competitors have.”**

— Jon Zaninovich, Jasmine Vineyards Inc.

vice president Jon Zaninovich.

“We are seeing an explosion of varieties relative to the stable of varieties the table grape industry has had in the past,” reports Kenfield. “It’s driven by the pursuit to give the consumer a better experience in terms of a bigger, firmer, crunchier berry.”

In Los Angeles, CA, The Giumarra Companies conduct breeding and variety research “to develop robust grape varieties with the best flavor,” according to West Coast business development manager Megan Schulz.

Meanwhile, in nearby Bakersfield, CA, Sun World International LLC has dedicated its new variety development initiatives to extending the California grape season on either end “with varieties that have improved size, yield, and flavor profiles,” says Gordon Robertson, the company’s senior vice president of sales and marketing. These include two early season varieties — Superior Seedless green grapes, which begin harvesting in early to mid May and Midnight Beauty black seedless grapes, which are ready to harvest at the end of May — and Scarlotta Seedless, a late season red grape variety. “California grape offerings are in a transition where we are seeing older varieties decrease in production, giving rise to newer, more reliable, and grower-friendly varieties,” he adds.

New varieties have been coming at an increasingly faster clip, according to Jim Pandol, with late green varieties being the fastest growing. Several years ago, Pandol Marketing launched an initiative dedicated to serving specialty and ethnic markets where the focus is on flavor, rather than berry size. In this particular arena, he says kids are driving the growth, which has been in the region of 30 percent per year. “The most important consumers we need to focus on for the present and the future are the kids,” he acknowledges.

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When it comes to marketing to kids, the obvious destination is the lunchbox. With that in mind, the California Table Grape Commission has been addressing what it calls “the portability issue.” Likewise, companies like HMC have been working on packaging grapes as a snack item in order to help extend the category’s reach and give consumers increased access to grapes. “It’s in its infancy, but people love grapes, so the more we can do to get them in the places where currently it’s difficult to get to, that’s another opportunity to increase consumption of table grapes,” says HMC’s Kenfield. “That’s the market we are working on in terms of providing the product to the marketplace in a form that’s going to facilitate that.”

By all accounts, table grapes are an incredibly profitable category for the retailer. Even the economic downturn could not slow grape sales, according to Dayka, who stops short of branding the category “recession-proof.” Forty percent of grape purchasers buy the product on a weekly basis, preceded only by bananas and apples, says Brux of the CTGC. That makes them a staple. Consequently, it is in retailers’ best interest to respond to that growing popularity by striving to serve their grape-loving customers by all means possible.

### Finding The Right Mix

With so many new types of grapes flooding the market, retailers have no shortage from which to choose. But just how much space should retailers dedicate to the

category and how many different types of grapes should they carry? Not surprisingly, there is not one set answer to that question.

“The correct answer is between one and 10, depending on the demographics of the store,” says John Pandol of Pandol Bros. “Retail is all about customization, not about cookie-cutter plan-o-grams.”

That said, there are varying opinions across the industry with regard to how much space should be allocated to the category. Robertson of Sun World recommends a minimum of 32 feet, consisting of a mix of all three colors in bags, clamshells and specialty items. “Grapes are one of the most profitable categories in the produce department in terms of dollars per allocated square foot, but could use a little more room in most cases,” he says.

Data from the California Table Grape Commission confirms Robertson’s opinion. Specifically, space allocation of more than 25 feet can generate up to 63 percent more dollars per store per year than sets under 18 feet, cites Brux. Likewise, research has shown that promoting five or more varieties of grapes at retail can result in a 70 percent volume lift. “Mixing grape colors, sizes and varieties adds a dramatic look, and provides consumers convenience when selecting grapes,” she adds.

Those in the industry are understandably excited about new grape varieties. With the exception of true grape connoisseurs, however, most consumers are clueless when it

comes to deciphering one grape from the next. They simply know red, green, black and white. John Pandol says many consumers don’t even realize they are eating different varieties and simply attribute differences in taste or texture to varying production areas or times of the growing season.

Sunlight International is attempting to educate consumers by including variety names on its bags of grapes. According to Dulcich, this move comes at the request of retailers who are recognizing the value of improving their grape selection and promoting different grape varieties.

Jasmine’s Zaninovich agrees, adding that some retailers are already looking to grape varieties to serve as a competitive point of difference. “Companies and stores looking for different angles to set themselves apart are starting by promoting grapes by variety so they have something different than their competitors have,” says Zaninovich. “Some people are starting to realize there’s a difference because some of the new varieties are quite different than those to which they’ve grown accustomed. However, it takes a long time to educate the public.”

In light of that fact, Zaninovich has resigned himself to the fact that “the education of different varieties will come later.” For the moment, the focus must be on “getting stores to promote and consumers to ultimately eat them and come back for more.”

The California Table Grape Commission has a number of recommendations for retailers to boost sales of California grapes. They include:

- Featuring grapes in front-page ads
- Promoting five or more varieties of grapes
- Featuring multiple varieties on different print ad pages
- Highlighting grapes in five promotions per month.

In addition, Brux points to research showing that consumers want to know more about the potential health benefits of grapes. That knowledge is driving some of the Commission’s promotional activity. “In addition to including health information in our ads and new mobile site, and emphasizing select health messages throughout our consumer campaign, we will also be equipping retailers with a number of health messages they can use in their ads or signage,” Brux details.

When it comes to building retail displays, Pandol of Pandol Bros. is adamant produce managers “never set a bigger display than they

**“Space allocations of more than 25 feet can generate up to 63 percent more dollars per store per year than sets under 18 feet.**

**Likewise, research has shown that promoting five or more varieties of grapes at retail can result in a 70 percent volume lift.”**

— Karen Brux, California Table Grape Commission

can maintain.” Specifically, he warns, “displays more than two bags deep crush,” increasing the likelihood of shrink, something no produce manager wants to incur. He also recommends retailers encourage their produce workers to remove grapes that are starting to spoil to maintain the integrity and appeal of the display. “The grape business’ best friend is a produce clerk empowered to cull,” he says. “I’ve seen grapes left out so many days that gnats are flying around the display. It may sound counterintuitive, but culling more leads to less shrink.”

The California Table Grape Commission advises keeping non-refrigerated bagged grapes on display for up to 24 hours and

refrigerated bagged grapes on display for no more than 48 hours. Clamshell grapes can be kept on display for up to 48 hours and 72 hours, respectively.

“The best thing a retailer can do is to keep their displays tidy and looking fresh,” says Jasmine’s Zaninovich. “Nothing is more unattractive than an unkempt grape section that’s been picked over with grapes spilling out of open bags. It’s very important to keep things clean-looking and attractive to consumers.”

Zaninovich knows it’s basic human nature for consumers to want to taste a grape or two before buying them, so retailers are bound to find a few open bags at the end of the day. While that does add to the amount of shrink,

that’s just “part of the deal” and needs to be accepted as such, he says.

When it comes to avoiding shrink, retailers must be stringent about maintaining the product in the proper environment at all times, says Giumarra’s Schulz. In particular, she advises that retailers keep their grape displays free of wet conditions and located away from strong-smelling items in the produce department. In addition, she adds, attention must be paid to keeping the product at the proper temperature. “Grapes should be refrigerated throughout the cold chain — and while displayed — to maintain quality and maximize shelf life,” she says.

Whether a retailer decides to highlight particular varieties or engage in other promotional activities, at the heart of any retail initiative the focus must remain on the product. With their bright colors and sweet, succulent flavors, grapes will always remain a consumer favorite, as long as retailers set out to keep them at the forefront of their minds. “We just need to remind consumers that they love grapes and give them more reasons to eat them on a more frequent basis,” says Brux. **pb**



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Peruvian Asparagus



Importers Association

Asparagus represents increasing potential for high ring sales in the produce department. More and more consumers are looking for healthy and convenient foods, and fresh asparagus presents an easy-to-prepare and highly nutritious solution. According to USDA-ERS statistics, per capita consumption of fresh asparagus has grown and remained consistent over the past decade.

Asparagus from Peru, a principal supplier, allows retailers to complement other seasonal sources and offer quality product year-round. Retailers can count on consistent, quality Peruvian asparagus to build sales and provide ample displays of product throughout the year. To assist retailers in managing the category, the Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association (PAIA) has developed a Category Management Plan Outline for Fresh Peruvian Asparagus, available from any PAIA member or the association office at [prestige@1scom.net](mailto:prestige@1scom.net).



**RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS — GO BIG!**

The year-round availability of asparagus supports programs designed to build the category not only during peak holiday periods but throughout the year. Focus on the following key areas to boost sales:

- **Vibrant Colors:** A variety of colors are available from Peru. Use of multiple colors makes for attractive display alternatives. Fresh asparagus is readily available in green, white and purple. Showcase unique colors, like purple or white, by adding these products to displays where fresh green asparagus is featured to create interesting and impactful displays.

- **Visibility:** Size sells!!! Strategically display the category to ensure consumers see it. Many successful retailers display asparagus at the front of the produce department and utilize island displays and corner caps to guarantee consumers see it. Making sure displays are especially visible and well-positioned in the produce department will gain sales. Advantageously cross-merchandising asparagus with other grocery items will build asparagus sales and add additional ring for the department.

- **Variety:** Fresh asparagus now comes in a wide variety of sizes and packaging to enhance display practices and meet consumers' needs. Be sure to display several different packaging options to increase convenience for customers. Large display tables of different product forms (whole spear bunches, microwave tray-packed trimmed spears, packaged green and/or white asparagus, packaged asparagus tips, white and purple asparagus) will increase sales and add profits to the produce department.

**PROMOTION AND SIGNAGE**

Fresh asparagus is a great item to promote for entertaining and holidays, especially during Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Retailers should also capitalize on the opportunity to promote asparagus during the summer for picnics or barbecues.

Promoting multiple colors of Peruvian asparagus together may encourage consumers to try a new color. Retailers can also use alternative pricing methods, such as by the bunch instead of the pound, to showcase the value of the product. Value-added and packaged fresh product can be used as part of a meal solutions offering. In-store demo programs increase consumer awareness of asparagus as an easy and economical dinner component.

Effective signage should stress suggestive usage

ideas as well as the many nutritional benefits of fresh asparagus. Signage should recommend serving ideas such as: tasty party item • easy to barbecue • microwaveable • quick and healthy snack

**Promote Nutrition:** Health-related promotion is a definite method of gaining sales. Asparagus contains a host of health benefits:

- Asparagus is low in calories
- Naturally fat- and cholesterol-free
- Good source of potassium, Vitamin A, Vitamin C
- Rich in rutin and folacin, which has been proven important in the duplication of cells for growth and repair of the body

Promotions designed to highlight nutritional benefits will lead to loyal purchasers. Combine asparagus with other Superfoods in an in-store promotion outlining the health attributes of these products. Health aspects appeal to a wide segment of the market including active life-stylers, young adults, growing families and seniors.

**Cross Merchandising Opportunities:** Fresh asparagus has numerous cross-merchandising opportunities including salad, oils and dressings, with deli or seafood items, and wines. During the summer, placing a display next to barbecue-style meats and fish is a great way to promote picnic items.

Value packaged or tray-packed fresh asparagus can also be cross-merchandised with packaged salad. Fresh and packaged asparagus can be cross-merchandised with other departments to provide a meal solution for customers, for example in the meat department with steaks or in the deli with roasted chicken.

**VALUE ADDED**

In an effort to increase household penetration and reach new consumers, a number of Peruvian asparagus importers are working closely with their suppliers to increase the category through value-added options — including microwaveable and ready-to-eat designed for both retail and foodservice. These value-added programs provide the consumer with convenience and value.

**CARE AND HANDLING**

Asparagus should be bright-looking with closed, firm tips. The butt-end of fresh asparagus should be cleanly cut and sufficiently hydrated. Display under refrigeration or with the butt-end in water or touching a wet pad. Be sure to monitor the condition of water in display trays and change frequently. In the backroom, keep asparagus cold (34-36 degrees F) and moist (damp room) prior to display. Fresh asparagus is not ethylene-sensitive but is susceptible to absorbing very strong odors.

**FIVE WAYS TO GROW YOUR PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS CATEGORY:**

1. Don't be afraid to go big and promote the product!
2. Promote multiple uses and provide recipe information from grilling to soups.
3. Promote alternative colors, especially for home chefs and entertaining.
4. Build promotion around nutrition and health. Asparagus offers excellent advantages in this area.
5. Cross-merchandise with proteins and provide a meal idea.

**OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL IDEAS**

- Use an in-store demo to show consumers how to incorporate asparagus into a new recipe or meal idea.
- MIX and MATCH colors.
- Promote value-added and packaged fresh product as an easy convenient side dish.
- Put asparagus front and center in the department to encourage impulse sales.
- Price by the bunch instead of by the pound

**PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS IMPORTERS ASSOCIATION**

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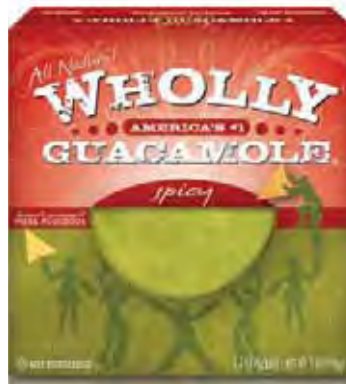

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Consumers can easily find prepared guacamole in their produce department, and have a number of options from which to choose.

# Prepared Guacamole Excites New And Current Avocado Customers

Convenience, saved time and labor, and a lengthy shelf-life introduce new consumers to the avocado category. **COMPILED BY JENNIFER KRAMER**

Avocados have never been a staple grocery list item, and many consumers still need education on picking ripe fruit, cutting and preparing them, along with recipe suggestions. Yet when done correctly, an avocado program can bring great success to a retailer's produce department and bottom line. While produce category managers and associates should always be up for the challenge, there is another way to introduce fresh avocado products to their customers: prepared guacamole products, now being offered in produce departments nationwide by a number of large, and growing companies.

PRODUCE BUSINESS spoke to a number of leaders in the industry to learn more about this growing trend, including: Al Ahmer, vice president of sales and production, and Rob Wedin, vice president of fresh sales and marketing for Calavo Growers Inc., Santa Paula, CA; Tracey Altman, vice president of marketing for Fresherized Foods/Wholly Guacamole, Saginaw, TX; and Dan Walton, executive vice president of Yucatan Foods, Los Angeles, CA.

**PRODUCE BUSINESS:** It seems that sales of avocados, in general, and prepared guacamole, specifically, have grown exponentially over the past 10 years. What do you think accounts for that growth?

**Al Ahmer:** The growth of Hispanic influence, mass acceptance of Mexican food, and guacamole availability at virtually every major store chain in the United States has impacted the growth. Also, the use of ultra-high-pressure technology in guacamole production, which creates an all-natural and very flavorful product, is responsible as well.

**Rob Wedin:** With reference to fresh avocados, avocado popularity continues great growth because avocados are fun to eat and there are many new meal usage ideas for avocados. They are not just used in guacamole now. Avocados are recognized for their healthful properties. Plus, availability has been more consistent throughout the year, especially in the East, where large populations are driving rapid growth. Retail displays of ready-to-eat avocados have also expanded greatly, and many avocados are sold in consumer bags, which contributes to multiple purchases. Finally, advertising and promotion has expanded greatly since the establishment of the Hass Avocado Promotion Order.

**Tracey Altman:** Consumers are getting smarter about the foods they eat. They understand that shopping in the produce section for snacks and meal ingredients is important. Couple that with the fact that consumers are also more educated about the avocado. For years, avocados were thought to be full of fat, and therefore, unhealthy. As people become informed of the difference between good fats and bad fats and the 20 vitamins and nutrients found in avocados, they are offering them more to their kids and using them in breakfast, lunch and dinner meals.

**Dan Walton:** A combination of dedicated and persistent marketing by the various organizations and co-ops such as California Avocado Commission, Chilean Avocado Importers Association and APEAM (Avocados from Mexico), which together have an annual budget north of \$20 million, has helped raise awareness of the avocado and impact sales.

But good marketing can only be effective if the product is functional, and avocados are conducive to all ethnic cuisines. The fruit has more of a mouth feel, rather than an actual flavor, so each ethnicity can incorporate it into its own style of cuisine.

There is still a lot of growth potential, with Subway having added avocados as a side option. People will realize they can use avocados as a substitute for mayo, or as an additional condiment on sandwiches.

**PB: Though high-pressure pasteurization is credited for extending shelf-life of prepared guacamole and enabling its placement in the produce department, surely there has to be something more to the rapid growth of this category. Convenience obviously is a big attraction to consumers, but how much does taste and your specific “recipe” of ingredients keep customers coming back for more?**

**Ahmer:** It’s the fact that you can use all natural ingredients without any preservatives that delivers a fresh-like taste to the finished guacamole. The guacamole recipe is also very important, and we at Calavo feel that we have three of the best available: Authentic Style (Mild), Caliente (Spicy) and Pico De Gallo (Medium).

**Altman:** We get letters from customers all the time saying they didn’t think “guac-in-a-box” could be good until they tried ours. We believe it comes down to quality of ingredients. Not all store-bought guacamole products are created equal. Some are filled with sour cream, mayo and other fillers, with less than 5 percent avocado. When people find out that we use the same ingredients they use at home to make their guacamole — avocado, onion, garlic, peppers and salt to taste — and that they can conveniently purchase it pre-made without worrying about over- and under-ripe fresh fruits, they’re excited to have our product as an option.

**Walton:** We actually don’t think HPP has been responsible at all for the increase. HPP works very well in offering chefs in restaurants pure pulp so they can make their own guacamole, but we have found at the retail level consumers have little, if any, idea what HPP means. Given that you can add natural ingredients to extend shelf-life up to 60 days by lowering the pH of the guacamole, there is no real need to use HPP in guacamole. The secret is how clean you can make your guacamole, plus how low of an oxygen content you can get in the headspace.

The reason the category has grown has more to do with the fact that consumers are able to get “real” guacamole with up to a 95 percent avocado content, whereas before they had the Dean Guacamole option with less than

10 percent. After quality, we would say the reason is convenience vs. fresh avocados. That goes a long way with wanting to have a Mexican night at home and not having to “time” your fresh avocados.

**PB: Some stores are now adding “guacamole bars” with associates creating guacamole to order. Can you break down the pros and cons of prepared guacamole made in-store versus your product?**

**Ahmer:** Store-made guacamole may use inconsistently or over-ripe avocados with the thought of reducing shrink in produce, and this could produce an inconsistent guacamole. If preservatives are not added, the shelf-life would also be relatively short.

**Wedin:** The guacamole bars have been a great contributor to fresh avocado sales and profit at retail.

## Using guacamole in place of ranch dressing or mayonnaise, as a salad dressing, or in recipes like chicken salad and deviled eggs is becoming more frequent.

—Tracey Altman, *Fresherized Foods/Wholly Guacamole*

**Altman:** All fresh avocados will eventually turn brown and go bad. For those consumers wanting a batch to enjoy immediately, the guacamole bar might be a great solution. We find that offering a variety of flavors in a variety of packaging sizes allows folks to enjoy the right amount of guacamole at the right time. For example, our 2-oz snack packs have been great for people wanting a snack or to add to salads or sandwiches. Meanwhile, the 7-oz is great for a couple of people, and then the party packs are perfect for large group gatherings like football homegating parties.

**Walton:** Yucantan Foods makes the only artisan guacamole on the market with the highest quality fruit. Our guacamole items are composed of 95 percent avocado and 5 percent spices. Making product in-store is a challenge as to labor and availability of ripe avocados. We do provide very high quality avocado halves and avocado pulp that several retail customers use as the main base for their fresh guacamole programs.

**PB: Are there pockets of the U.S. and Canada that are still untapped markets for prepared guacamole, and once identified, what strategies are in place for realization of the potential for these markets?**

**Ahmer:** I don’t think there are untapped

markets, just markets that are growing more than others. The Northeast is a good example of that, and obviously, that is where the bulk of the U.S. population resides. Many people get their first taste of guacamole at T.G.I. Friday’s, Chili’s, and Chipotle.

**Altman:** There was a time when the Northeastern markets weren’t familiar with avocados or guacamole products, but as the fruit has become more integrated into restaurant menus and more readily available, we’ve found that this is changing. For instance, Subway, Au Bon Pain, Wendy’s and Burger King are just a few restaurants that have integrated avocado into their menus.

**Walton:** Except for southern California and Texas, the entire country is in “Wild West mode” when it comes to guacamole — waiting to be introduced. Once people realize the potential of

using guacamole as a condiment, the usage will be many folds higher than it is today. In California and Texas, as the first and second generation Latino children are growing up, they are becoming more open to buying

pre-made guacamole vs. making their own. This can be a very large wave of “new” guacamole sales for these two states, plus other places in the United States with large Mexican populations.

**PB: Given the rapid growth of the guacamole category, where do you see the category expanding in the future as far as line extensions?**

**Ahmer:** We produce an Avocado Hummus, which is starting to gain good distribution.

**Altman:** The category still has a lot of room to grow, both in terms of market-share as well as flavor. We find that when we educate our consumers on ways to enjoy guacamole as more than just a dip with chips, their use of the product moves from a party-time purchase to a weekly basket staple. Using guacamole in place of ranch dressing or mayonnaise, as a salad dressing, or in recipes like chicken salad and deviled eggs is becoming more frequent.

**Walton:** Line extensions will be both in flavor and packaging. We have already launched a Guacamole Hummus available at Ralphs’ and HEB. We have launched a Guacamole Ranch available in HEB and Wal-Mart stores. Once we fully market these flavor profiles, we have a quite a few more to introduce. Also single-serve guacamole, plus avocado sauce in plastic bottles are growing at a fast pace as well. **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF NYS DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE & MKTS. – PRIDE OF NEW YORK PROGRAM

The Pride of New York program helps New York growers connect with retailers.

# From Asparagus To Zucchini, Everything Grows In New York

With a geographic advantage of being close to a number of the country's most populated cities and plenty of fertile land, New York's vegetables are a sure bet. **BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD**

**F**ertile farmlands might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of New York. Yet, back in the 1700s, it was the state's Schoharie Valley, located about 150 miles north of New York City, that earned the nickname Breadbasket of the American Revolution by supplying General George Washington's troops with wheat, apples, corn and a variety of vegetables.

Today, agriculture is just as important. Some 36,300 farms, averaging 193 acres in size and run by many multi-generations, occupy nearly a quarter of the state's land area and produce a wide array of food products. New York ranks fifth in the nation for area harvested and value of fresh market vegetables. Fresh market vegetable production totaled \$355.5 million and processing vegetables were valued at \$27 million in 2011, according to the New York Agricultural Statistics Service's *Vegetable Report*, published in January 2012. Leading crops include cabbage, sweet corn and onions.

Dan McCleery, merchandising manager

for produce and floral at ShopRite Supermarkets, based in Keasbey, NJ, says, "There is a great bounty of fresh produce items available in New York, especially vegetables."

## Industry Snapshot

A combination of sandy loam and the black dirt of the muck lands that's as rich as potting soil; a climate tempered by the Great Lakes of Ontario and Erie to the west and the Atlantic and Long Island Sound to the east; and a plentiful water supply are some of the natural attributes that make vegetable farming so successful in New York.

"What's more," says Larry Eckhardt, owner of Kinderhook Creek Farm in Stephentown, NY, and past president of the New York State Vegetable Growers Association (NYSVGA), "We're a large state and our farmers can supply to over a third of the U.S. population in less than a day. For example, I'm on the Massachusetts border and can get product to New York City or Boston or Portland, Maine, in hours. Farmers out in the west, near Buffalo, are closer to Chicago."

Andrew Gurda, president and owner of Pine Island, NY-based A. Gurda Produce Co. Inc., echoes this proximity advantage. "We're only 85 miles away from New York City and that's nearly 19 million people. That means we can pick, pack and have product in the store within a day."



Cabbage is the No. 1 New York vegetable by dollar amount and volume produced.



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## SHOPRITE & C-TOWN PROMOTE NY VEGETABLES

“Consumers today want to buy locally grown fruits and vegetables,” says Dan McCleerey, merchandising manager for produce and floral at ShopRite Supermarkets, in Keasbey, NJ. “We aim to deliver. This starts with looking for New York farmers that are GAP-certified. After that, we’ll take what a farmer can grow. If they can only supply one store, or just a couple, that’s fine. We really try to customize our locally grown program and work with the harvest as it starts in mid-June in Orange County, then upstate in July and the Mohawk Valley in August. During the peak of the season we carry as many as 25 different vegetable items. Sweet corn is No. 1, followed by vegetables such as bell peppers, squash and leafy greens.”

Similarly, at C-Town Supermarkets, a 200-plus store chain headquartered in White Plains, NY, fresh New York-grown corn, tomatoes, squash, eggplant and several other vegetables are identified to customers via point-of-sale signage, says Joe DeLorenzo, director of produce merchandising and operations for White Plains, NY-based Alpha 1 Marketing, the independently owned and operated chain’s marketing and advertising arm. “We’ll use the Pride of New York logo. Depending on the store, we’ll either display and merchandise all the locally grown produce in one area to make it easy for customers to find. Or, in the smaller stores we’ll leave it in its plan-o-gram location with good signage.”

Customers can easily spot New York-

grown vegetables in ShopRite stores. “We put up a cardboard barn around a display table and display all our local produce for the week there,” describes McCleerey. “In addition, we’ll advertise local produce in our weekly ads.”

“At the height of the season,” says DeLorenzo, “we’ll run a large block ad with all of our locally grown fruits and vegetables grouped together.”

ShopRite also features locally grown produce in two types of summer in-store events. One is a Meet the Farmer opportunity, and the other is a special weekend showcase of local produce. McCleerey knows, “Successfully offering customers New York-grown fruits and vegetables this way means being able to move on the fly and making the time and space.” **pb**

New York’s vegetable production season starts with planting in April. Robin Root, owner of Root Bros. Farms, in Albion, NY, details, “Harvest starts in mid-July and we’ll have crop right through Thanksgiving. Being a steady supplier is an advantage for us. For example, our niche is a little later than states

like New Jersey, and we don’t have gaps in supply like they do.”

The window of availability is nearly year-round for some items. Eckhardt points out, “We have a substantial number of storage crops such as potatoes, onions, carrots and cabbage. Some of our big farms will ship

storage cabbage right through the winter and into May. In addition, we’re seeing more greenhouse production every year. For example, there’s a greenhouse tomato grower in Elba that ships truckload quantities on a year-round basis.”

The type of farms in New York run the

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## TOP 10 VEGETABLES BY VOLUME

Vegetable	Volume (pounds)
1. Cabbage	4,472,000
2. Onions	3,087,000
3. Sweet Corn	2,736,000
4. Pumpkins	1,462,000
5. Squash	897,000
6. Cucumber	476,000
7. Snap Beans	469,000
8. Tomatoes	392,000
9. Bell Peppers	193,000
10. Eggplant	93,000

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, New York Field Office 2010

gamut. Some are planted by hand, farmed organically and harvested by oxen in a back-to-nature and nostalgic choice. The vast majority, however, use the latest technologies. For example, Mike Riner, vegetable farm manager at Elba, NY-based Cy Farms LLC, shares, “We use GPS-style planting that plant straight down the field with exact spacing for better seed utilization and optimum yield. Our cooling facilities have changed drastically over the years. Fifteen years ago, we could cool one load a day. Now, we can force-air cool six to eight loads daily.”

Much of today’s advancements on New York farms come from Cornell University’s Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY, points out Eckhardt. “Our farms are the testing grounds for cutting-edge technology, as well as plant breeding and even food safety research out of Cornell,” he says. “For example, we have retailers that come to us and say they want us to follow a specific food safety program. Our reply? ‘Who do you think helped Cornell develop it in the first place?’ That’s how up-to-date many of our farmers are in food safety. It’s crucial. My biggest fear isn’t weather or markets, it’s a food safety scare. Some of our farms never recovered from the spinach

outbreak that happened in 2006.”

Laurie Gregori, sales manager at Lynn-ette & Sons Inc., in Kent, NY, agrees, saying, “Third-party certification is a must if you want to sell your product.”

The New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets (NYS DAM), in Albany, NY, has offered its Specialty Crop Block Grant-funded GAP Certification Assistance program to farmers in the state since 2008, according to director of communications, Jessica Ziehm. “The program pays up to \$750 for the cost of a first-time GAP Certification,” she details. “Another big part of this program is education. We host regional two-day educational workshops with staff from Cornell to help farmers develop a food safety plan. Many times, it’s just a matter of documenting what they are already doing.”

There are challenges in vegetable farming in New York. Maureen Torrey Marshall, vice president of Torrey Farms Inc., a 10,000-acre farm, located in Elba, NY, says, “The No. 1 challenge, as it is throughout the country, is the labor supply. Some farmers are converting over to grain because it can be

## TOP 10 VEGETABLES BY DOLLAR

Vegetable	Value (dollars)
1. Cabbage	\$87.9 million
2. Sweet Corn	\$71.1 million
3. Onions	\$53.7 million
4. Snap Beans	\$39.2 million
5. Squash	\$36.7 million
6. Tomatoes	\$28.4 million
7. Cucumber	\$18.4 million
8. Bell Peppers	\$9.9 million
9. Eggplant	\$4.0 million
10. Cauliflower	\$3.4 million

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, New York Field Office 2010

saves both labor and fuel consumption.”

Kinderhook Farm’s Eckhardt contends diversity is the answer for some farms. “Sweet corn is our main crop; we grow it on 225 of our 1,100 acres,” he says. “But we also grow field corn, oats, wheat and soybeans and raise cattle.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF NYS DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE & MKTS. – PRIDE OF NEW YORK PROGRAM

harvested mechanically. There’s now an ethanol plant in western New York and that makes field corn look pretty attractive when there’s no labor supply.”

Marshall points out that other challenges stem from government agencies not considering large commercial full-time farmers in the state local. “They don’t understand the type of farming we do, and therefore it’s the ‘local,’ or 10- to 20-acre farms that get the grants. Unfortunately, these small farms aren’t going to feed us. What’s more, our large farms are actually more sustainable because of efficiency and ability to pool resources. For example, we’ve been upgrading our squash operations in order to harvest more rows with fewer passes and this

it. Gurda points out, “Even though we have a freight advantage over produce grown on the West Coast, there’s still the cost of doing business. Many retailers are bottom-line driven. If they can get it cheaper at Hunt’s Point, they will.”

“As a farmer,” says Lynn-ette’s Gregori, “you need to be set up for direct-store deliveries in order to get local product in chains. For others, there are a lot of rules to overcome. We haven’t seen the interest in locally grown impact our sales.”

Yet, retailers in New York have always been good about promoting the state’s fresh produce in-store. Eckhardt acknowledges, “Locally grown has always been important, but it hasn’t always been identified as such in

### Pride Of New York

Marketing the state’s vegetable crop at supermarket retail has its challenges and opportunities. Everybody wants locally grown produce, but not everyone is willing to pay the premium for

## NEW YORK'S TOP CROPS

**F**rom asparagus to zucchini, everything grows in New York. However, leading fresh market vegetables, the ones that rank New York in the top five in the nation for production, are cabbage, cauliflower, pumpkin, snap beans, squash, sweet corn and onions.

**CABBAGE:** Fresh market and processing cabbage are grown primarily in the western and Finger Lakes region of the state, as well as on Long Island. Cabbage is one of the biggest crops grown at Elba, NY-based Cy Farms LLC, according to Mike Riner, vegetable farm manager, who reports, “We’ll begin harvest the third week in July and ship to the fresh market until January and out of storage into June.”

Root Bros. is another major cabbage grower in the state. “We can store up to 10,000 tons of cabbage from November to June,” divulges Robin Root, owner of the Albion, NY-based farm. “This means we truck it nearly 52 weeks, primarily on long-term contracts to slaw producers in the West and South, and east to the City for egg roll production.”

**ONIONS:** Pungent, yellow globe-shaped onions are cultivated primarily in the western portion of the state in the mucklands. Cy Farm’s Riner says, “We grow a high-sugar high-pungency onion that has good quality and shelf-life.”

Yet, on 400 acres in the north central portion of the state, Glennville, GA-based Bland Farms LLC, harvests its unique sweet flavored onion from the first of August through October. Delbert Bland, owner, president and CEO, says, “This is our fourth year and we grow and ship about 300 truckloads, mostly in 40-lb. boxes under the brand Empire Sweets.”

**POTATOES:** Potato varieties such as round white, red, yellow, russets and fingerlings are grown throughout New

York for fresh market sales, as well as for chips and seed. Ken Gray, vice president of sales and marketing for the Bushwick Commission Co. Inc., in Farmingdale, NY, says, “We primarily grow round whites on Long Island. We’ll ship them from mid-August through February.”

**OTHER VEGETABLES:** Sweet corn is another important vegetable crop. Larry Eckhardt, owner of Kinderhook Creek Farm in Stephentown, NY, notes, “The muck soils in Orange County are great for growing sweet corn. The only other area in the country with similar soil quality is in Belle Glade, FL.”

In addition to cabbage, Maureen Torrey Marshall, vice president of Torrey Farms Inc., a 10,000-acre farm, located in Elba, NY, says, “We also grow summer vegetables such as green beans, cucumbers, zucchini and yellow squash, winter squash and miniature pumpkins.”

The popularity of the Food Network and consumers’ interest today in food and cooking is leading farmers to diversity their vegetable offerings. Andrew Gurda, president and owner of Pine Island, NY-based A. Gurda Produce Co. Inc. recalls, “My grandfather grew the basics: carrots, celery, lettuce, onions and maybe cabbage. Now, we grow over 30 crops including arugula, leaf lettuce, escarole, chicory, romaine, parsley, asparagus, cilantro, leeks, radishes, scallions, spinach, Swiss Chard and several varieties of squash.”

The demographic diversity of the state is also creating markets for niche items. Tim Pezzolesi, the NYSDAM manager of marketing and promotion, shares, “We have farmers in the state testing the waters in ethnic markets. For example, with Brazilian squash and water spinach, Latino crops such as tomatillos and hot peppers, as well as Asian vegetables such as tatsoi, bok choy and Napa cabbage.” **pb**

**“Locally grown has always been important, but it hasn’t always been identified as such in the past. Today, with more consumers looking for fresh foods, retailers have started to identify the state-grown fruits and vegetables as such with the Pride of New York program.”**

— Larry Eckhardt, Kinderhook Creek Farm

and carry New York produce by highlighting it on price sheets, or providing an insert of New York produce or a special section with just New York fruits and vegetables and a separate price.”

This spring, New York senators proposed an expansion of the Pride of New York program that will increase awareness of New York-grown products both in restaurants and at retail. This proposal would create two new designations — Dine: Pride of New York for restaurants, and Shop: Pride of New York for retailers and wholesalers — that would serve as a beacon for New Yorkers who want to purchase locally grown products. This impetus follows on the heels of a report published by the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) in April 2012, titled: *Bringing New York Farms to Table, Shop: Pride of New York and Dine: Pride of New York*, that found farmers in the state heavily relied upon direct sales to consumers in order to meet demand. Specifically, more than 7,000 New York state farmers sell direct to consumers, while only 1,782 sell to restaurant and retail wholesalers. Thus, the IDC’s Dine and Shop programs are targeted to sales of state-grown products by opening up the more traditional — and higher capacity — supply chain between farmers, wholesalers, retailers and restaurants. Interestingly, under the IDC’s proposal, supermarkets must carry at least 20 items grown and/or processed in New York State in order to qualify for a Shop: Pride of New York designation. **pb**

the past. Today, with more consumers looking for fresh foods, retailers have started to identify the state-grown fruits and vegetables as such with the Pride of New York program.” Pride of New York was started in 1996 and is administered by the NYSDAM. It’s a cost-sharing grant program between the state and private businesses where money is used for advertising. There are approximately 3,400 Pride of New York members.

The interest in buying local has spurred many retailers to develop their own distinctive chain-wide ‘locally-grown’ programs. “As such, Pride of New York continues to assist with point-of-sale materials, but our goal is to complement rather than compete,” says Pezzolesi. “However, we consider our real strength pointing retailers in the right direction in terms of finding suppliers. We also work with distributors and wholesalers to add

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ProWare's latest products allow case-level traceability, along with portable tools for scanning and printing at the retail level.

# Keeping Up Momentum In Produce Efficiency

Change is here with more on the way. For all the noise, we're simply changing the delivery and storage of documents. **BY MEREDITH AUERBACH**

It looks like a case of hurry up and wait. Produce industry software developers point out that excellent inventory management software tools to make the data flow of produce logistics fast and smooth are readily available and actually declining in cost. The Produce Traceability Initiative, now more than three years old, has provided a forum for the industry to make its preferences known. Retail customers are beginning to make serious demands for better information. Increasingly tech-savvy consumers point their cell phone cameras at labels to discover where and how the products they buy are grown and come to market.

And yet, most players say the industry is still years away from recognizing and benefiting from the evolution of party-to-party transactions from paper going through the fax machine or mail to a stream of electronic data.

## Ease And Efficiency Begin With A Label

The choke point can occur at any point in the system, but it is frequently at the warehouse where problems become visible. "We spend a lot of time with distributors, looking at boxes from grower/shippers," reports John Carpenter, president of Silver Creek Software Ltd., producer of

Visual Software, in Boise, ID, "and we estimate that less than half of producers label cases consistently, in spite of having the capability to do it. For whatever reason, there's a big difference between being compliant in theory and actively implementing the process. The label has the ability to initiate everything: PO, invoice, location, lot, traceability, pick codes and more. It's how you know what and where each pallet is located."

Henri Morris, president and CEO of Edible Software, a division of Solid Software Solutions, based in Houston, TX, concurs with the participation estimate and goes on to point out, "Wholesale produce distributors and terminal markets have unique challenges including mixed inventory, the need to control constantly changing brands and specs and a faced-paced, highly competitive environment. Having an excellent inventory management system enables efficiency that goes beyond the need of traceability for food safety, and improves all the business aspects involved in the chain of logistics. In the past, for example, we may have had an accurate total number of cases, but perhaps not the further breakdown of size, pack or pick date," he continues. "Clients also want to avoid slowing down the process that is putting a label on every case on a pallet. The system can print

a pallet label, along with the required number of case labels that get applied to cases if the pallet is broken up for different orders as it might be for foodservice."

## See What The Tools Can Do

"Today's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software has everything available to handle inventory control, accounting, purchasing, sales, invoicing, accounts payable and accounts receivable, and it has been adapted and customized for the produce industry," declares Charles Shafae, founder and president of dProduce Man Software, in Half Moon Bay, CA. "For example, a regular customer has an account with individual pricing and unique structure. On site, the software can match specific purchase requirements to various products; a PO gets generated and accepted; the invoice is completed. The process cuts the amount of time of the whole transaction. Traceability is embedded throughout, and the software can assign picking tickets to simplify inventory management because precise locations are already stored as a record."

Even product temperature monitoring is being incorporated into ERP systems. Don Walborn, director of sales and marketing at

Plant City, FL-based ProWare Services LLC, explains, “AgWare is our ERP package for managing your business, including lot traceability for food safety. It works with our newest product, FreshAware, using case-level RFID tags to capture, monitor and report unit-level temperature throughout the supply channel for quality control, accountability and a calculator to help distributors judge remaining shelf-life. Every new development increases visibility of product through the supply chain.”

Although the software programs available to the produce industry now basically do the same tasks, developers look at the issues from different points of view and build software and hardware with distinct points of difference. Fundamentally, their job is to make sure data can flow from system to system, whether it is in a warehouse with a broad range of requirements or sent to a data pool such as I-Trade, a provider of supply chain management and intelligence solutions. Screen views and reports must be easy to read and be intuitive to bring up. Languages other than English may be an issue. Successful developers seek long-term relationships handling all the individual variations and customizations just as buyers and sellers of produce do.

One result of the move into electronic data is the pure volume of data, and you still have to figure out where to put it. Similar to the items in your closets at home, data takes space — lots of space. How you deal with data storage is one of the factors in deciding which system to use.

Along with consumer software developers, some industry software developers are putting programs online and moving storage to the “Cloud.” Others prefer the use of local servers — either the client’s or their own. But to demonstrate the degree of change that’s happening, Morris of Edible Software shares, “You can even rent space on Amazon’s servers where they have plenty of spare capacity. We’re less comfortable with pure Cloud storage, and believe it is important to know where your data is stored as a security measure.”

Developers sell some systems outright. Courtney Heim, sales and marketing representative for Produce Pro Inc., in Woodridge, IL, describes her company’s approach, “Produce Pro is a lot-based tracking system that grows with customers. They purchase the basic software to load on their servers and get annual maintenance and updates included. It’s a software accounting solution for customers large and small. The next step up is Produce Pro Plus, adding a warehouse management component and portable tools for printing,

picking and scanning throughout the warehouse. All the parts tie together,” she explains.

“Our goal,” Heim continues, “is to help foodservice streamline produce sales to make up-selling more productive. Add-ons are web-based apps, available through the App Store to be used on IOS and Android devices; orders and information flow into the system and show order history, specs and availability to encourage one-to-one relationships between sales people and customers. Customers can order at anytime through their own devices.”

While large groups could see start-up costs in the \$25,000 to \$30,000 range, small organizations can purchase and put a system in place for less than \$5,000. Morris states, “We believe in helping small clients get up and running. It’s worth the investment based on their potential growth and, in a sense, is one way to give back to the industry. We have clients that started with a couple users and are now big companies. We also have a way to rent software.”

Moving software online offers another solution. Charles Waud, president of Waudware

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Inc., in Brampton, Ontario, Canada, comments, "In Canada, we're somewhat behind the United States in full implementation of software-based inventory management solutions. Much of our produce work is in terminal markets. We do see more computer equipment in the hands of warehouse workers, and for us, the future is in online services, and our program is online supported by a very reliable business-grade Internet connection, robust for the area and your situation. Terminal markets are emergency-driven. If you are slow to fill an order, there's a guy next door who will. Situations like that tend to put holes in inventory management. As much as you need good equipment that can operate in quite rugged environments, you need people who get what inventory means, who understand that part of inventory control is lot control."

DProduce Man's Shafae encourages customers with a subscription business model. He says, "A subscription means no upfront outlay, which can be a barrier to use for smaller producers, terminal market businesses and foodservice distributors. We charge by the number of concurrent users, and for three, the subscription is as low as \$600. For that you get basic support, data security and updates."

"What's important," comments Silver Creek's Carpenter, "is to keep the value proposition top of mind. You can choose from a broad range of hardware, software and services to meet your specific needs. You need robust software, equipment and processes. That means everybody involved needs to study their own operations to see what works for them. You have to learn, invest and spend appropriately. Tech is key to success more than ever."

### Information Is Power

Software developers express real concern about the reluctance of some industry companies to get involved. In a time of thin margins, they recognize financial constraints, and concern over whether all the changes will last or fall to the next big thing. At all levels, it sometimes seems that the process will slow down, rather than speed up, day-to-day work. Long-time practices will have to change. Labeling every case is a big task for grower/ shippers, local producers, importers, re-packers, terminal markets, produce and foodservice distributors. Waud comments, "These systems have to be consistently reliable for a large volume of data to be collected, stored and passed on, at speed, at all hours."

Carpenter takes a consumer perspective,

noting, "I'm convinced consumers want information and will continue to expect it to be immediately available. Such attitudes bode well for suppliers who provide it. We think expecting good information immediately may be somewhat generational in terms of comfort with tech devices such as Smart phones and iPads. We need to tell the whole story, from field to consumer, and tech provides the tools to do it well. Check the numbers: sales of Smart phones and tablets are up, while laptops are decreasing in importance."

Retailers, too, are providing their own form of incentive. Increasingly, they are demanding complete and compliant labeling for both case-level, and soon, package-level products. Theirs is the power hand because it holds the entry to the retail system and the dollars in payment. Losing a sale to a customer because of a label problem is a situation no one wants.

Other drivers will be future recalls, more regulation or penalties for non-compliance. Tech can make everything flow faster and more accurately, but produce will continue to be largely a trust-based business built on relationships and confidence. Still, it's clear the time for waiting is over and the time for more hurry-up is here. **pb**



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# Herbs: The Fresh Smell Of Success

A thorough and well merchandized herb category brings rings to the rest of the department. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



The herb category continues to grow as people return to the kitchen in an effort to save money.

**E**ven in our economic times, fresh herbs are still enjoying the fresh smell of success. Herbs offer a healthy substitute for salt, while opening the door to an incredible range of interesting foods.

"I've been in the herb category for 10 years and the growth has been huge," says Michele Henning, vice president of key account sales at Shenandoah Growers Inc., in Harrisonburg, VA. "Based on our sales we think people are returning to the kitchen, or going into the kitchen for the first time. Going into the kitchen is a way to save money."

Herb sales have increased steadily for at least a decade, and even in the recession, producers report annual growth that ranges, depending on their location, from the mid to high single digits all the way up to 30 percent. "We're seeing growth," admits Vern Meyer, director of sales at Herb Thyme Farms Inc., headquartered in Perrysburg, PA. "It's not the growth we saw five or 10 years ago, but the category is growing. More people are interested in healthy living, and in cooking as an event."

However, our Canadian neighbors to the north, who are largely escaping the recession,

report eye-popping growth in fresh herb sales. "In British Columbia, because of the Canadian economy, the sales have been booming," reports Rick Brar, president of International Herbs Ltd., headquartered in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. On average, we are up 35 percent year over year. The economy is on fire up here. Outside of 2009, when the entire world slowed down, and we had 10 percent growth in British Columbia, every other year has been in the 30s."

The market for herbs is people who are returning to the kitchen, and hoping the experience will be interesting. "Without a doubt, fresh herbs are trending up," agrees John Vasapoli, director of produce merchandising and food safety at D'Agostino Supermarkets Inc., a 14-unit New York chain based in Larchmont. "The category is up 15 to 20 percent for us this year. I think it has to do with all the cooking shows; every recipe has some kind of herb."

Chick Goodman, vice president of sales and marketing for Diamond Direct Farms, in Miami, FL, agrees, adding, "The herb category has experienced double-digit growth for the last decade, through both prosperity and

recession. While we would like to think that it is due to the marketing skills of those of us who have been involved for over a decade, the reality is we should thank cable TV and the ever expanding number and popularity of cooking shows," he continues. "Rachael Ray and the like may have done more for the category than the growers and marketers could ever have done for themselves. This is not to minimize how hard the industry has worked to develop quality products and presentations, but sometimes being in the right place at the right time can make you look smart, and right now, fresh herbs are at the top of their game."

## It's All About The Freshness

Fresh herbs are a way to bring quality into the kitchen for not a whole lot of money. You can build a successful herb program around as few as four or five varieties, but the product must be and look fresh. "Herbs must be fresh and accessible," asserts Vasapoli. "Most companies have done a good job of offering a variety of racks so you can find one that suits your department."

Serena Leiterman, marketing assistant at



North Shore Greenhouses, based in Thermal, CA, agrees, noting, “The category has been growing rapidly the past few years. I think people are getting into cooking and they don’t want to sacrifice quality.”

Because herbs are highly perishable, the key to quality is freshness. It is worth taking the time to learn how your herb supplier maintains the cold chain to keep the product fresh. Meyer advises, “Know your marketplace and have good quality herbs on display. We spend a good deal of money on cold chain integrity.”

New packaging options are designed specifically to keep herbs fresh, and to keep them good, too. Charlie Coiner, founder of Miami, FL-based Rock Garden South, shares, “We are using new packaging. For some time, I’ve wanted to reduce the amount of plastic going into landfills, so we are packaging in bags that have 75 to 80 percent less plastic. They have a resealable opening so consumers can use some of the herbs and then seal it back up. Plus,” he adds, “the bags are breathable so you get longer shelf-life in transit, in the store and in consumers’ refrigerators. I think that has helped increase sales.”

The importance of freshness is making local product — an important trend throughout the produce department — particularly strong with herbs. “We’ve noticed the interest in buying local is growing,” Shenandoah’s Henning comments. “When herbs are in transit a long time, they are losing their nutritional value, anyway.”

Nothing could be fresher than alive. As such, there is a growing market for living herbs. The living product helps to reduce shrink

because it stays fresh longer on the retail shelf. “North Shore offers living herbs,” Leiterman says. “In fact, we were the first to do so. We grow them hydroponically. We have living clamshells and 2-in. potted plants that come nine pots in a tray. They can put a rack of basil pots right next to the tomatoes,” she suggests.

Retailers find that sales of potted herbs do

**“We offer a racking system for live plants. We like to see retailers put it where it will drive impulse purchases, such as in the organic section or with the tomatoes.”**

— Jim Weber, *Econo Foods*

not cut into existing sales of fresh herbs in bags and clamshells. Vasapoli claims, “We helped the category grow when we brought in a whole line of potted herbs. They are local, from New Jersey, and they really took off. They didn’t cannibalize our sales of bagged herbs at all.”

When the herbs are fresh, they can sell the entire produce department to a group of consumers who buy more than their share of produce, and also buy other high end products that contribute to fine dining at home. “Everything with herbs is about the quality,” reminds Henning. “Consumers think if the herbs are fresh, the produce is probably fresh, too. Retailers know herb buyers also buy more produce, better wine and better cuts of meat.”

### Seize The Opportunity

Herbs are usually an impulse buy, which means visibility and quality are key to driving sales. Most retailers are just beginning to seize the new opportunities for merchandising herbs. “As the category has grown, I think there is more need for cross-merchandising, such as basil with tomatoes, mint with citrus, or dill

with seafood,” says Leiterman of North Shore.

There are intriguing cross-merchandising opportunities, in particular, for living herbs. “We offer a racking system for live plants,” says Shenandoah’s Henning. “We like to see retailers put it where it will drive impulse purchases, such as in the organic section or with the tomatoes. I’d love to see the living herbs displayed with complementary items, such as mint with berries, or living chives with potatoes, but we’re not there yet.”

Diamond Direct’s Goodman suggests placing herbs near other items that would be used by ‘home chefs,’ such as mushrooms, shallots and variety peppers.

However, there are effective ways to display herbs above the foods they complement. “We have our herbs hanging above our specialty food section,” says Jim Weber, produce manager at Econo Foods, a 6-unit chain based in Iron Mountain, MI. “We have eight to 12 feet of 1-oz. clamshells hanging above the section. Our Marquette store sometimes has to get 50 basil in one shot. At some of our smaller stores, sometimes we only need 20 units of all the herbs combined,” he details.

Smaller packages open up opportunities to lower the price, and entice new consumers to try fresh herbs. Rock Garden South is taking advantage of this and offering “single-size

herbs in both clamshells and breathable bags,” details Coiner. “It makes them more affordable, which definitely helps sales.”

There are also new products available that emphasize herbs as ingredients. James Krouse, president of Eureka Specialties Inc., located in Los Angeles, CA, shares, “We are starting to use herbs as a flavoring agent and in drinks. Things like basil, mint or dill can be used in lemonade or added to water for a refreshing kick.”

### Carry A Proper Assortment

There are dozens of herbs out there, but fortunately you don’t have to carry them all. International Herbs, for example, offers 45 different herb varieties, but retailers can put together a quality program with as few as a half-dozen varieties, but Brar reminds, “You have to keep it simple, and the packaging has to be green, environmentally friendly. You have to be able to speak to the consumer about how you use the products.”

A good selection begins with the basil, which is the powerhouse of the fresh herb category. “Basil outsells everything else 5-to-1,”



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**“We have our herbs hanging above our specialty food section. We have eight to 12 feet of 1-oz. clamshells hanging above the section. Our Marquette store sometimes has to get 50 basil in one shot. At some of our smaller stores, sometimes we only need 20 units of all the herbs combined.”**

— Jim Weber, *Econo Foods*

reports Krouse. “Just one variety — Italian basil — will do it.” Mint, rosemary, dill and chives round out his leaders in the category.

Others agree that it starts with the basil. “Basil is a must, and after that, it may vary a little by region,” notes Meyer of Herb Thyme. “Generally, chives, cilantro, mint, rosemary, sage and thyme are also important,” Meyer says.

Goodman of Diamond Direct sees “three basic ranges of good herb offerings, starting with a basic Top Ten, to a 14- to 15-item extended set and then a 20-plus item super set. The Top Ten in the basic set include basil, baby dill, chives, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon, thyme and a large size basil, will do more than 80 percent of the volume in any set, with basil historically being 40-50 percent of the business in any set.”

According to Rock Garden’s Coiner, the big four herbs — accounting for at least 60 percent of the category — are basil, cilantro, mint and dill.

“Mint went well during the Kentucky Derby, but mainly it’s basil, dill, rosemary, oregano and thyme,” says Weber from Econo Foods. “We also have a fish medley, a pizza medley and a hamburger medley with a number of herbs grouped together.”

Many herb consumers are open to suggestion about new uses, and this is where your supplier needs to help. “It’s important for the herb grower to play a role in educating consumers,” says Henning from Shenandoah, which has recently spiffed up its website to create an easily accessible source of recipes and information about herbs for consumers and retailers alike.

The underlying point, which Coiner points out, is that, “Herbs are benefiting from the trend toward healthy living and a desire to reduce salt in the diet.”

### The Organic Connection

Producers disagree over the importance of organics within the herb category. Brar of International Herbs maintains, “Organics have

been driving the category. We’re 50-50 between organics and conventional on the fresh herbs, while we’re 80 percent conventional on our vegetables. The foodservice sector has not yet switched to organic, but retail has made the transition.”

Shenandoah grows its organic herbs in high-end greenhouses, and that part of the business has become particularly strong. “We’ve had double digit growth, because



people are concerned over what they put into their bodies,” Henning reports. “I think organic fits into a lot of that. Our organic sales are certainly a lot larger than they were five years ago.”

There are numerous producers who believe organic methods are at the heart of how they want to do business. “Our organic business is growing,” reveals Herb Thyme’s Meyer. “We believe in the organic process; it’s better for the workers and better for the environment. We are taking more of our conventional land and using organic methods on it, and our organic business has grown more than our conventional business.”

But some other producers believe that modern lower impact chemicals have blurred the distinction between organic and conven-

tional. “The vast difference between good chemicals and bad chemicals does not exist any more,” contends Rock Garden’s Coiner. “The 1986 Food Quality Act was important in forming this distinction. The organic designations tend to limit some treatments. Organic farming is very difficult with herbs, mainly because of the soil pathogens, and as such, are becoming far more expensive to grow than conventional herbs.”

There are even producers who question whether you can grow quality herbs with good shelf-life organically. Krouse of Eureka admits, “We find the shelf-life and quality are not there with organics.”

Nonetheless, retailers in some parts of the country find their consumers strongly prefer organic herbs. “Here in New York, organics matter,” says D’Agostino’s Vasapoli. “That’s why our main line of herbs is organic.”

Goodman of Diamond Direct contends the organic category within herbs is not a crucial one. “Organic herbs may have been a bit overplacated nationally, as the category has not been big enough to support sets of both organic and conventional. This led to the logic that conventional shoppers would buy organic, but organic shoppers might not buy conventional. Hence, organic seemed to cover more bases for the retailer, whether there was actually that strong a demand for organic or not. We are seeing interest in natural and local challenging organic.”

### Economic Effects

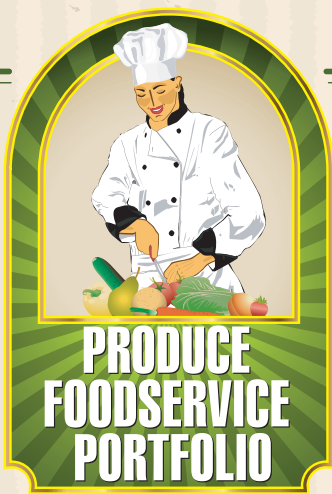
Whether organic or conventional, herbs continue to grow right along with the healthy lifestyle trend, and this growth has not been stopped by the economic downturn. “If you put out a quality product, people will buy it,” contends Krouse. “When money is tight, people will still spend it on quality.”

Some suppliers report that the economy has slowed, but not stopped, their growth. “In general, the economy is definitely not helping,” admits Coiner. “Our retail sales are still increasing, but there are several factors to consider.”

Suppliers in other areas with strong economies, however, report very healthy growth even in the recession. The staggering increase in demand for herbs in Western Canada has even reached, to a lesser extent, the Pacific Northwest, according to Brar of International Herbs.

The category is growing, and producers are making sure retailers’ choices are growing right along with it. Vasapoli emphasizes, “The industry has come a long way with shelf-life, varieties and packaging.”

**pb**



# 14<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL PRODUCE BUSINESS PRODUCE FOODSERVICE PORTOLIO

For foodservice 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.

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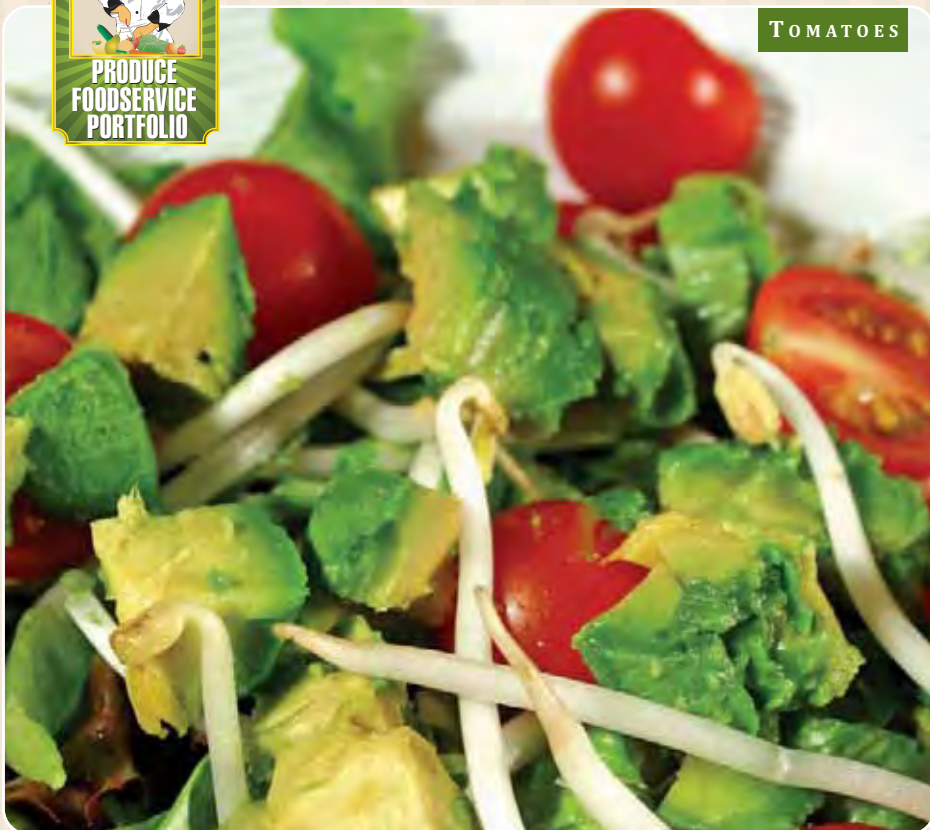
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TOMATOES



## Avocado Tomato Salad Recipe

SERVES 2

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup Del Monte® cherry tomatoes, cut in half
- 1 Del Monte® Hass avocado, cut in chunks
- 1/4 cup bean sprouts
- 2 cups Romaine lettuce
- Salt and Pepper
- 2 tbs. Light Balsamic Vinaigrette

DIRECTIONS

In a bowl, combine all ingredients and enjoy!

For more recipes, visit:  
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TIPS & TECHNIQUES

Do not refrigerate tomatoes. For optimum quality, store in ambient temperatures. Cold temperatures reduce the flavor in tomatoes.

**Seed Removal:** To remove the seeds, place the tomato on its side and cut it in half. Then, squeeze each half firmly to push out the seeds — or to preserve the integrity of the tomato, scoop out the seeds.

**Slicing:** For perfectly sliced tomatoes, make angled cuts through the stem and under the core. Place the tomato on its side. Then, cut a thin slice from both ends. Finally, slice the tomato to your desired thickness.

**Peeling:** For easy peeling, boil tomatoes for 15-30 seconds. Rinse with cold running water. Then, peel skin.

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CELERY



## Dandy® Celery, Radish and Fennel Salad with Lemon Vinaigrette

Cool and refreshing, this bright and colorful salad provides a fresh and elegant twist on the traditional summer coleslaw. Serve it alongside grilled proteins from chicken, barbecued ribs, or fish, to burgers. To transform it into a main course, add shrimp or chicken and serve on a bed of crisp lettuce. Or toss it all together with shredded lettuce. Dill and lemon give this salad bright flavor; mint and orange juice are nice additions and alternatives to the list of ingredients below.

**SERVES 4**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon mildly fruity extra-virgin olive oil, such as Spanish
- 1 medium fennel bulb
- 1 cup Dandy® celery, cut diagonally into 1/4-inch slices
- 1 cup thinly sliced Dandy® red radish
- 1/2 cup chopped scallions, green and white parts, or 1/4-cup thinly sliced red onion
- 2 tablespoons snipped fresh dill
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

**DIRECTIONS**

1. For the dressing, in a small bowl, whisk the lemon juice with 1/4 teaspoon salt and 3-4 grinds of pepper until the salt dissolves. Whisk in the oil until the dressing is cloudy. Set the Lemon Vinaigrette aside.
2. Cut off the tough top stalks and feathery branches from the fennel. Quarter the bulb vertically. Remove the tough outer layer from each piece of quartered fennel and cut away the

hard inner core at the point of each quarter. Cut the fennel crosswise into 1/4-inch slices, making 1 cup. Reserve any remaining fennel for another use. Place the sliced fennel in a mixing bowl. Add the celery, radishes or onions, and scallions.

3. Pour the dressing over the vegetables and using a fork, toss to blend. Add the dill and toss again. Serve the salad immediately, or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to 12 hours. The marinated salad will have sharper flavor.

**For a main dish salad:**  
Make batch of Lemon Vinaigrette, using the same amount of ingredients. Toss the dressing with 1 pound of shrimp, boiled, shelled, and halved lengthwise, or 3/4-pound roasted chicken breast, in bite-size pieces.

Line 4 wide, shallow soup bowls with red-leaf lettuce leaves trimmed to fit. Mound 1/4 of the dressed salad in the center of the bowl. Using a fork, remove the shrimp or chicken from the dressing and arrange in a ring around the salad. Serve immediately.

**PRODUCT AVAILABILITY**

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**TIPS & TECHNIQUES**

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- Eliminates waste.
- Reduces labor costs.
- Lowers freight and storage costs.
- Always keep product refrigerated until ready to use. Ideal storage temperatures are 32 to 36°F and 90-98 percent relative humidity.
- Select celery with straight, green stalks that are crisp, firm and unblemished.
- 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.
- Do not store celery uncovered as it will deteriorate quickly.

**BENEFITS**

**Increase Shelf-Life**

Increase your shelf-life with Dandy® fresh-cut products. Sliced, diced and packed to maximize longevity, our products stay fresher longer, helping you to reduce waste and utilize what you buy efficiently.

**Lower Costs**

Save money and increase your bottom line by eliminating the need for labor to slice, dice and chop celery and radishes. Our fresh-cut products give you the opportunity to buy what you need, when you need it due to our consistent availability and year-round supply.

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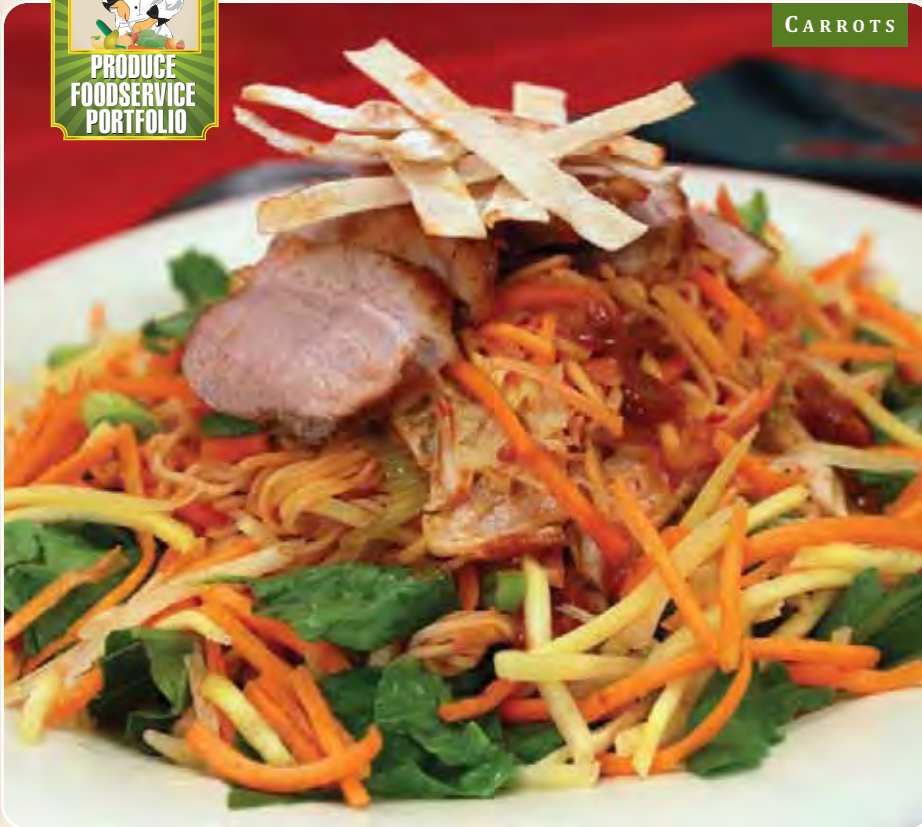
DandyFresh



CARROTS

STORAGE & HANDLING

- Always refrigerate immediately — never break the “cold chain”
- Ideal storage temperature/atmosphere: 32 to 36°F, 98 to 100 percent relative humidity
- Store away from ethylene-producing fruits (apples, avocados and bananas).
- Whitening of peeled baby carrots is due to natural dryness; a quick ice water bath will freshen and restore color.



Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred® Carrot Chinese Duck or Chicken Salad

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups Grimmway Farms ColorShred® Carrots, Plus 1/2-cup for garnish
- 3 cups Romaine lettuce
- 3 cups shredded Napa cabbage
- 2 bunches scallions, cut on the bias in small pieces
- 4 cooked duck breasts or chicken thighs – grilled or roasted – baste with Hoisin sauce on the skin side for the last five minutes of cooking
- 2 cups cooked Chinese noodles
- 2 cups Wonton shreds – slice Wonton wrappers into long strips. Place on cookie sheet and bake at 350 degrees until golden.



DIRECTIONS

Prepare the dressing – whisk together Hoisin sauce, peanut butter, Chili paste, brown sugar, ginger, Rice Wine vinegar and Sesame oil.

In a large bowl, combine Grimmway Farms ColorShred® Carrots, cooked Chinese noodles, Napa cabbage and scallions. Toss with dressing, reserving some for drizzling on top of salad.

Arrange Romaine lettuce on four serving plates.

Divide Grimmway Farms ColorShred® Carrot Salad on top of lettuce.

Slice duck breasts or chicken thighs thinly and arrange on top of salad.

Top with Wonton shreds and garnish with Grimmway Farms ColorShred® Carrots.

Drizzle reserved dressing on top.

Best served at room temperature.

DRESSING

INGREDIENTS

- 4 tbs. Hoisin sauce
- 2 tbs. smooth peanut butter
- 2 tbs. Chile paste – add more if you like it hotter
- 2 tsp. brown sugar
- 1 tsp. fresh ginger, grated very finely
- 3 tbs. Rice Wine vinegar
- 2 tbs. Sesame oil

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HANDLING INFORMATION

- Keep refrigerated at 34°F.
- Shelf life = 16 days



Mann's Arcadian Harvest® Petite Whole Leaves™ with Goat Cheese Crostini

VINAIGRETTE

INGREDIENTS

- 2 garlic cloves, peeled, halved
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 8 1/2 inch-thick diagonally cut baguette slices (about 4 inches long by 1 1/2 inches wide)
- 4 ounces (8 tablespoons) soft fresh goat cheese (such as Montrachet)
- 5 cups Mann's Arcadian Harvest® Petite Whole Leaves™
- 2 tablespoons chopped drained oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted

DIRECTIONS

Preheat broiler. Spread each baguette slice with 1 tablespoon goat cheese. Arrange on baking sheet, cheese side up. Whisk oil, vinegar and garlic in large bowl to blend. Add greens, sun-dried tomatoes and pine nuts; toss to combine. Season salad to taste with salt and pepper. Divide salad between 2 plates. Broil crostini just until cheese softens and begins to melt, about 1 minute. Arrange 4 crostini atop each salad.

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# 50 WAYS TO ADD FRUITS AND VEGETABLES TO MENUS

(excerpted from the PRODUCE FOR BETTER HEALTH FOUNDATION "Foodservice Fact Sheets")

## BREAKFAST TIPS:

1. Use mashed avocado and nut butters on toast instead of butter or margarine.
2. Blend puréed fruit into cream cheese and butter to top bagels and margarine.
3. Add veggies to your breakfast potatoes such as fresh and roasted peppers, onions, and mushrooms.
4. Use pancakes as a wrap for mixed fruits or veggies like apples, raisins, peaches, sautéed peppers, asparagus and mushrooms.
5. Top waffles with fresh and dried fruit and a dash of cinnamon.



6. Add a variety of veggies like spinach, scallions, and peppers to scrambled eggs or omelets.
7. Serve 100% fruit or vegetable juice in both traditional and nontraditional varieties.
8. Serve assorted fresh-cut fruit, such as melons, pineapple, and berries, with low-fat yogurt; use unusual serving bowls, such as hollowed-out melons.
9. Offer a variety of fruit smoothies made with frozen fruit.
10. Offer broiled grapefruit halves, pre-cut orange and grapefruit sections, or ambrosia.

## LUNCH TIPS:



11. Offer vegetable soups year round, cold or hot.
12. Serve raw spinach leaves in addition to lettuce for burgers and corn to tossed green salads.
13. Add beets, corn, beans or peas to tossed green salads.

14. Offer fruit desserts, such as fresh berries, baked apples, poached pears, or a fruit cobbler or tart.
15. Serve chopped Asian chicken and vegetables rolled in lettuce cups.
16. Add sliced mushrooms, chopped tomatoes, and shredded carrots to create a veggie Caesar salad.
17. Offer a tropical fruit plate with mangos, papayas, and other exotic fruits.
18. Add cooked sweet potato cubes to potato salad.
19. Serve sandwiches with a colorful side of grilled cauliflower with peppers, baby vegetables, or a mixture of olives.
20. Add wilted greens, chick peas, garlic, and olive oil to pasta.

## DINNER TIPS:



21. Add veggie color to your whole grains in the form of shredded carrots, pesto, and chopped peppers.
22. Top grilled veggies with fish or chicken.
23. Serve two vegetables with each meal.
24. Add dried fruit (dates, blueberries, apricots) and nuts to puddings and baked goods.
25. Add colorful veggies to your wraps, such as red radishes, yellow peppers, purple cabbage, and leafy greens.
26. Offer a baked sweet potato in addition to regular baked potatoes.
27. Serve roasted vegetables, such as carrots, asparagus, eggplant, squash and bell peppers.
28. Poach pears in cranberry juice and stuff with cream cheese, dates and walnuts.
29. Add some ethnic bean dishes to your repertoire, such as rice and beans, curried chick peas, and lentil dahl with fresh ginger, green chilies and cilantro.
30. Add fruit to stir-fry dishes.
31. Serve poultry or beef dishes with a fruit sauce.

## APPETIZER AND SNACK TIPS:

32. Offer bean dip, hummus, or mango salsa with baked chips for an appetizer.
33. Put together fresh fruit, cheese, and nut trays.
34. Offer a veggie plate with cooked and raw veggies like fresh baby carrots, marinated Brussels sprouts, stuffed mushroom caps, and grilled tomatoes.
35. Chop berries or tropical fruits, mix with fresh basil and balsamic vinegar, and

spread on thinly sliced, toasted baguettes.



36. Spear fruits or vegetables on skewers and grill.
37. Offer fresh chopped tomatoes with herbs, olive oil, and feta cheese on whole grain biscuits.
38. Crush berries and mix with ricotta cheese; serve as a spread for crackers.
39. Serve frozen grapes in small cups.
40. Dip long-stem strawberries in white and dark chocolate.

## ADD A NEW TWIST TO TRADITIONAL FAVORITES:



41. Stuff winter or summer squash, artichokes, or peppers with seasoned whole grains.
42. Combine mashed potatoes with cooked sweet potatoes, cauliflower, or leafy greens.
43. Add a frittata brimming with colorful veggies.
44. Serve a colorful veggie pizza topped with parmesan or pecorino cheese instead of mozzarella.
45. Add intrigue to your wraps with an unusual ingredient, like fresh figs or pomegranate seeds.
46. Make lasagna with eggplant, zucchini and roasted red pepper.
47. Add a variety of citrus sections to your salads, such as pink grapefruit, pummelo, and kumquat.
48. Substitute nontraditional fruits in cobblers, pies and bread puddings.

## GENERAL TIPS:



49. Serve stir fries with many colorful veggies; reduce the meat to improve health and reduce expense.
50. Add veggies to your whole grains like bulgur salad with chopped veggies, herbs, and an olive oil vinaigrette.

Contact Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) at 302-235-2329; fax to 302-235-5555; or write to 7465 Lancaster Pike, Suite J, 2nd Floor, Hockessin, DE 19707  
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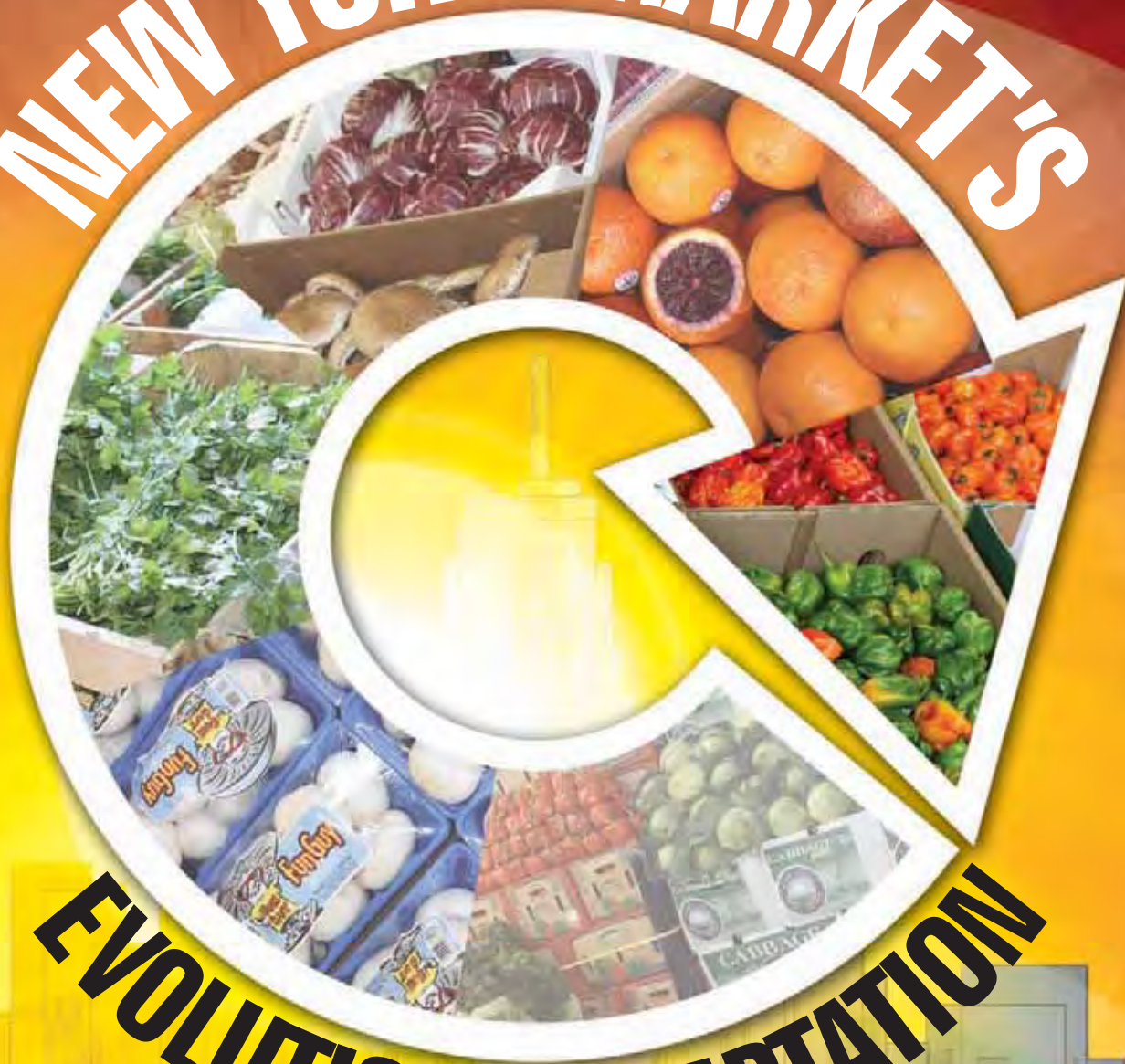
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# NEW YORK MARKET'S



# EVOLUTION & ADAPTATION

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# EVOLUTION AND ADAPTATION

## Hunts Point Market: Survival of the Fittest

BY MIRA SLOTT

**C**harles Darwin would have a field day in New York's Hunts Point Market, located in the Bronx. Just spending a day at the nation's largest terminal market and listening to the history of its vendors, the pre-eminent theorist on evolution would scratch his head and wonder why the market is still so successful, despite the many challenges confronted since its opening 45 years ago.

With larger chains mainly bypassing the Hunts Point Market to go direct — now relying on the wholesalers for “fill-ins” — and concentrated sales off the market currently escalating competition, the balance of power has shifted from wholesaler to buyer, forcing traditional, third- and fourth-generation companies to reinvent themselves. The result is a seismic transformation from niche, specialty houses to full line, full service operations, where delivery services have often reached the point of being taken for granted.

Many are hedging bets by expanding distribution outside the New York

Metropolitan area as far as Maine, Florida and Chicago. Some wholesalers have even developed national brands or specialized in imports that are marketed through the Hunts Point offices, even though the products themselves may never go through the Bronx.

According to Joel Fierman, president of Joseph Fierman & Son, billions of boxes of produce traverse through Hunts Point Market to nourish vast numbers of people in the New York tri-state area, while playing a vital economic role for retailers, restaurants, foodservice buyers, wholesalers, growers, and distributors, as well as employing some 3,000 people and supporting community businesses.

The Hunts Point Market also donates millions of pounds of food annually to New York City food banks. Vendors say solutions to an outdated market are complex, weighing pros and cons of the different alternatives, and plans for a new market continue to be hashed out.





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Jeff Young, Leo Weiler and Peter Pelosi — A&J Produce Produce Corp.

"In order to survive, you need to reinvent yourself every year, be proactive and not reactive in progressing," says Nick Pacia, vice president at A.J. Trucco Inc., who has been instrumental in catapulting the firm to the next level during the past decade, much larger in size and scope, servicing both Hunts Point Market customers and going direct to major retail chains on a national scale.

"When A.J.Trucco was founded, we had three items — fresh garlic, chestnuts, and for quite a

few years, imported Italian red onion on a string, until that was stopped by the Department of Agriculture," says Sal Vacca, president. "We went a long way with these items, and became known for our dried fruit and nut business. Then in 2000, Nick joined us and brought in a line of kiwis and figs from California, which helped take the place of summer items."

Pacia attributes branding as an important step in spurring national growth in phases. "We

build relationships and when matured, we'll level off and then grow again. We look for opportunities, but have our core approach in place. Flexibility is important, not concentrating on one particular commodity, looking for diversity, and adapting the way we present and market products," he explains.

Competition makes you better, but you need to identify what you want your company to be, says Pacia. "The business of imports runs three months ahead, while the wholesale market is completely in the moment. It's not easy to juggle both approaches."

"You never stop learning in this business," says Fierman. "We figured out how to take Mother Nature out of the picture and roll with the punches, whether it's dealing with over production or the transportation industry eating up revenues," he says. "When everyone is shipping the same boxes of produce, we're all looking for ways to be original," he says. And pressure is mounting with more competition outside the market. "There is less of a customer base shopping the same amount of houses. It's extraordinarily difficult as a produce company to promote your own brand, but it helps us establish an identity," says Fierman, noting that the firm has been branding for over 50 years.

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**Times Have Changed**

Less than 40 of the original 120 companies that relocated from Manhattan's original Washington Street Market have survived, consolidating power through attrition and strategically buying up units, all within the same space provided in 1967.

One such firm is Nathel and Nathel, which has grown from 2½ units to 22½. "We realized the market was right for a quality, full-service wholesaler, as my brother and I waited for the ideal spot to open up so that we could grow the business from one centralized location," says Ira Nathel, president of Nathel and Nathel. "When L&R Fruit Corp. was going out of business in 1991, we took on the 7½ units. I remember bringing the guys here from the other side of the market, expressing concern — 'We'll never fill this up.' We did in a month."

"The small guys got eaten up," says Richard Cochran, president of Robt. T Cochran & Co., the oldest company on the market, which his grandfather helped build. "No one specializes in



**Karen LaSorsa, Joe Weldon, Charlie Maggio, Liz Vega and Albert Pagan — Fresco**

anything anymore. I try to sell whatever I get my hands on, but if it's not the right product, I won't bring it in. Other guys have products 365 days a year," he continues.

"In the early days, one guy only sold onions and potatoes; we sold mainly greens, and nothing in winter produce," Cochran adds. Times have

certainly changed.

Wholesalers had the upper hand. "People used to spit at customers if they argued price. Now, everyone is crying. Customers have a lot more options with one-stop shopping and deliveries, plus increased competition from the guys outside the market," says Cochran, warning, "A lot are fly-by-night. You're only as good as your last deal."



**“Individual companies must be shrewd enough to see what’s going on with transportation. Anybody at this end of the business that has not evolved into a delivery business will fall behind.”**

— Myra Gordon, Hunts Point Terminal Market Co-Op Association



**Joe Palumbo — Top Banana**



**Louis Lord — Jerry Porricelli Produce**



**Eric Mitchnick — E. Armata Produce**

When the economy is tough, people buy what's on sale, and the market ebbs and flows with lack of supply and over supply, adds Cochran. "In the end, established relationships are the best way to ensure longevity," he says.

"I was always interested in the market and learned so much when I was working in the summers," says Cochran's son Mike, the fifth generation to join the business. "It's changed so much from when I was a kid. I remember when Joe Palumbo [now managing member of Top Banana] had one truck. If we did things the old way, it would be very inefficient. With all the chal-



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Sal Vacca, Howard Ginsberg and John Stewart — A.J. Trucco Inc.

lenges, you couldn't do it," he says.

"The foot traffic has declined, and it's difficult to compete when you don't have a level playing field with outside, non-union competition," says Myra Gordon, executive director of the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association.

**"Fifty years ago, you'd see battles between a buyer and salesman, a lot of cursing and yelling, and then they'd go out to dinner. You can't do that anymore. You must always show gratitude to the customer."**

— Ira Nathel, Nathel and Nathel

"Outside market companies undercut us on price and increase competition," says Sam Sampour, manager of CM Produce. "We've lost money because of the pop-up stores, and then they disappear."

Here, with 40 houses, "We sometimes have to sell at a loss and accommodate special requests. If one guy asks for 10 boxes of an item, I'll bring it in, but sometimes he doesn't end up buying it because there is no binding contract with the customer," Sampour says.

"We're basically not just a terminal market

anymore," Gordon continues. "To stay competitive, a company must adapt into a full line, warehouse and delivery service. We've always been the warehouse of the small customer, but now there's the gas, insurance and maintenance costs," she says,

adding, "Individual companies must be shrewd enough to see what's going on with transportation. Anybody at this end of the business that has not evolved into a delivery business will fall behind."

"Delivery service is where the business is going; unloading faster is the only way to steal the business," says Steve Katzman, president of S. Katzman Produce and Katzman Berry, and co-president of the Hunts Point Terminal Cooperative Association, of the move to edge out competition by expediting customized deliveries on Sundays, through its Sharkey Trucking Corp. "It happened because it had to happen. Our customers needed to get product," he continues.

"Increases in deliveries and service upgrades are ongoing, but we've been trucking for years," says Matthew D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo Bros Co. of New York and co-president of the Hunts Point Terminal Market Cooperative Association. "We now have 20 trucks, and 40 percent of our products delivered. The business used to be dominated by independent trucking companies and



Richard Cochran — Robt. T. Cochran & Co.



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you'd be at their whim. We've been doing it on our own — maybe 60 deliveries in one day," he says.

At the time Hunts Point Market was designed, it was considered state-of-the-art, but through the years, the infrastructure has been taxed, according to D'Arrigo, it was not built to handle the massive conversion in transportation systems with truck delivery superseding rail cars, and it now lacks adequate storage to accommodate the exponential produce volume.

"We have a dynamic co-op, and I'm confident we'll make the best decision for members in this market," says Joe Palumbo, managing member of Top Banana, and first vice president of the Hunts Point Terminal Co-op Association, adding, "I believe a healthy market with big and small companies serves the common good. At the same time, the world is moving so quickly and we need to change with it or face dire consequences."

According to Palumbo, "We're all trying to find more business from the same piece of pie. "Everyone is selling bananas, handling more items

**“Ten years from now, we’ll be doing business a lot differently than we are today. From a co-op standpoint, we come together for common issues, but don’t sugarcoat it.”**

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

and doing deliveries. I think we were better off when houses were more specialized," he contends. "Our ripening facilities are state-of-the-art, and we're constantly updating computer systems. We move a lot of bananas, some weeks better than others, but at the end of the year, fortunately, our balance sheet shows positive gains.

Adaptation within those uncertain confines has required taking risks and projecting possible business opportunities with foresight to seize opportunities while not overreaching, from stomaching upfront operational investments for long-term returns, to championing proprietary grower partnerships, broadening product depth and breadth and broaching value-added services. All this, while orchestrating complex logistics to get quality perishable product with limited shelf-life through the supply chain to its final destination, alleviating any fallout, and it goes without saying, keeping everyone relatively content.

"We changed with the times," says Nathel. "Fifty years ago, you'd see battles between a buyer





**“I personally inspect everything coming in, and am careful on how product is packed. Even if I have the customer’s money in the drawer, if the product is not up to my standards, I won’t sell it to them. I’m not a genius; I’m just old-fashioned.”**

*Jim Renella, J. Renella*

and salesman, a lot of cursing and yelling, and then they’d go out to dinner. You can’t do that anymore. You must always show gratitude to the customer,” he adds.



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“You have to be a full service business right now. If not, you’re not doing the business,” says John Tramutola, the youngest of three brothers, all of whom play integral roles in running A&J Produce, which started in 1977 to become a powerhouse. “With fewer houses on the market, we’re one of the largest firms,” he continues. “Still, there is always a boss on the walk and very involved, unlike many other houses,” he says. “We

have a loyal customer base over the years, but it is also very limited.”

According to Tramutola, the name of the game is consistency, so when buyers don’t have product or run short, they come to Hunts Point. “Growers also rely on us to take product. They know they have an outlet,” he continues. “We don’t hold product that long to repack anything. We’re a volume house, and we try to treat everyone fairly — shippers and customers, from the little guy to



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**“The younger generation brings different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to create an enlightened vision. It can take the industry to a new place.”**

— Dana Taback, Fierman & Son Inc.

the biggest guy.”

Now most wholesalers on the Hunts Point Market are handling all items, and the service end of the business is really one-sided, with customers having “no skin in the game,” says Thomas Tramutola, secretary/treasurer of A&J Produce. “The fact of the matter is we have all of the expense for deliveries — drivers, trucks, fuel, tolls and insurance. Once it arrives at its destination, the

customers have the option of accepting or rejecting the product at our firm’s expense. We always delivered, but it’s now part of the whole market culture,” he continues.

Another Hunts Point wholesaler, M&R Tomato, expanded its produce base through the years from tomatoes to a full product line, but its customers, who make up a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds, still walk the market and shop. “The Hunts Point

Market is invaluable to the smaller chains and independents,” says Denise Goodman, vice president/secretary of M&R Tomato.

“Today you have to be a full service house,” says Roni Okun, director and fourth generation at Morris Okun. “Customers need a one-stop shop; that’s why we put in a fruit department. When I see a new item like the topless pineapple that is reasonably priced, I immediately take it in.” But

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Ira and Harlan Nathel — Nathel & Nathel



Wanda Lopez, Richie Straus, Bob Rathgeb, Dennis Cohen, Jessica D'Orazio and Ronnie Potash — Nathel & Nathel

Okun passes on many gourmet, niche products. "There are people who buy them, but I'd rather sell high-volume basics in the economy we're living in."

One company bucking the trend of becoming a full line distributor is J. Renella Produce. Owner Jim Renella, admits, "Huge full line companies are

bookends on either side of me, but I still sell only one item — watermelons.

"This is what it was like at Washington Street Market, concentrating on what I do best, and staying true to my core." He stakes his whole reputation on it. "Eventually, I'll be selling more and

more of my own brand," he says.

Due to consolidation of the buying end and greater competition from outside the market, wholesalers recognize there are fewer customers walking the market. Thomas Tramutola also sees less product on the market due to heavy volume

**NEW GENERATION:**

**JOSHUA, JOE & PAMELA FIERMAN at Joseph Fierman & Son**

BY MIRA SLOTT



Pamela Fierman



Joe Fierman



Joshua Fierman

“Put red in front of the bull, stand on your own two feet and go push the envelope,” my father told me,” says Joshua Fierman. Marc Fierman, who runs Joseph Fierman & Son with his two brothers Joel and Billy, set this standard for his son becoming the fourth generation to help carry on the firm’s legacy. “Bring something to this business if you want to come into it,” Josh remembers a turning point, ‘now-or-never’ conversation with his father. “Before I came here, I was working at CFO Publishing, building a career with more and more on my plate. My father called me. He wanted me to find myself. I had been in the

corporate world almost 10 years, but then opportunities started to open at our company, and I had a chance to be a part of my family business and help secure our financial future.”

“Every day, I work directly with my Uncle Billy and with Uncle Joel as well. I’m taking care of all the human resources responsibilities. It’s challenging. I’ve always had my territory, selling and trying to establish new territory, but here I’m part of a bigger picture,” he continues.

“I can’t put a price on the knowledge I’ve gained. In order to best prepare for this business, you need a taste for it all. I might get a chance at selling. My back-

ground is in product licensing, brand management and publishing. I look for how I can marry my education and job experience to the produce business.”

But growing up, wasn’t all fun and games. “I remember when I was nine or 10 and I went to my father, ‘I want an allowance like my friends, \$5 a week. He brought me a box of potatoes to sell, along with motivation, ‘You’ll have more money than all your friends.’ I made five trips back and forth, searching for a buyer. Finally, I went to Food Emporium and sold my box for \$5. I proudly relayed my accomplishment to my father, and he took my \$5. ‘Do you want another box?’ he asked. I sold the next



**Thomas Tramutola — A&J Produce and Myra Gordon — Hunts Point Market Co-Op Association**



**Tony Biondo — A.J. Trucco Inc. and Sal Biondo — Market Basket**



**Denise Goodman and Lisa Vogel — M&R Tomato Distributors**

buying by supermarkets and large chains, such as Wal-Mart and Target. “No one likes the volatility... When an item is short, our market [prices] go up. A lot of people are now asking for prices for a week, but that’s not the way the market works,” says Tramutola.

Many companies in the industry want to limit the risk they take, adds Peter Pelosi, in logistics and buying at A&J. “We may have to adapt and give out prices to small/medium retailers that can’t put in a good-buy deal on peppers one day in six stores. Change gets complicated. It’s a

fine line. We have relationships with customers that do circulars for seven stores at a price — not on every item, just select items, because they can’t change midstream if that item is not readily available.”

“We’ve been growing steadily and now we’re at

box for \$10. He taught me a valuable lesson.”

That experience has stuck with him. “We’re held to the highest standards here, and there is nowhere to hide. It is 24/7, teaching and learning,” he says, adding, “No one is blowing smoke. We all have respect for each other. There’s so much opportunity.”

## JOE FIERMAN’S BIG PERSONALITY

Joe Fierman, Billy Fierman’s son, credits his “big personality” as well suited for the outdoor terminal market’s hustle and bustle working sales downstairs, and interacting with a diverse customer base.

“I’m here a year and a half,” he says, learning the ropes working summer breaks as a porter, “how to sell, how to handle product and deal with customers.” He started full time after graduating from Lynn University, where he studied advertising, public relations and graphic design, yet he already was on familiar ground. “I have a knack for numbers, calculating prices off the top of my head. There hasn’t been any sales situation that intimidates me,” says Joe. “When I worked vegetable sales, I saw how to deal with customers. It’s pretty much groundhog day with certain people. I see the customer and I already start placing the order.”

While there are notable exceptions, for the most part, nobody out on the street has unique items, according to Fierman. “It’s about developing relationships with your customers, managing the floor and hopefully putting out the right temperament and personality,” he says.

“This is definitely a job you can’t go to college for. You won’t find Hunts Point Market 101,” he continues. “This is a real live experience. It’s not easy to wake up early. I have customers getting here at 3:00 in the morning. If I come at 5:00, I’ve already missed

them.” As far as working outside, “you get used to the elements here. I prefer the cold weather to the warm. When my friends come, they are thrust into all the action, dodging moving skids and they can’t believe this is what I do. It’s fast-paced. You either sink or swim. Fortunately, when I started, everyone gave me a heads up.”

## PAMELA FIERMAN BRINGS IN ‘COMMODITY’ KNOWLEDGE

Pamela Fierman is no stranger to rapid, high-pressure commodities buying and selling to capture the best value. She worked at the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYME) at the World Financial Center in Manhattan 4 1/2 years. “I come to the company with a financial commodities background, but I had always wanted to work here. My father, Joel Fierman, persuaded me to get outside experience. We had the talk,” she says.

There are direct parallels to Hunts Point Market and the financial markets, she explains. “I asked to be here and my father let me start at the end of September 2011. At first, he had me sit with everyone to get a sense of how the business works. Knowing I was relatively green to the industry, and perhaps being a bit protective, he elected to keep me off the street,” she adds. That backdoor training covered every department from payables to receivables and learning all the mechanics of the office. “Now I’m in charge of inventory, and that’s a huge job that includes more than 500 different SKUs, determining when product is about to turn and inventory traceback.

Her father interjects: “She hates her hours.”

Pamela replies: “What hours? I can’t go home until I’m done!”

“Pamela renews my spirit,” says Fierman. “She’s

the next generation, and it’s her choice to make our company go on to the next generation. Women in the produce business are extraordinary. They’re tenacious and strong, just like what it takes to work at the New York Mercantile Exchange. Women have to step up to be in a predominantly man’s world,” he says.

As a child growing up, Pamela only visited Hunts Point, and had never worked there until now. The industry is changing as a whole, according to Joel Fierman, who says, “It’s becoming more corporate than family, and runs more coolly and formally, following the letter of the law.”

“That’s what makes family stand out,” says Pamela. “This is more personal than a 9-to-5 job at a corporation,” says Pamela. “The family side goes beyond a job to the welfare and future of the entire operation with love.”

Coming into it, you can’t look at it as an employee. It’s a different mindset, she continues. “This is your company, now in its fourth generation, and you’re going to be the future of it.”

There’s a certain pressure to learn all the ins-and-outs of the business, through experience, paying attention, listening to all the expert advice, she explains. “Mostly, this is not something that can be taught, but requires hands-on experience, and every day I pick up something new,” she says.

As the younger generations come in, they see things from different perspectives, and bring their own insights as well. “I love it here, coming every day as an adult. I’ve formed a new relationship with my father. We’ve always been close. Now we just talk about produce instead of Peter Rabbit,” Pamela smiles. “Three brothers with three kids will be working together. It’s special,” she says, adding, “I like that I get to have lunch with my Dad.” **pb**

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another crossroad. All houses are at a spot for redevelopment,” says D’Arrigo. “Ten years from now, we’ll be doing business a lot differently than we are today. From a co-op standpoint, we come together for common issues, but don’t sugarcoat it. This is a competitive market. We all carry the same products and are trying to beat the competition,” he says, adding, “Every day, there has to be good quality, brand consistency, and a huge continuity of supply to keep the customers from shopping elsewhere.”

**Line Expansion Creates Specialization (Again)**

“Now that everyone sells everything at the same price, we need to differentiate further,” says Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. On the fast track, the firm, which started with seven items, now offers more than 3,000, and has developed a targeted branding strategy. It continues to build its arsenal.

Diversification of product helps with upswings



Lori Hirsch DeMarco and Helene Traeger — LBD Produce



Guy Barone — Buyer on The Market and Jim Renella — J. Renella Produce



Jose Duran and Rick Romano — S. Katzman Produce

and downswings, says Katzman. “In an uncertain economy, people can’t afford a hit; they need to spread out,” says Stefanie Katzman, in sales and procurement. “It’s all structured around demand for a one-stop shop. If we carry every item, we keep customers,” she continues.

To that end, Katzman is building its imports side of the business. The company has teamed up with another wholesaler on the market, Top Banana, to create a brokerage firm named Top Katz, which specializes in procurement of imports and other harder-to-find items. “Top Katz gives us more buying power to do bigger volumes,” says Stefanie Katzman.

Adds Paul Manfre, sales associate at Top Katz, “We’ve got many more import deals on the table — a lot of strategic partners in different countries. We look for windows of opportunity, where there are always gaps and gluts. We had a mango deal when no one else did. You need these windows to stay in business.”

According to Manfre, Top Katz’s customers know, “We are on top of the markets... the East

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## NEW GENERATION:

## MICHAEL &amp; NICHOLAS ARMATA at E. Armata

BY MIRA SLOTT

For Michael and Nicholas Armata, a hard work ethic instilled by their father Chris Armata, president of E. Armata, was honed at Hunts Point Market from an early age.

“My Dad told me when I was little, unless it was a necessity, he wouldn’t buy it for me,” says Michael Armata, who joins his sister, Chelsea [featured in 2008’s New Generation Report], and brother each day on the Hunts Point Market. “So, I begged him to work to earn spending money. At 8, I shined his shoes for \$5 a pair, but he would say, ‘Not good enough,’ and I had to redo the job until it was perfect. I started coming here in the summer when I was 10 years old and earned \$10 a day doing odd jobs. Uncle John [Acompora] is my Godfather and when he brought bagels on Wednesdays, he would charge me, sesame seed, butter and cream cheese were extra. When I was hungry, I had negative earnings!”

“That next summer I remember working in the back stacking wet product, scallions, broccoli, corn, and I’d be drenched.” At 13, Michael was working five days a week all summer long, and nothing fazed him.

“Right when my brother Nick got his license, he was bringing me in and teaching me how to do tickets. I got to work with porters. When I was a senior in High School, I was on the wrestling team and we had Saturday tournaments, so I came to Hunts Point Market every Sunday, working days and nights when I could. When I turned 17 or 18, I was the box man in the warehouse. Now I’m a salesman. It’s my calling,” says Michael. “I talk a lot. I always asked the customers questions. I wanted to understand.”

“In High School, I didn’t have much time, with school work, wrestling and working to put money toward gas.” I was a porter and then I’d load and unload trucks in between — anything they wanted me to do. I always wanted to get more responsibility, and I felt proud when they allowed me to check the door.”

“Now, I understand people when they have a problem because I’ve gone through it myself. I remember when they sent me at 15 to Row C delivery in the pouring rain, I didn’t have a coat, and I built a pallet in a refrigerated warehouse, soaked and shivering. And then there was that heat wave and a trailer broke down filled with 48 bins of watermelons. I had to go through fallen broken bins. I reached in the mush to grab and there were maggots! I had to throw my clothes out. I couldn’t eat watermelon again until a year ago!”

After all that, some kids might have rethought their career path. “I never saw friends in the summers and missed the parties. Most kids in my



Paul Armata, Chris Armata, Chelsea Armata, Michael Armata and Nicholas Armata — E. Armata Produce

school were just given things,” says Michael. “I went to Roger Williams for college, but on breaks always came home for work.”

This business changes, but a lot of people say, “That’s how it is.” Michael says he is always interested in new ways to do things and become more efficient, whether it’s computerizing manual tasks, researching alternative fuels, or alleviating inefficient operating methods. “There are so many variables in the produce business you can’t control, so if there is anything you can control, you should make it a precedent,” he continues.

“For me, I would never want to do anything else. I want to be with my family. We always joke around,” says Michael, who is known around his family and friends as a prankster. “Everyone gets mad at me because I smile and laugh. I always, say, ‘It’s not going to change the fact I have to stack potatoes.’ Especially in this business working 75 hours a week, you can’t be half in and half out, so it’s important to keep a sense of humor and stay grounded.

“The day trade attracts more independent stores. At night, I deal mostly with brokers. If I tell them the wrong price, I lose the business. They’re going to look all over. You have to be on top of your game. The main thing my Dad taught me: When you shake a man’s hand, you look him in his eyes and you take your glove off or it’s disrespectful. Don’t be arrogant. Shut your mouth and listen. Working here, I don’t want to just be Chris Armata’s son. I want to develop my own identity. I’ve learned life lessons from many people here on my way toward that goal.”

#### NICHOLAS ARMATA GETS FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE

“My experiences here as a kid were eventful, to put it mildly,” says Nicholas Armata, now working full

time at his family’s company for more than three years. “I always wanted to get a paycheck, so when I was little, my Dad had me stacking boxes, but coming here was my choice. I love it here.”

Nicholas says his father pulled no punches. “If I wanted something, I had to earn it. Getting older in my teenage years, I came to work here two to three times a week. When I turned 14, I’d ride my bike into Syosset, where I got a part time job at the deli to earn extra money.”

At Hunts Point Market, Nicholas would help people load trucks, stack pallets, and pull out product that didn’t look good — basic, simple jobs. “My responsibility grew every summer. Every break from school I was here. If I was off from football season, I’d grab Sunday overtime to help out,” he says.

“Right now I’m selling. I went to Johnson & Wales, where I studied Food & Beverage and Business. I love the restaurant industry. One day, maybe I’ll open a restaurant,” Nicholas contemplates, but I’d like to be here until I retire and turn over the business to my kids.

His colleagues don’t realize how good they have it. “Here people complain stacking lettuce. When I was 12, we had a scallion truck tip over. Now the repacking involved in that job was worth complaining about, although my brother had it worse during the infamous summer of the rotting watermelon. He stunk for days! You learn from these experiences,” says Nicholas.

“It’s easy to get frustrated. I’m hard on myself. I’ve always been competitive, and pride myself in improving,” he continues. “My family built the company to where it is today. It’s a team effort, involving the whole crew, salesmen, porters, foremen, to take every step to fix each issue. The goal is to beat everyone’s expectations.”

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Yvonne Sepulveda and Christine Sherman — Morris Okun

coast deal, the California deal, imports... that's all we do. Top Katz West and Top Katz Texas use our service to 'bird dog' loads. Hunts Point Market companies are our customers. We're not competing with them," he says.

"We've always been a specialty house, while others are opening specialty departments to become one-stop shops," says René Gosselin, operations manager at Coosemans New York. "But it takes expertise to develop a specialty business over time. It is hard if you are selling potatoes and onions to all of a sudden get into specialties and learn the process. We have the upper-hand there," he says, noting that the firm is doubling down on creative ways to educate buyers on unusual varieties and stimulate interest.

Coosemans is a family of companies. "We're a wholesale company, but there is a lot of potential as a conglomerate to capitalize on our different strengths and expertise," says Gosselin. "However, it is not a straight-forward proposition. Each operation is not identical in the way it's structured. We operate independently. Also, the needs of customers in New York are very different than those in Atlanta. A product could sell like crazy in the South and here we have no market," he says.

**“Forget the old theory, ‘If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.’ If it’s not broken, break it and modify it. That’s what we do.”**

— Chris Armata, E. Armata

"Our family came from Asia to the United States with nothing to pursue new opportunities," says Sampour of CM Produce, noting that the company also owns farms in Homestead, FL, where the firm is able to develop special tropical fruit varieties to differentiate itself.

"Our customers call us, 'The King of Persimmons,'" which CM Produce expedites to market before everyone else. "My brother buys for certain stores and delivers direct," he adds. Sampour contends, "Our fruit tastes better than other Asian-

grown fruit because we control the quality and we don't sell cheap to anybody." CM Produce also is known for its Israeli products, developed with expert growing methods, he adds.

"If we didn't have a warehouse in Brooklyn to support our business, we wouldn't survive here," says Sampour, adding, "We just opened a distribution center in New Jersey to accommodate 40 or 45 stores. Product can go from our farms straight to the warehouse and we don't touch it."

**Trust, Loyalty At The Core**

Strategies to differentiate can only take a company so far in a supply/demand, price-driven market where, with a few notable exceptions, most people are offering the same items to a shrinking pie of customers. Immersed with an influx of ever-changing ethnic cultures and diverse personalities, relationships set precedent. One can never lose site of the principles embedded within the market's core, generations of loyalty, trust and integrity, so critical in nurturing long-term grower and customer relationships and developing new bonds.

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says Renella of J. Renella. His livelihood hinges on ensuring that substandard product never gets past him. "I'm the cop. I protect my customer. They know I stand by my product," he says. "I personally inspect everything coming in, and am careful on how product is packed. Even if I have the customer's money in the drawer, if the product is not up to my standards, I won't sell it to them. "I'm not a genius; I'm just old-fashioned."

At Hunts Point Market, tradition and modernity seem to collide. While trying to outpace a fast-

changing world, an old-fashioned handshake still means something, according to Lori Hirsch DeMarco, president and third generation at LBD Produce. "Our customers appreciate the fact we are there for them personally. Quite honestly, technology has not always changed the business for the better," she contends, adding that Helene Traeger, accounts receivable bookkeeper, still does all inventory by hand.

"We don't ever put a customer in the position of having to leave a message on voicemail.

Customer service has always been what's important going back generations," DeMarco says. "My brother Michael is constantly there for them, regularly in contact and accessible." The same is true on the grower side, she says.

In validation, Gordon of the Hunts Point Terminal Market Co-op Association points out, "Many growers are committed to their wholesalers and wouldn't deal with anyone else. Certain houses have their shippers, where loyalties can't be broken."

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"This is the only job I've ever had," says Traeger. "Lori and I are such good friends, I don't know what I would do without her."

DeMarco responds in kind. "If we weren't in the market together, we'd travel together all the time. However, this is a daily business and you feel like

you can't take a day off. We're so used to this place. It's a home," she says, adding, "Even when I have to leave to deal with personal challenges outside the market, I look forward to returning; this place is my comfort zone."

"Evolution really hasn't happened at Juniors

Produce," says Louis Augone, III, sales representative. "We're still doing handwritten tickets, and everything is as it was around here, although we did add a booth for winter, which was nice," he says, adding, "My father, Louis 'Junior,' likes to say Juniors is here for the 'working man,' catering to

## DELIVERY DEMANDS IGNITE COMPETITION

BY MIRA SLOTT

**T**ransportation logistics is a critical component of the supply chain, yet it is costly, complex, and fraught with potential problems and liabilities, according to Paul Kazan, owner of Hunts Point Market-based Target Interstate, which opened its doors in 1981. "Our business is risk management, something we've been doing for 30 years," says Paul Kazan.

Much has changed since then. "All these wholesale companies are expanding into full-line, full service houses, facing increased customer demands for tailored product deliveries," he says. The trend has led to vendors diving into the trucking business and building transportation operations in-house. The reasoning can be two-fold, according to Kazan, but he contends it's risky, and ultimately flawed. Confronted with additional logistics costs, many look to cut out the middlemen and eliminate those additional fees, while at the same time having more control and autonomy over the delivery process. In some instances, the wholesaler may be trying to show customers it is in control of its supply chain logistics to instill confidence, he postulates.

"People think brokers make a fortune, but brokerage margins are not that high anymore," he says. For the difference in financial savings there, these companies don't have any recourse to absorb liability," he explains. That wholesaler takes on all the responsibility and overhead and an enormous amount of risk for that control, he says. "When there is a problem, the reality is that if the customer can



Paul and Evan Kazan — Target Interstate

avoid going back to the shipper, they'd rather blame the trucker," he argues. "We know we're at the bottom of the totem pole. We all eat six figures every year on non-reimbursed claims from a customer," he contends, adding, "We're still treated as the stepchild in this business. The model itself has to be reassessed." It takes time to develop a carrier base, explains Kazan. "I have 5,000 carriers in the system with a couple hundred trucks in route."

In an increasingly competitive environment, Target is taking actions to reinvent itself as well, restructuring to reduce its own internal risks while strengthening its core, and introducing several new value-added services and technology tools for its customer base.

Target is looking to leverage its established reputation and long-term Blue Book status to expand its agent program and move away from its branches. Kazan explains, "We want to recruit high-quality,

financially sound candidates that match the level of our integrity."

In a tough economy, a lot of people hold back on making investments for the future. "This is the time not to hunker down but to grow," says Kazan. The firm is working on sophisticated computer technology that can be integrated with most customers' systems to better monitor and track products in transit, according to Kazan's son Evan, who has been instrumental in its implementation. It will allow customers to catch problems early, improve product quality, load optimizations and delivery efficiencies, as well the ability to do strategic forecasts and sales planning, he explains.

"We have to find a competitive advantage," adds Kazan. "We need to provide resources to customers to help them manage their companies better. It's going to be a tough business going forward and people need to adapt."

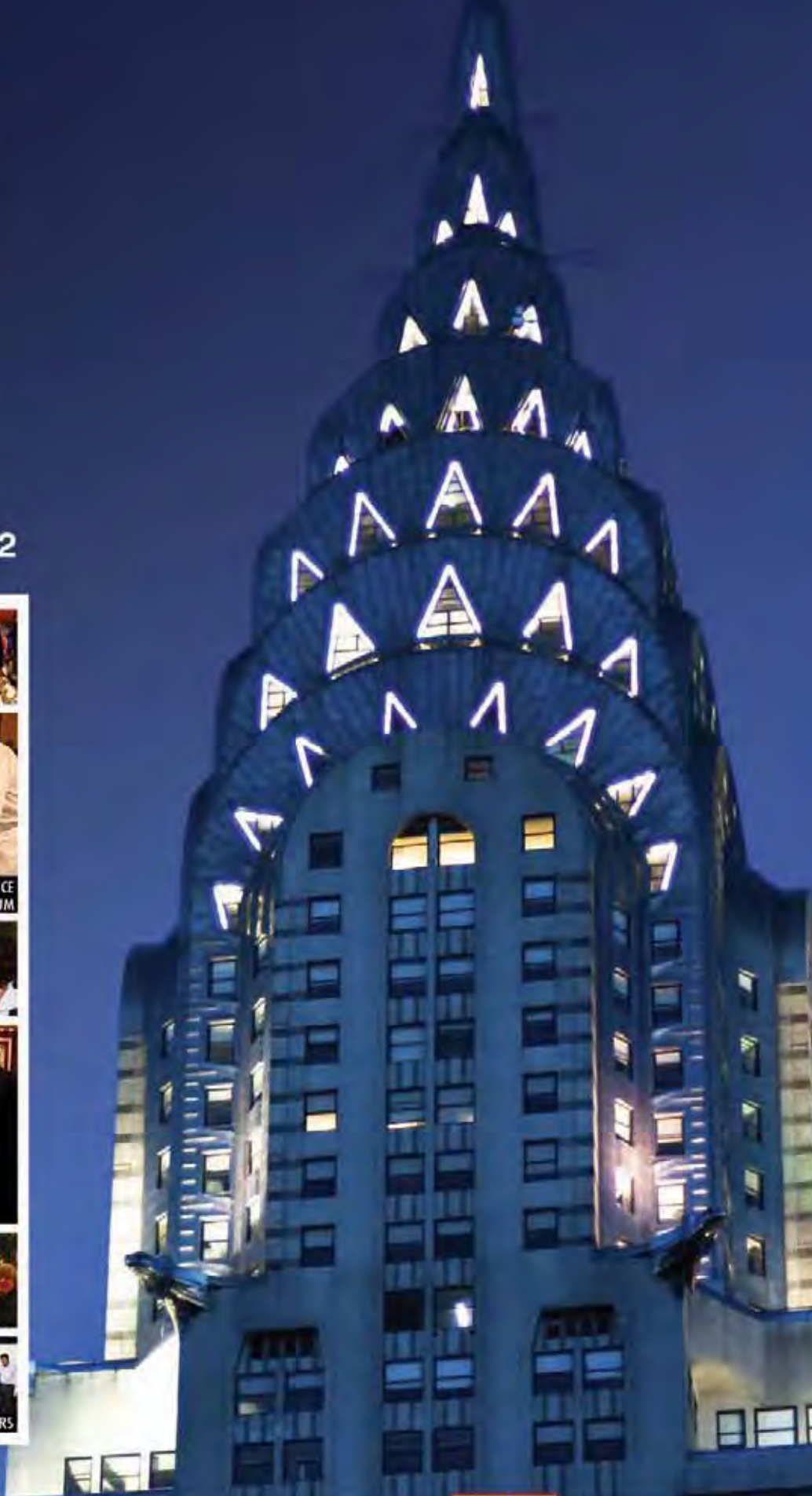
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Ciro Porricelli of Jerry Porricelli Produce has widened his product line but grapples to hold on to that old-school niche mentality as companies become giants around him. There are less firms on the market, but less business — too many direct deliveries. “There’s always the doubt these big firms are going to eat you alive,” he says. “But I’m still here 14 years. This is the business I know. Firms have come to me making offers for my unit, but I just say, ‘I’m living my dream.’”



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“We have loyal customers here since Day 1,” Augone of Juniors Produce says, of people who remember him as a little boy. “It’s like the United Nations here pretty much every day. My brother Craig and I have picked up different languages and try to speak to customers in Chinese, Turkish, Spanish and Korean,” he says, adding, “We’re learning Hebrew now.”

Augone says the firm relies on the dynamics of the Market. “It all stems from customers looking for that deal, but they would rather pay more for fresh quality, where we put the whole box together and do all the work for them. Hunts Point Market promotes that opportunity,” he says, adding, customers take a gamble dealing with all the companies opening up outside the market. We’re here 18 years and the formula is still working.

**Family Ties Create Impressive Work Ethic**

As family businesses evolve, tenured players contemplate whether the Hunts Point Market will be their children’s destiny, infuse new perspectives, and jump into the fray to carry on the family legacies. “The younger generation brings different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to create an enlightened vision,” says Dana Taback, in sales with Fierman & Son, adding, “It can take the industry to a new place.”

Working at Hunts Point Market is not ideally suited for everyone. It can involve long hours, gritty, hard work in extreme weather conditions. A quick-thinking, nimble attitude, as well as the ability to react quickly to the unexpected are necessities. “If you’re not willing to work seven days a week on call 24 hours, you don’t belong in this business,” says Okun. “It is life-consuming. It takes a certain person to balance and run a produce operation. I grew up with a father working at night. I don’t think a stranger could fit into this business very well. This is what I was born to do. It is in my karma.”

The industry can be a daunting one, even for a woman who is part of the family. “Hunts Point Market never was geared toward women. I felt I was on my own,” says Okun. “When we started at Hunts Point, we had three vegetable units. Now



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**“Most people running companies at Hunts Point Market started by pulling a jack, stacking boxes and selling. Everybody had to pay their dues.”**

— Denise Goodman, M&R Tomato

we have 20 and a half,” but growth did not come easy, she cautions. “I took big risks,” she says.

The family connection is still very vibrant and important at Hunts Point Market, says Goodman of M&R Tomato. With the family business comes responsibility and obligation. “I worked here in high school and college. When my sister Bonnie passed away, it was a traumatic time, and I came back into the business. My brother, Michael, who has been here his whole life, taught me a lot. He runs the place, doing business from 6:00 pm to the early hours of the morning. I come in at 4:00 or 5:00 am. It’s not a typical schedule,” she says, adding, “Most people running companies at Hunts Point Market started by pulling a jack, stacking boxes and selling. Everybody had to pay their dues.”

### Value-Added Investments

Beyond offering a full line of products and delivery options, many companies on Hunts Point are increasing their value-added services, such as repacking and even processing of produce. “At E. Armata, we are firm believers in not staying static, even when you don’t think things should change, there’s always a better way to do things,” says president Chris Armata. “Forget the old theory, ‘If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.’ If it’s not broken, break it and modify it. That’s what we do.”

The company has stayed ahead of the game by offering customers repacking services for a few years now. “We have a tomato repacking plant here on the premises, where we sort tomatoes by color and can give customers what they want,” he details. “We’re all trying to find the customer to move product at the right price. Most companies, like us, have expanded lines and are doing more business by delivery,” Armata says, adding how important it is to stay open to new ways of thinking.

“My daughter, Chelsea, is the office manager, and brings fresh aspects to our some-



Tony Biondo, Vito Cangialosi and Nick Pacia — A.J. Trucco, Inc.

what old ways of doing things, which is extremely vital to the growth of our company," he acknowledges, adding that his sons, Michael and Nicholas, are now being trained as salesmen after many years learning the business from the ground up. [see New Generation profiles on pages 95, 100 and 102]. My kids have to learn the way I did — loading trucks, stacking pallets, knowing the different temperatures and shelf-life issues — to better understand how customers and growers feel."

While Nathel and Nathel has developed a

stronghold at Hunts Point Market, it was determined to seize a missed opportunity to service the large retail chains. Sheldon Nathel, president of Nathel International, says the entity was launched on that premise to sell and supply national retail chains direct. Nathel describes his role as a liaison between international growers and U.S. retailers. In the future, the broader goal is to bridge international with domestic business to supply national retailers year-round, he says.

"We are pursuing a facility in New Jersey so we can expand our business to fresh-cuts and

packaging," says Mario Andreani, general manager of S. Katzman. "To be HACCP-approved, you have to have your own facility." He believes this investment in the future will make a difference down the line. "We're not equipped to deal with really specialized items and bagged salads. As we grow, that will only complete the picture."

"What we've noticed is that more and more customers are looking to reduce costs and require wholesalers to provide a wider range of services," says Gosselin of Coosemans. "Right now, we store product here and customers come and get it.

**"We don't ever put a customer in the position of having to leave a message on voicemail. Customer service has always been what's important."**

— Lori Hirsch DeMarco, LBD Produce



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We're looking into adding delivery service options, but because of logistical complexities, the cost increase has to be assessed. We're not in the parcel business like UPS," he says.

### Food Safety

"We get more and more requests to see our HACCP certification and copies of our inspections," says Gosselin, adding that Coosemans has stayed ahead of the curve in instituting and upgrading food safety measures. The big food companies require it, and government regulations will soon make it an imperative, he continues.

"We were one of the first companies here to become HACCP-certified, and we're set up for traceability. The problem remains that once product is picked up in pallet trucks and leaves our premises, food safety issues can occur outside our control," he explains.

A.J. Trucco's Pacia says he has taken a principle role at his company in bolstering food safety and certification, spending time overseas working with growers in training seminars and in adopting food safety requirements. "We can't afford to do business otherwise. Food safety is a very important step. All the programs we develop are identified with branding, with both our growers and customers in mind."

Charlie DiMaggio, president of Fresco, the newest company on the market, keeps a close eye on food safety and where the industry is headed in the future. "The big keep getting bigger. Nothing's easy. Whatever you did yesterday, you can't do tomorrow. You have to keep on moving to stay ahead."

Entering a consolidated market, DiMaggio committed significant upfront costs, he says, installing advanced computer systems, higher end software and tracking technology that could be expanded in line with his potential growth. "It's a different form of thinking — projecting into the future," he says.

"I built the place with HACCP-certification in mind," forecasting rising food safety demands from customers as well as new government regulations down the pike. "We're kind of sheltered here, dealing with a lot of Mom & Pop stores, where outside, companies are facing strict requirements from huge chain stores," he says, adding, "Competition is what drives this market."

### The Importance Of Team-Building

In order to stay ahead of the competition, companies on the Market must focus on building

**“What we’ve noticed is that more and more customers are looking to reduce costs and require wholesalers to provide a wider range of services.”**

— René Gosselin, Coosemans New York

a strong team. Stefanie Katzman of S. Katzman acknowledges, "Your base has to be strong," and the company's near 250 employees reflect that. But she warns, "There are a lot of moving parts, and when you grow quickly, people in the middle management may fall into a role they are not prepared for, producing hiccups. A mistake can snowball.

"We probably have 70 to 80 more employees than any other company on the market, even though we are not the largest," says Andreani of Katzman. "We now have more salesmen,

foremen, and porters. We found out we needed more salespeople that could communicate well with our Korean and Spanish customers. It's all about relationships."

"Anyone who wants to work hard can make a living here," says Louis Langone, sales at Robt. T. Cochran & Co. "I've watched the market change for 30 years," he says. "It's in my blood. Ever since I went to my father's store when I was a kid, I've never looked back."

### Grower Partnerships

Doing business on the Hunts Point Market means more than a signed contract, which is still a rare document when it comes to growers and shippers arranging to ship thousands of dollars-worth of produce across the country. It means when times are tough, those relationships keep you coming back, with both buyer and seller helping each other. "We stay with shippers for hot and cold markets," says John Tramutola at A&J Produce.

"Our relationships with shippers go back generations," points out Goodman of M&R Tomato Distributors/M&R Trading. "No one is looking for somebody to take a big hit. Bizarre weather patterns create gluts and shortages. Now people buy what they need and don't speculate as much. Also when prices go up too high too quickly, they don't sustain themselves," she explains. "There are a lot of choices, so if one item is short, people just substitute."

"One hand feeds the other," recognizes D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. "We've maintained partnerships with suppliers and receivers as far back as 1948, Ocean Mist in the 60's, Driscoll's in the 80's...We know very much how that plays out. When they're long, we take product even if it's not a good buy, and they sell to us when we're short," he says.

"As the business faces more difficult margins and tougher competition, we constantly have to protect our growers and shippers as well as our



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customers," says Chris Armata, of E. Armata. "It's growers first and foremost. They are the beginning of the whole chain, the first source of how things happen," he explains. "We have many shippers for years with handshake relationships, and trust on both ends. When markets are bad, it's our job to make sure their produce moves and is not left sitting in the field," he says. "When projecting an increase in production on the growing end, the growers and wholesalers used to be able to call the chain stores and they would drop their prices so we could start moving product," according to

Armata. But times have changed, and he contends there is a "lack of support on retail pricing, unlike years ago, and the bigger stores don't adjust pricing quickly enough."

"Growers are more like partners," agrees Stefanie Katzman of S. Katzman. "We don't invest in farmland but we work with growers to lay out a game plan for cycling out the field and what items to grow. Farmers have broadened their horizons as well, growing a wider range of crops to protect themselves against major loss if a certain crop gets destroyed."



One of the companies on Hunts Point that has fostered long-standing relationships is Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., which forged an exclusive relationship with Dole Fresh Vegetables that goes back 20 years ago. The partnership positions the company to distribute the entire line of Dole pre-packaged salads and western vegetables in the New York City Market. It also has enabled the company to equip a separate state-of-the-art facility with a sophisticated refrigeration system on the confines of Hunts Point Market, providing optimum storage and round-the-clock deliveries with its fleet of trucks.

Beyond its arrangement with Dole, Rubin Bros. is building its branding strategy with other high-quality products that don't conflict, furthering its stalwart reputation and extending its ability to cater to a wide customer base [see Morton Williams retail profile on page 139].

Alliances are stronger every year with producers in different growing areas. Pacia of A.J. Trucco notes, "We make plans tighter if a market is not right and adjust. We work on special varieties and partner on how we can improve current product and make it better for consumers." **pb**

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
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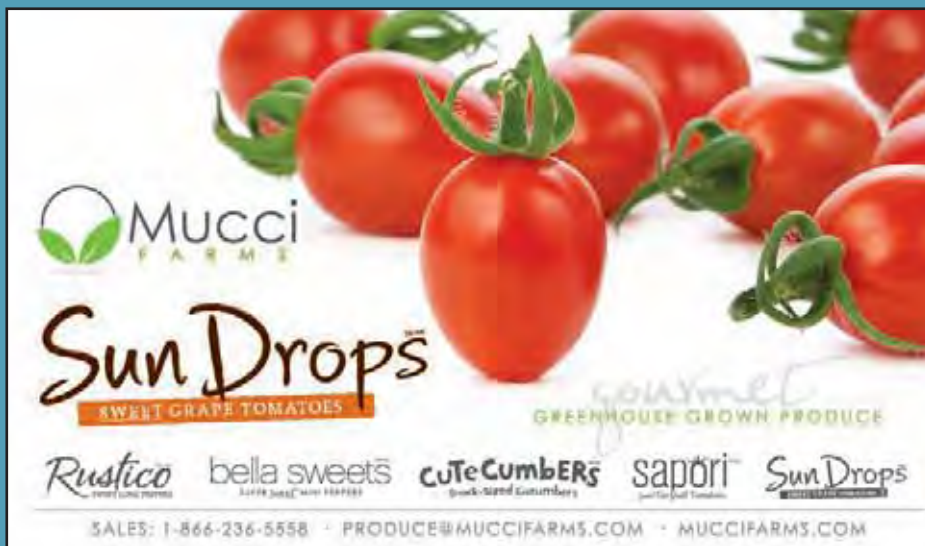
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**CELEBRATING FRESH**

# BEYOND THE BRONX Companies Outside the Market Adapt With Innovation

To meet the ever-changing needs of a complex marketplace, wholesalers, distributors and importers scattered around New York's hub develop innovative solutions in serving their customers.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**F**aced with no shortage of challenges in recent years, companies off the Hunts Point Market are honing in on their strengths to confront impediments. "The business has gotten bigger, but also more complex," says Paul Auerbach, president of Maurice A. Auerbach Inc., headquartered in Secaucus, NJ. "Everyone wants something different. We invested in our new facility due to the changing marketplace and the increasing importance of food safety."

"In the changing landscape of the market, several issues present challenges, including food safety, supply and weather," says Raphael Goldberg, CEO of Interruption Taste Me Do Good, in Brooklyn, NY. "Weather, especially, has been playing more of a role year after year."

The economy is an obvious big hitter. "The economy is a major challenge these days including rising transportation costs, as well as consumers not going out and spending as much," says Lucky Lee, vice president of sales for Lucky's Real Tomatoes, in Brooklyn, NY.

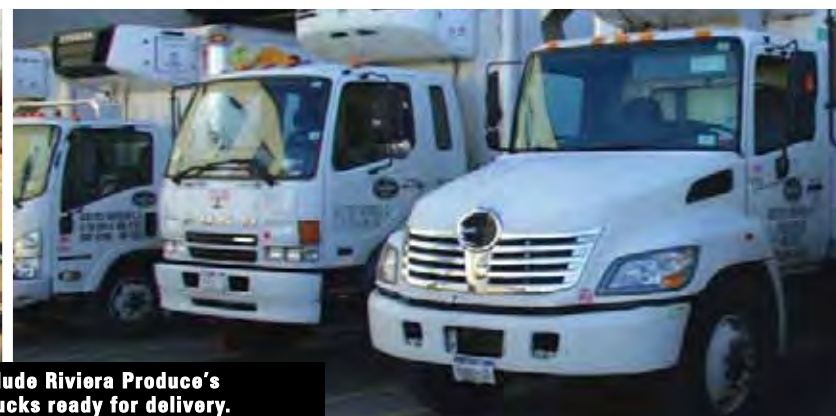
"With the economic downturn, competition has been stiffer and customers are more selective in how they spend their money," adds Jeff Ornstein, co-owner of Eli & Ali Organic and Specialty Produce, in Brooklyn, NY. "Margins have tightened up. It's affected how we sell and how we buy. In general,

everyone wants the best quality as cheaply as possible."

Suppliers and customers seek out creative solutions to economize. "Customers are downsizing portions rather than raising prices," reports Ben Friedman, president of Riviera Produce, a foodservice distributor, based in Englewood, NJ. "They're trying to control their expenses. They're also taking certain high price items off the menu before they go out of season to minimize the cost increase. We also see customers trying to buy things by the piece or pound instead of a whole case. They're using us more like their refrigerator."

"People are always looking for value, but when times are tough, people really pay attention to value," says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales with Vision Import Group LLC, based in River Edge, NJ. "Another continuing change is how the ethnic markets and especially the Latino segment in this country are growing. Our business has grown with them because we've had the right product at the right time."

"Our opportunity is in staying on top of an evolving consumer," says Goldberg. "Shoppers are changing. They're more informed than ever before and more concerned about where their food comes from. For a growing segment of consumers, eating and shopping has become more of a social act. We always want to be one step ahead of the consumers in what they want."



A roundup of images from companies outside the Hunts Point Market include Riviera Produce's warehouse, Auerbach's banner announcing its new facility and Baldor trucks ready for delivery.



Ian Zimmerman, Jeff Schwartz, Paul Auerbach, Josh Auerbach and Randy Auerbach — Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.



Bruce Klein — Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.



Jason Grapple — Genpro



Rob Goldstein — Genpro

Lee adds, "If your focus is to do the right thing by your company and the people you service, then everything else falls into place."

### Augmenting Supply

New York area companies have turned an eye toward sourcing and supply in an effort to adapt. "We're trying to buy as much as we can locally to minimize the freight and maximize product shelf-life," says Riviera's Friedman. "Local can cost less, taste better and last longer."

"We really focus on our ability to deliver fresh," adds Vinny Bondi, president of Uncle Vinny Enterprises, in the Bronx, NY. "We're outselling California product three-to-one in all the markets we're in. We process our salads the day before we deliver so the shelf-life is better. Literally, we can be from our farms to the table in 24 hours."

Eli & Ali started out as a vine-ripened tomato re-packer with an eye toward innovation. "We jumped into organics as soon as we could when we started the business," states Ornstein. "We

now offer a lot of organic items including tomatoes, peppers, fruit and some other vegetables. We're very selective and it's helped us become more important to our customer base. People still want to feed their families the best, even in a tough economy."

"Our innovation starts in the procurement of the product," explains Art Hernandez, director of operations for Eli & Ali. "In this economic environment, it can be difficult to always get the top quality product. There are many challenges logis-

## Rethinking Logistics

As companies delve into the cost of doing business, logistics has risen to a more prominent role. "When the economy changed years ago, people started looking under the hood of the cost structure of transportation," explains Robert Goldstein, president of Genpro, in Rutherford, NJ. "Transportation can be a crucial part of successful business — it's about finding the best mode and the best price."

Ben Friedman, president of Riviera Produce, in Englewood, NJ, agrees, "Diesel prices, toll rates, electricity and other costs seem to be rising every year and we cannot control those expenses. We're trying to go green and use whatever we can to offset these expenses, but it has definitely put more pressure on us."

"People are more price-conscious and a lot sharper about when to use various transportation modes," says Goldstein. "They are more in tune with leveraging transportation and are waking up to the different issues and risks. We see people thinking

outside the box more with respect to logistics."

Genpro supports the traditional model of truck brokering, but is increasingly providing new solutions to help customers. Goldstein explains, "It becomes about efficiencies and technology — can I do something better than you can do it yourself and do it more effectively? Every day, produce transportation is about fitting the right puzzle pieces together in the right way to provide what's needed. Technology can only go so far because the business is still dependent on Mother Nature and the human component. We use technology to enable and facilitate, but we still structure our business around service and personnel."

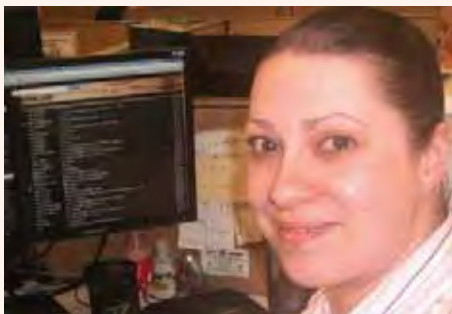
Companies in the New York market and beyond must analyze risk versus cost when seeking out solutions. "Our business comes down to trust and control," says Goldstein. "We want to create efficiencies and cost savings in price as well as soft costs and risks. A lot of things can be done and we strive to find

better processes. We believe in constantly reinvesting in things we can provide to our customers."

For example, three years ago Genpro opened an office in Missouri to service corporate accounts. "The way business was evolving required greater compliance to service these accounts," explains Goldstein. "We decided to emphasize the employee-employer relationship to ensure accountability, as opposed to contracting everything out. It is our responsibility to our customers to ensure what we're doing for them."

Technology will enhance business in the future but presents some short-term challenges. "Information technology systems will be increasingly important and beneficial," says Peter Kroner, director of business development for Eli & Ali Organic and Specialty Produce, in Brooklyn, NY. "It's a challenge right now, because at times, we get less information than we did years ago by hand. Though technology is important, the people factor of our business will always be a key component."

pb



Angela Rodriguez — Genpro



Danny Delgado — Genpro

John S. Messina, Manny Galeano and Ben Friedman  
— Riviera Produce

*“One of our customers’ biggest requirements is the availability of the product. We shine in a tight market. To do that, we maintain a fresh inventory with the emphasis on fresh, and we have a diverse customer base.”*

— Paul Auerbach  
Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.

tically with the cost of fuels and increasing freight rates. We make sure every single piece that comes through our warehouse is up to standards. We work closely with customers to find out what they’re specifically looking for and procure it for them.”

Increased availability of product is a crucial element in the new marketplace. “One of our customers’ biggest requirements is the availability

of the product,” says Auerbach. “We shine in a tight market. To do that, we maintain a fresh inventory with the emphasis on *fresh*, and we have a diverse customer base.”

“We have been developing new supplies and now source from over eight countries in Latin America,” reports Goldberg. “We have expanded the number of items and availability of those items to meet increasing demand.”

“We focus on keeping our eyes open to new vendors and new products as well as improving existing relationships,” adds Riviera’s Friedman.

As retailers focus more on inventory management, solutions are being created. “Millions of dollars are wasted when a retailer is too long or too short on inventory,” says Ira Greenstein, president of Direct Source Marketing, headquartered in Mount Kisco, NY. “We implemented a forward logistics replenishment program specializing in key commodities like table grapes and stone fruit so we become the safety net for our retail customer base. Since our cold storage facility and transportation is outsourced through third parties, we have a better understanding of our fixed expenses

for operating. We can provide retailers with considerably lower prices for filling last minute inventory needs. We not only offer great service, but can save them hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of a season.”

Expanding geographic coverage and entering new sectors of the market are additional areas of opportunity. “We are evolving by combining the strengths of all our locations to supply our products nationwide,” says Vision’s Cohen. “Our goal is to develop year-round supply and focus on excelling in a few specific commodities. The collaboration of Vision Imports with Tavilla Sales of Los Angeles and Vision Produce Partners in Texas, which just opened in 2012, allows us to distribute nationwide.”

“In foodservice, which we’ve been in for 30 years, there is a pattern related to weather and consumer demand,” explains Lucky’s Lee. “When there is a downswing in foodservice, there is an upswing in retail. This trend motivated us to move into retail and come up with our TastyLee product. This new product allows us into retail because it’s firmer, yet is field-grown and flavorful.”

## Sustainability And Environment

**E**nvironmental and sustainability initiatives are another way New York companies are looking to progressive solutions. “We try to do right by ourselves, our customers, our associates and our community,” says Paul Auerbach, president of Maurice A. Auerbach Inc., in Secaucus, NJ. “Our efforts on sustainability and waste management are not just important to us, but also to our clients.”

“We see increasing interest in fair trade and organic, even in middle America,” reports Raphael Goldberg, CEO of Interruption Taste Me Do Good, in Brooklyn, NY. “Our challenge is to increase the perception of what it is to be in a community. Where does our community begin and end?”

Environmental initiatives are yielding multiple benefits. “We recycle our paper, cartons, plastic boxes and wrap,” explains Auerbach. “We donate product to several food banks and send food waste to

compost. We have eliminated 85 to 90 percent of what we used to put into the regular waste stream. We’ve done this for the social and environmental benefits, but it’s also helped our bottom line. Our ultimate goal is to be refuse neutral.”

“We’re recycling every piece of cardboard coming into our place and are in the process of installing solar panels on the roof,” says Ben Friedman, president of Riviera Produce in Englewood, NJ. “We’ll first use the renewable energy and any extra will be sold back to the power company.”

“We recycle most of the cardboard we receive,” states Art Hernandez, director of operations for Eli & Ali Organic and Specialty Produce. “We try to have recyclable containers for all our packages. This is especially important in organics; it’s conflicting if a customer buys organic in a non-recyclable container.”

“We use a recyclable clamshell,” reports Vinny Bondi, president of Uncle Vinny Enterprises in the Bronx, NY. “We try to recycle as much as we can with everything we use.”

Interruption has developed unique methods for ensuring the social integrity of its products. “The way we design and implement a partnership with our growers and their community through a fully integrated supply chain is truly innovative,” says Goldberg. “This includes all the implications of the social and environmental elements of what a fair trade program is. We must perform the due diligence our shoppers expect from us and look toward the future. We try to be extremely efficient, work on tight margins and deal directly with chains and producers to keep prices competitive. We believe our products should be for all, not just for high-end consumers.”

**pb**

## New Positioning

Developing new products, presentations and marketing are other ways New York area companies are evolving. “We see the value proposition increasing because of market changes and challenges,” says Interrupcion’s Goldberg. “Our new ‘Taste Me Do Good’ campaign is designed to meet shoppers where their needs are. Shoppers are thinking about many

issues as they make purchase decisions and they want to know something good is going on behind the scenes. Shoppers are really responding to the new campaign. In a complex reality, this simple message is a way to simplify their lives.”

Organic continues to represent a distinguishing card in the innovation hand. “We have been engaged in quality assurance programs for years

as a result of our organic certification,” says Kroner of Eli & Ali. “We’ve been providing traceability initiatives from the day we started and must have a third-party quality assurance company endorse our operation. This is the difference between handling box-in, box-out organics and actually re-packing. A handler can buy and sell without having its operation certified. But when you’re involved in repack,

## BALDOR SPECIALTY FOODS broadens its niche, multi-dimensionally, deeper and wider. BY MIRA SLOTT

Wherever you are in New York City, you’re bound to spot a Baldor Specialty Foods truck among its burgeoning East Coast fleet, making daily distribution runs to fastidious executive chefs at gourmet restaurants, and a growing repertoire of foodservice and retail customers. If you could peek inside that omnipresent truck, its outbound contents would likely intrigue even the most well-traveled foodie: a cornucopia of the freshest, seasonal, premium-grade fruits and vegetables, from fancy and unusual, to uniquely sourced, meticulously prepared and creatively packaged; coupled with gourmet meats, cheeses and a ballooning line of specialty items. Customized to meet ever-changing needs and demands, products and processes are tightly monitored and held to stringent food safety standards.

Direction going forward involves strategic, multi-dimensional growth. “No matter how big we get, we’re still a company that can turn on a dime,” says Michael Muzyk, president, as Baldor moves to solidify its stronghold in Manhattan and steadily rising wave of expansion. “That entrepreneurial part of Baldor is what ultimately drives us,” he says, of the evolutionary path the company has undertaken, made much easier since the company has settled into the state-of-the-art, 150,000-square-foot facility it spent \$20 million renovating.

“There are only three ways to grow my business: add new product lines, extend distribution, and mergers,” says Muzyk. “We’ve gone about as far as we can go on the East Coast, more than a 120 mile radius from here to Boston, from South Maine to Philadelphia. We consider growing more, but from a footprint we are strong, so we look to take product sales to new levels. Our logistics have made it easier to build product lines everywhere, every day,” he continues. “One of the biggest hurdles is the rising cost of fuel,” he adds, pointing to increased air cargo expenses. “We try to manage that burden. In the end, it’s the relationships with suppliers, customers and our associates that will determine our future.” First internally, deepening product lines, strengthening operations — involving equipment, food safety/trace-



Michael Muzyk



T.J. Murphy



Alan Butzbach

ability, and logistics and bolstering employee benefit programs — and second, externally at both ends of the supply chain, forming partnerships with growers and customers.

Notably, Baldor opened a retail division to fill a gap in direct retail distribution for niche and hard-to-source products, explains Muzyk. The division has served as a catalyst for a distinctive, highly successful partnership with Mario Batali’s Eataly, a sprawling gourmet marketplace interspersing restaurants and a robust retail shopping experience. T.J. Murphy, Baldor’s vice president, and son of the company’s founder, oversees the partnership. Murphy explains that Eataly lets Baldor run the produce department, utilizing all its resources, local farmers and international sources, and capitalizing on its infrastructure and expertise to manage hundreds of items on a daily basis and stay on top of the trends. Adds Muzyk, “We had a retail chain here yesterday in shock at how many moving parts it requires to get a box of strawberries to them.”

Muzyk waxes poetic about the evolution of food from the 1980s as a culinary student, captivated by Julia Child, when nobody was coming out as a superstar chef, to the advent of the Food Network and consumers looking for jicama and demanding all varieties of peppers, to today’s world when a chef is likened to a rock star. “It changed our perceptions of chefs and misconceptions of the work it takes to run a kitchen, faced with labor issues, paying vendors and poor deliveries,” says Muzyk, of the often-underesti-

ated business aspects. “There are chefs playing catch up,” he laments. “It was always beat-the-supplier, or don’t work with the supplier.” Baldor seized an opening to create new relationships, explains Muzyk.

“What’s old is new again. Companies used to source product locally because it was in season. Now because of logistics, companies source from everywhere. People are starting to ask, ‘Shouldn’t we get back to the local farm?’ It’s a 360-degree process.”

Muzyk notes he has been on a mission to help New York farmers do a better job in promoting themselves. At the same time, he says it is critical that government does not exempt smaller growers from upholding the same food safety standards as the larger growers. “At Baldor, food safety is in place and customers expect that, but we’re taking food safety to the next level,” says Muzyk.

“It is impossible to be 100 percent risk-free, but we do everything to balance the scale of the risk,” says Alan Butzbach, director of marketing. “We determined the next step was an in-house lab to do testing on fresh-cuts,” he continues. “We’re now holding product, sending it to a lab to test and then it goes into production. We’re trying to prevent recalls that occur before knowing results.” It’s expensive and detail oriented, but critical.

“We’re always looking to take another step forward, examine procedures, and re-think exposure,” adds Muzyk, who remains bold in his ambitions, yet mindful of the challenges. **pb**





**Raul Millan and Ronnie Cohen — Vision Import Group**



**Dan Martin, Latisha Wallace, Lucky Lee and Anna Chrostowska — Lucky's Real Tomatoes**

you must be certified and have a third-party endorsement for your facility.”

Uncle Vinny’s has entered organics in the last six months. “We’re up and coming in the organic market,” says Bondi. “We now offer four different organic products: spring mix, baby spinach, baby arugula, and a red and green mix. Organics are a higher dollar item for the higher dollar supermarkets and we see opportunity there.”

*“We’re looking at how we can uniquely serve our customers in packaging, such as combination packs. Some customers like clamshells; others prefer trays; we try to accommodate all of them. We’re trying to give them the product in the form they can best use and increase their sales.”*

— Art Hernandez  
Eli & Ali Organic Specialty Produce

A focus on branding for quality promises future loyalty. “Our branding and marketing strategy is innovative,” says Cohen. “We have developed the Mojito and Havana in limes and Mr. Squeeze in limes and lemons. We’re developing our mango brand to represent a unique brand with meaning and recognized quality. A long term goal is to create value and brand recognition with the end consumer.”

“Our Uncle Vinny label has seen tremendous results,” reports Bondi. “We have been marketing it with the slogan ‘Stay Skinny with Uncle Vinny,’ and it’s been well received by the public.”

Uncle Vinny’s also offers dual-labeling. Bondi explains, “For example, we’ll add a sticker that says ‘Packed fresh for Fairway.’ Not a lot of people

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Brandon Rankin, Raphael Goldberg and Colin Sharpe — Interrupcion Taste Me Do Good

are doing this right now and it's a great way to differentiate the product."

Increased quality and flavor tied to a brand adds prospects. Lucky's Lee reports, "Customers are interested in locally grown and flavorful products. Our TastyLee branded product is a U.S. sun-ripened field-grown product, with great flavor and firmness. It enables retailers to get behind what they're saying about offering customers local and flavor."

An example of innovation in presentation is that of Lucky's box size. "Our company started out with a 25-lb. box right off the farm, but over the years chefs have asked for certain specs," explains Lee. "We developed new presentations to meet those specs, but there is a price attached to pulling out certain products. With the downturn in the economy, we re-introduced the bulk box of different sizes, sold under a Lucky's for Less label. It's the same great tomato for a more economical price.

"I give credit to the chefs now for thinking outside the box and looking to use different presentations or sizes of the same commodity," continues Lee. "Danny Meyer [New York City restaurateur and CEO of Union Square Hospitality Group] put a plum tomato on a burger in order to have cost efficiency at a time when plums were less expensive, yet still great quality. This is a great example of innovative thinking

to meet the challenges of this economy, yet still uphold the integrity of the business and food."

New packaging and labeling allow companies to differentiate their products for customers. "We're looking at how we can uniquely serve our

uses of limes."

Interrupcion's POS innovation includes product packaging with more social information like the number of workers employed in the making of the product. "We're also working with different groups like Fair Trade towns and student groups to help educate and promote," says Goldberg. "We're expanding use of QR codes to connect Smart phones to our products, and working more with social media."

### Service-Driven

As markets have tightened, New York area vendors work closely with customers to devise solutions. "Our customers appreciate the level of communication we have with them," says Lee. "We've really delved into re-working packs and price points. During tough times, you want your customers to know they can count on you. Our job is to help our customers find the solutions and alternatives they need to keep their business successful."

"We're very customer-responsive," emphasizes Auerbach. "We communicate with multiple people in the organizations, and I stress customer visits. We visit not only our big accounts, but also our wholesale accounts. We encourage all levels of customers to visit us. We stay on top of the market and help our customers to do so as well."

*"In foodservice, which we've been in for 30 years, there is a pattern related to weather and consumer demand. When there is a downsizing in foodservice, there is an upswing in retail. This trend motivated us to move into retail and come up with our TastyLee product."*

— Lucky Lee  
Lucky's Real Tomatoes

customers in packaging, such as combination packs," says Hernandez of Eli & Ali. "Some customers like clamshells; others prefer trays; we try to accommodate all of them. We're trying to give them the product in the form they can best use and increase their sales."

"We're developing different presentations like bagged limes and value-added presentation," states Cohen. "The value-added grab-n-go will help customers better promote the products and offer convenience to consumers. For example, recipes on the lime bag help educate consumers on various

Many companies provide options to help customers with challenges. "I see us as a modern day horse-and-buggy peddler," relates Eli & Ali's Ornstein. "We pay attention to detail and care about our customers. The fact that we're a medium-sized company gives us some advantages. We react better to the marketplace. We can deliver same day. We fly product in every day. We can service our customers efficiently and effectively. We benefit our customers because we are able to meet their changing needs and that gives them more flexibility in their business."

"We do second and third deliveries to locations daily," says Friedman. "It's not very cost effective but it is very service-driven. Many companies in our industry have a cut-off time and a minimum delivery. We go the extra yard to get it into a truck or car and get it to the customer when nobody else can."

Auerbach emphasizes the importance of innovating with personnel. "We just hired 20-year-old Alan Napolitano, who is a third-generation produce person. He's injecting youth into the company and has really stimulated our social media outreach."

Education is a component of innovation as well. Lee explains, "It's important to continually educate customers and help them understand the differences and attributes of products. In the future, changing the face of flavor in retail will be significant. We want to give the U.S. public the flavor they're looking for."

"We do a lot of demos to educate the public," says Bondi. "We teach consumers to bring salads to the next level by incorporating fresh herbs and other specialty products."

### Foundation In Food Safety

Increased focus on food safety is a crucial area of evolution for companies. "The biggest challenges now and in the future are in making sure you have traceability and food safety," says Bruce Klein, director of marketing with Auerbach. "You must make sure you trust in your suppliers."

"A lot of rules and regulations have changed from a government standpoint as far as compliance and standards go," says Goldstein. "Customers are thinking about the implications of risk or what can happen if their transportation is not complying with all the steps needed."

"Food safety is our No. 1 issue," agrees Bondi. "Our facilities are HACCP-certified and we run a clean and secure warehouse."

Auerbach moved to a new 60,000 square-foot state-of-the-art facility in December, 2011, of which 45,000 square feet is refrigerated. The new facility allows for storage, re-packing and handling product all within strict food safety guidelines. "The reason we moved to our new facility is for

the safety and security of the produce," says Klein. "There is a lot of innovation in this facility with respect to technology in our refrigeration and security, and there is no cold chain breakage at all."

"Now more than ever, retailers need to feel their vendors are staying focused and are up to date on the most recent food safety initiatives," says Greenstein. "At Direct Source, we have implemented barcode/pallet tag scanning systems in the Logan Township, NJ, facility to ensure every package can be properly traced

back to the farm. Our growers from Chile and Peru must also stay current and provide us with all food safety certifications."

Companies continue to invest in new technology for traceability and efficiency. "We're putting in new computer systems, which will increase our ability to trace product," says Ornstein of Eli & Ali. "This is important to our customer base."

"We're investing a great deal in traceability systems and will be set up for RFID," adds Klein. **pb**

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## FRESH PRODUCE ON THE MOVE: EDDIE'S PIZZA TRUCK Gains Traction With Veggie-Rich Menu

BY MIRA SLOTT

New York City's history and culture have always been steeped in street vending, as food cart vendors have angled for position on corner blocks throughout the city. In the past few years, the mobile food truck phenomenon has spread to metropolitan pockets across the country, with Manhattan, a thriving food Mecca, presenting unique challenges and rewards.

The NYC Food Truck Association helps galvanize indomitable entrepreneurs keen on mastering the ins and outs of the business from navigating the maze of logistical obstacles and parking limitations to meeting the complex and strict regulatory requirements.

In fact, Derek Kaye, owner of Eddie's Pizza Truck and Cart, as well as a burgeoning catering event offshoot, says he views his diverse fellow mobile food truck operators as less adversaries and more allies, noting mutual benefits of cooperative equipment buying and a team mentality, in a cut-throat environment for discerning New Yorkers' food dollars.

Inclement weather, unforeseen construction and burdensome parking restrictions can lead to a food truck's death knell, he explains. Kaye says food truck operators working together is analogous to how fresh produce industry executives volleying Mother Nature, food safety issues and other industry-specific variables, must unite when battling processed food manufacturers for the common good.

It's no coincidence that Kaye speaks of an affinity for produce since he attributes healthy, fresh, quality produce ingredients as a pivotal component of his success. Below, Kay opens up about the evolution of his mobile food business and what it takes to hit the streets of Manhattan with fresh vegetables the key driver.

**PRODUCE BUSINESS:** What inspired and motivated you to start a mobile food business in bustling Manhattan amid a plethora of stellar restaurants and other foodservice and convenience



Derek Kaye, owner of Eddie's Pizza Truck and Cart

retail venues? New York City certainly isn't at a loss for pizzerias!

**DEREK KAYE:** I have been going to Eddie's Pizza Restaurant in Hyde Park, NY, my entire life. [The iconic restaurant with its authentic, thin crust style pizza opened in the early 1930s]. A few years ago, I approached the owner and asked if he had any future plans for expansion. He said he was interested in finding someone who would share his love for the product, so we started developing an idea for expansion. At this same time, food trucks were becoming popular all across the country, spurred on by the advent of social media. Like many young entrepreneurs, it is very difficult to get a loan for a restaurant, so starting a truck was the best way to test out the business.

**PB:** Has this been the path you envisioned for your career? What is your background?

**DK:** My family is in the restaurant business and I've had the opportunity to work in different types of food establishments, including Nobu in London. I am a graduate of the Cornell School of Hotel Administration. My uncle has owned restaurants in

Manhattan for 20 years. I spent my summers interning at these restaurants and learning the ins and outs of the business. It helps to have a restaurant business background, but running a food truck is very different. Each business has its ups and downs. In a restaurant, you don't have to worry about getting a flat tire!

**PB:** When did Eddie's Pizza Truck first hit the New York City streets? How has the business evolved?

**DK:** We started the truck in June of 2010, added a pizza cart in June of 2011, and now have 15 employees. Our catering business took off from there and has been a tremendous help for us. It has all been through word of mouth.

**PB:** Could you elaborate on how the operation works? How competitive is the business?

**DK:** We arrive at 6:00 am to do prep work for the day and claim a spot. Lunch business starts around 11:00 am and continues until 3:00 pm. We change spots for dinner and stay until about 8:00 or 9:00 pm.

Parking is the biggest challenge. There are many more food trucks on the streets today than there were just a few years ago. It is competitive for which spots people get, but each food truck has such different food it is not really direct competition. The city provides a list of restricted streets — places we can and cannot park — so we constantly scout out new spots. It can be very challenging. There can be construction or a movie shoot and our entire schedule can be thwarted. We don't consider other food trucks competition as much as being consistent in where we park.

**PB:** How integral are your website, social media technologies and marketing efforts to the success of a mobile food business?

**DK:** Social media has been critical to connecting with customers and keeping them informed of when and where we will be on different days, as well as alerting them of specials and building our brand.

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Ben Tag and Alex Guzman whip up pies for hungry customers.

People know our website, but we use Facebook and Twitter to give them a clear indication and real-time updates as soon as we park.

We must create a consistent routine that customers can count on. The challenge is to stake our territories and establish regular, repetitive locations at time intervals that make sense for different neighborhoods and eating lifestyles. Like any business, we have regulars; we have people who come every week when we're up in their area. We get to know our customers and when they are coming. People call in advance to order so when they arrive their food is ready.

All the options available to our customers are competition; we try our best to supply better service, but being consistent is most important. Customers need to know you will be in a regular location or they won't bother showing up.

**PB:** Could you give readers a better sense of how things work from product procurement to cooking preparation, to keeping things fresh, dealing with weather, traffic and different variables you face with a mobile truck situation?

**DK:** Weather is a huge deal. Good weather equals good business. We have to plan to save up extra money in the summers just to make it through the winters. Traffic can sometimes be a problem, but mostly it's the parking that is the issue. We get fresh produce frequently, so keeping product fresh is not a problem. We can only store as much as the three refrigerators on the truck can hold!

**PB:** Your menu is overflowing with produce-rich choices. Could you elaborate on the role produce plays in your menu offerings?

**DK:** This is what makes our customers happy! They can choose from so many different toppings and customize the pizzas to their own liking. Our most popular pizza is the margarita with fresh basil, mozzarella, and tomatoes — just simple, quality ingredients. Our veggie special has a mixture of sautéed broccoli, spinach, peppers, mushrooms and onions. All of our sandwiches have arugula. We make our own pesto spread with basil and nuts, and we also have a variety of salads.

We want the ingredients to stand out. Our thin crust puts the focus on the toppings. Therefore, we rely on them being fresh, top quality, chosen correctly

and prepared well or else the flavor won't be there. Our customers have high expectations.

**PB:** How and from where do you procure your produce? Could you describe the logistics?

**DK:** We get much of our produce from Restaurant Depot/Jetro. Jetro is a regional supply chain cash-and-carry wholesaler, like a Costco, for food-service and retail independent business owners, with 100 or so outlets nationwide. We go to the store in Brooklyn to shop and hand-select the produce.

Some days the produce is delivered, and other times we pick it up. It's a combination; we have a smaller middleman who buys from Hunts Point Market everyday — grape tomatoes, basil, arugula and romaine, usually delivered two or three times a week. Produce is very important. It is used for all our pizza toppings, sandwiches and salads. In many ways, fresh produce represents a significant part of our business identity.

**PB:** Pizza is often associated with unhealthy eating, yet you are turning that image around, actually promoting the healthy, dietary benefits of a thin crust Eddie's Pizza. It's notable that you use calorie counts as a major selling point, touting that a 10-inch, personal-size pizza is only 270 calories. Customers can also choose whole-wheat crust and gluten-free alternatives. Have you found customer interest growing for healthier menu choices? Is there increased demand for local or organic items, etc.?

**DK:** Yes, definitely. We are always doing specials to adapt to these trends, and also change the menu seasonally.

**PB:** How does your customer base vary at different locations and at different times of day? Have you developed a loyal following?

**DK:** The customers are working or living in the area that we park in for that day.

Lunchtime is definitely the busiest because most people eat lunch around the same time. Dinner is much more dispersed, so the wait isn't as long as it is for lunch. We have loyal, long-time customers with particular menu requests, and popular items fluctuate based on different areas of the city.

Every neighborhood has its own personality; certain spots are a healthier focus, more salads and nutritious sandwiches. Down on Wall Street, people

tend to order large pizzas for the office and client lunch meetings. On the Upper East Side during the dinner hours, we sell smaller pizzas for families.

**PB:** You chose not to sell pizza by the slice. Why not? One might associate a mobile pizza truck with a fast-paced, single-slice business, especially for busy New Yorkers grabbing a bite on the go.

**DK:** We can serve a more gourmet thin crust pizza pie. We like to promote our personal pies as a healthy choice at only 270 calories. At Eddie's Pizza, you can have your cake and eat it too. Maybe we should create the Eddie's pizza diet!

**PB:** That's catchy! What are your future plans? Are you looking to broaden your reach outside of New York City?

**DK:** Our goal is expansion. In California, people tend to be more health-conscious. We have the ability to freeze our dough and ship it, so we are considering starting an Eddie's Pizza Truck business in Los Angeles. We would send some of our employees out to California to get things up and running. People in the produce industry could email us if they are interested in supplying us or learning more about the food truck business.

**PB:** Could you share any memorable vignettes that have transpired while running your pizza truck business?

**DK:** Meeting Andrew Zimmern and Dhani Jones. We were doing a food and wine festival and Zimmern asked me to make him a specialty pizza. I created an Asian-inspired pie and he tried it on camera — very cool. Food trucks are very popular and seem to be getting a lot of attention.

We're all in the NYC Food Truck Association and do business side-by-side at key group locations, including Hudson Square Park, Wall Street and Long Island City. We know we have to work together for the greater good. **pb**

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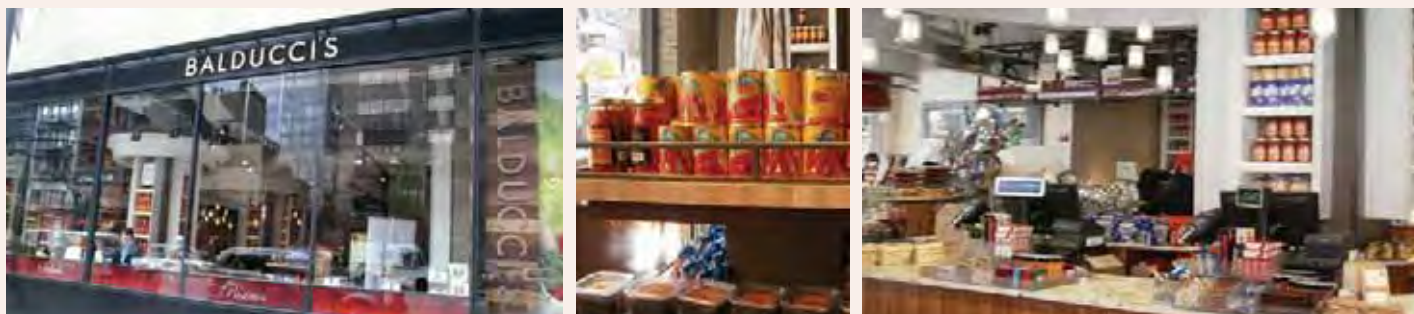
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# BALDUCCI'S GOURMET On The Go Café: Reincarnated, Balducci's is back in Manhattan

BY MIRA SLOTT

**F**resh produce infuses the flavor and panache that keeps products turning and New Yorkers' heads turning at this iconic specialty retailer's latest foodservice concept.

Rick Michener, Kings/Balducci's director of business development, and a produce aficionado with an executive chef background, played a lead role in launching Balducci's Gourmet On the Go prototype this spring in Midtown Manhattan's landmark Hearst Tower. "We're trying to replicate the formula in a couple of other areas of New York City, ultimately finding a spacious location for a market that can accommodate a produce department we can pull from right on the spot."

The strategy builds off the company's overall rebranding vision, trumpeted by Judy Spires, president and CEO of the Parsippany, NJ-based



30-store chain that include the Kings and Balducci banners. Spires unveiled the plan to reposition and further differentiate the Kings Food Markets chain last February, capitalizing on the gourmet elements of Balducci's Food Lover's Market, upping foodservice amenities and specialty grab-and-go items, while elevating the role of produce in the scheme. [You can read more about it in the March issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, *Kings Food Market Relaunches Brand With Produce And Floral Taking Lead Roles*. Go online to [www.producebusiness.com](http://www.producebusiness.com)].

"We have the buying power of Kings with the produce expertise of Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral," continues Michener, "the cachet of Balducci's Food Lover's Market, and the top restaurant quality produce standards of Baldor Specialty Foods [See Baldor Side Bar on page 128] that New York demands." Michener highlights advantages of his long-term, trusted relationship with Michael Muzyk, Baldor president. "In the mid-

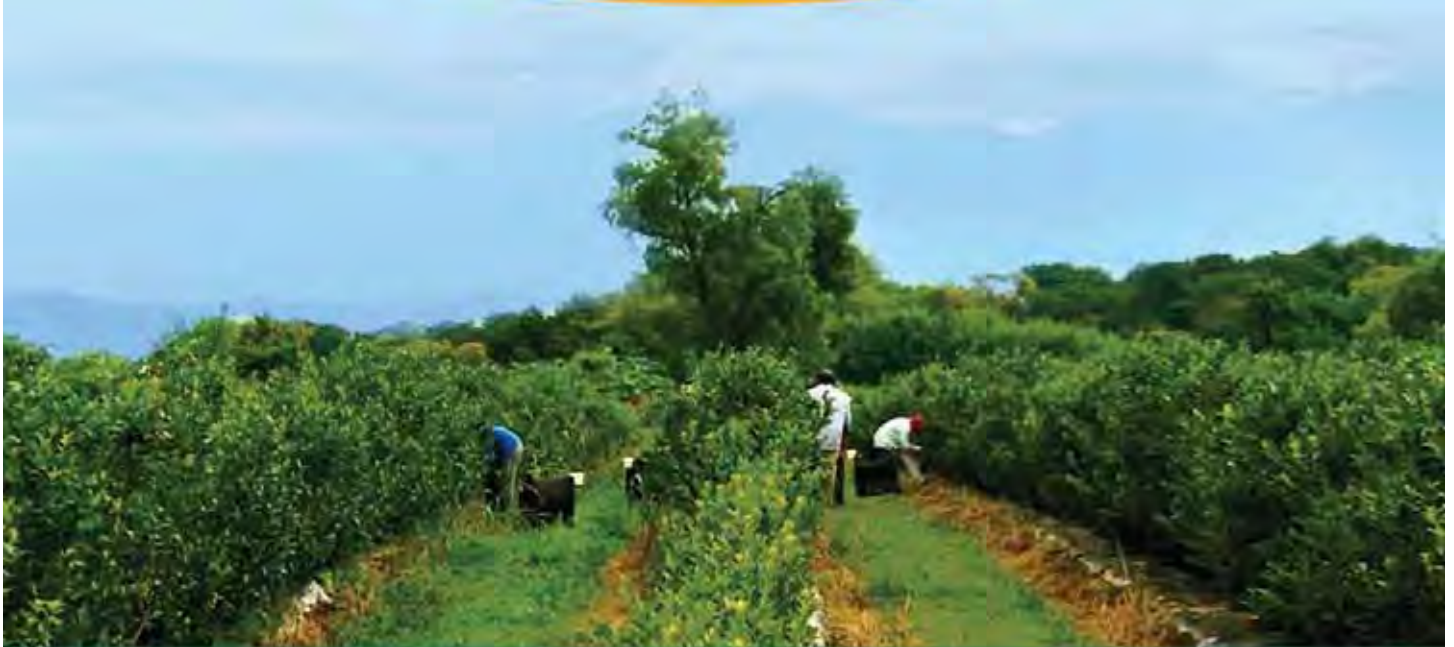
90s, when I was general manager and executive chef at Dean & DeLuca, Michael was my salesman before he became head dog. When I work with Michael, he understands the little details and how a certain variety of radicchio leaf can totally enhance a dish..."

"When I select an item, the first criteria is that it has to taste good," says Michener, rigorously testing for the freshest ingredients and waking up discerning palettes with an array of creative recipes and flavor profiles; the second criteria is bringing in unique, artisan products and special packaging, he continues, and the third is price. "Nobody knows value better than a New Yorker."

A theater of sweet and savory choices, service stations, self-serve cases, and a gourmet coffee bar tantalize customers as they're pulled this way and that toward aromas and eye-catching displays. A popular and entertaining draw, the customized crepe station offers a varied menu of



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flexible choices segmented by price. For pure and simple at \$6.95, the list includes brown sugar and lingonberries, Nutella and bananas, an orange crepe or one with apples and honey, while the Chef's \$8 menu offers more hearty protein crepes such as the grilled chicken, smoked portabella, cheddar combination, a Tuscan ham, tomato, basil and artisan cheese. Customers are free to compose their own creation if nothing from the menu strikes their fancy.

In another bustling area, two service people work in tandem behind the counter as a long line accumulates during the lunch rush. They help professionals, who work in the area, pick from a case brandishing signature pre-made artisan sandwiches, gourmet salads and lunch entrees.

"My favorite sandwich is the Gorgonzola, arugula and pear on this special artisan bread handmade from grape must yeast by a company in South Fork, Long Island," recommends one enthusiastic employee. He points a regular customer he now knows on a first-name basis to "the unexpected blend and texture of the baguette of radishes, sprouts, cucumber, smoked salmon and herb cream cheese spread, with a side of the pea and edamame salad."



Rick Michener, Kings/Balducci's director of business development, played a lead role in launching the cafe.

Soon the chef will rotate in a fresh variety of homemade dinner options from exclusive recipes, including Kobe roast beef, feta cheese, spinach and roasted pepper aioli; Speck, an Italian, cured, smoked meat, Fontina cheese, in a vegetable medley; and a portabella, provolone tartan.

The one-of-a-kind, service salad bar is another standout. "On the salad bar strategy," says Michener, "one thing that drives me nuts is salad bar places that nickel-and-dime you for the number of ingredients you choose and the weight of those items. 'I said, 'Let's just do it like this, give everyone everything they want for a fair price.' The options are anything but generic, including a wide variety of fresh lettuces, vegetables, herbs, fruits and nuts, integrating local and seasonal items.

"We're spending a great deal of time educating and training our employees on how to properly handle produce and sharing the stories behind our ingredients and recipes so that they can relay that information to our customers," says Michener.

The ambiance is a real blending of new and old. "This is a grand landmark building from the 1930s. We used solid stone granite tile flooring and reconfigured the merchandising around the

huge white support pillars," Michener adds. "We utilize adjustable merchandising racks to market a targeted collection of Balducci's proprietary products, and high hanging baskets for related kitchen items."

"We're on the cusp of business and residential. A Whole Foods Market is nearby, and that's great. Some people think they'll live until they're 100 if they only eat organic products, but customers tell me they're so glad we're here."

In executing the Gourmet On The Go concept, Michener took a very unorthodox approach: smooth marble counters are designed ergonomically so that customers can stand and rest their elbows while they eat, but there is no seating. "European cafés don't always have chairs. We have a good amount of traffic and I don't want this atmosphere to turn into an office like Starbuck's," he says. "I explain to new customers when they ask why we don't have stools that we want to maintain a steady in-and-out flow. People can hang out 20 minutes to enjoy a bite to eat, but we don't want them camping out. We are trying to please a lot of busy customers. This is New York City after all."

pb

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# MORTON WILLIAMS: Celebrating 55 Years In New York City, Neighborhood By Neighborhood

BY MIRA SLOTT

All the right produce and not a square inch of coveted space squandered. This family-owned regional chain of 12 stores in the New York Metropolitan area reflects the eclectic needs of each distinct community.

A visit to Manhattan's biggest store at 130 Bleecker Street — 12,000 to 15,000 square feet — melds the character and charm of the Washington Square Park area inside and out. From neighborhood street signs above the aisles to the city traffic lights flashing at checkout, the produce department is unquestionably the main attraction. Filling the senses upon entering, the shelves are strategically packed to the brim to maximize SKU variety, beautifully merchandised and color blocked.

Dating back to 1946, Morton Williams has mastered the art of limited space and diverse city nuances, evolving to accommodate changing times and preferences on a customized niche



Andrew Lalla, produce manager, and Marc Goldman, director of produce.

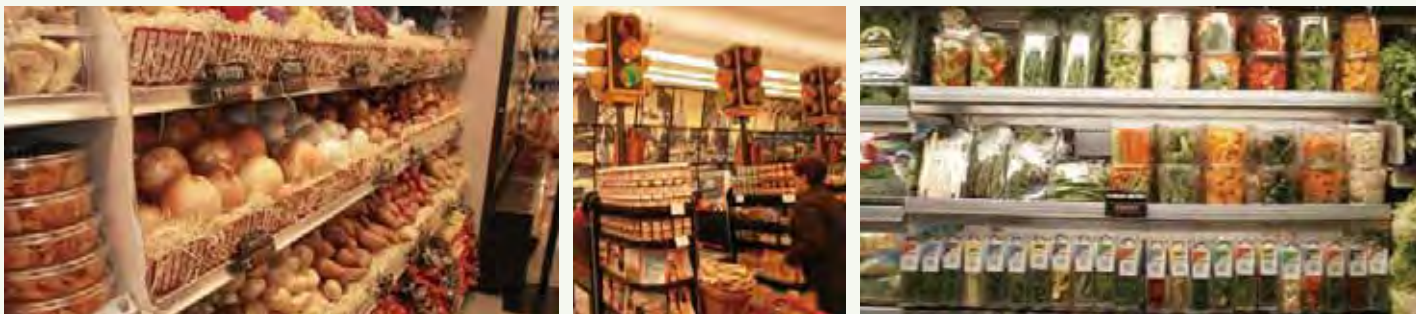
basis, according to Marc Goldman, produce director. Fifteen years at Morton Williams, Goldman's industry expertise spans 34 years. "I worked in Hunts Point Market for awhile and had a wholesale business selling to restaurants and delis," he says.

Morton Williams remains a diehard loyalist to the Hunts Point Market. The regional chain foregoes a warehouse and the inventory storage headaches and takes advantage of what the largest produce terminal market in the world has to offer. "We buy everything on the Market. We're probably the largest single chain still buying from Hunts Point Market on a regular basis," says Goldman, noting the gradual departure of super-market chains veering toward direct contract buying. "We have four trucks at the Market every

day. Our buyer is R.O.D.E Produce Brokerage, which procures the majority of our product." Morton Williams also uses RLB Food Distributors based in Caldwell, NJ, and Mr. Mushroom out of Brooklyn, he says.

Does Goldman miss the gritty, dynamic vibe of waking up before dawn and walking Hunts Point Market personally? "I went to Hunts Point Market for five years every day. Sometimes it helps to go down myself. It's good to take a walk, get a real feel for what's going on and see the sheer amount of items, which has escalated dramatically since I started."

With space at a premium, customers are treated to a surprising mix of loose, packaged and fresh-cut fruits and vegetables in all shapes and sizes, ranging from staples to apartment



dwellers' single-serve herb packs and gourmand edible flowers to an impressive self-serve display of bulk dried fruits and nuts, and a substantial salad bar. This store is open 24 hours. "If the neighborhood calls for it, we accommodate," Goldman emphasizes.

While decidedly more labor-intensive, Morton William's tactic is stacking minimum quantities of each SKU to get the utmost variety on the shelves at a given time, says Goldman. "We have to turn product quickly and keep refilling," he says. "We use every inch of space. There is no place wasted. At the same time, customers don't want to see boxes on the floor. We don't want clutter," he implores of the astute organization. "Our store by Columbia University is much smaller, so we have little displays with half-size boxes we're constantly filling up."

The Bleecker store yields a more expansive produce department with more employees to service it, but still requires inventory resourcefulness. "Dole has 30 varieties of salad, but we have space for 10. We have to rotate around," Goldman continues. "We get our product from Rubin Bros. Produce Corp. on Hunts Point Market. Cary Rubin does a really good job helping me with the salads. This is one of our better organic stores, so Organic Girl salads do well. If Whole Foods is in the middle, we don't push organic."

Manhattan customers like the international flavors, and local is not as big, says Goldman, of the produce coming in from everywhere, noting, "We try and bring in local when available, when it's fresher and better quality. Things are expensive in Manhattan, so we're looking to provide as much value as possible."

In the suburbs, you see a large supermarket chain merchandise bananas at various stages of ripeness and consumers stock up. "We do well with bananas, but people want them ripe to eat now. Most of our customers don't have space in their apartments to store unripe bananas," Goldman notes.

"The business has changed dramatically in Manhattan, with an emphasis on fresh-cut produce and prepared foods," he says. Morton Williams commits labor in store to create a full range of fresh-cut fruit and vegetable offerings. "It's turned into one full-time person here cutting fresh fruits



and vegetables all day," says Goldman, adding, "We get items like the fresh fruit yogurt with granola and homemade salsa from RLB, which is starting to do private label for us as well. Goldman says he uses RLB to complement and balance his Hunts Point Market business. "RLB product can be a little higher end than the Market, providing more specialty items and value-added choices."

"Since the economy went south, we see more customers gravitating toward the sale items," says Goldman. Promotions usually require good preplanning. "We have to make our ads three weeks out. RLB gives me all the information I need, and we rely on the consistent quantities, quality and pricing in these instances. It's very hard to do that at Hunts Point Market," he says.

The Hunts Point Market opens other opportunities, however. Recently, for example, "I got a call from Melissa's Produce alerting me that Sumo oranges, a cross between a Mandarin and Navel, were just in from California. I was able to act quickly, and had my truck pick up a few cases from the Market. I have to say this was the best citrus I ever had — tons of juice and so sweet." He continues, "We could only spare a couple of boxes for each store. While the stores highlighted these

gems in baskets upfront, this is the kind of product that unless you taste it, you would pass right by it," he explains. "Produce managers were right there slicing juicy samples for consumers to try. The experience was memorable," according to Goldman, adding, "It's tough to excite consumers in New York City."

In Manhattan, you can go three blocks and find a completely different store and customer base. "I have very good produce managers. They're in the stores 10 hours a day and know the customers better than I do. They show me what sells and what doesn't," says Goldman. "I bring all the produce managers with me to the trade shows to let them see everything going on and they appreciate being able to take that experience back to the store level."

The personal touch extends to home deliveries. "We get to know people when they call and are able to customize orders," says Goldman. "Andrew Lalla, the produce manager at the Bleecker Street location, has been here since the store was a Grand Union. Everyone knows him. All the old ladies come over and kiss him!" says Goldman, adding, "We're 10 years in the neighborhood and a real part of the community."

**pb**

## MORTON WILLIAMS

130 Bleecker Street  
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## A&J SEABRA

This Portuguese family chain gives diverse ethnic customers what they can't get at their mainstream supermarket. BY MIRA SLOTT

**A**&J Seabra, a Portuguese family-owned chain, rooted in Newark, NJ, would never be mistaken for your typical American supermarket.

Neighboring residents of the 260 Lafayette Street store, in Newark, NJ, are quite familiar with the family moniker, immersed within community establishments that family members own, including a handful of restaurants/cafes, bakeries, a printing company, trucking business and other commercial/residential real estate in the area. But the chain caters to a wider following, including Portuguese, Brazilian, Polish, Filipino, and Hispanic residents, among the varied customer base. They flock to A&J Seabra for a solid range of economical, value-oriented produce predominantly displayed the loose, old-fashioned, tactile way, and to



Tony Seabra, director of operations

replenish hard-to-find foreign grocery and perishable items lacking on the shelves of their local conventional supermarkets.

On a balmy weekday afternoon visit to the bustling, unpretentious 25-year-old store, open market-style wooden bins out front overflow with bulk, low-priced produce, adjacent to 20-lb. burlap bags of imported Portuguese *arroz* (rice) and multi-lingual signage, a hint of the international zest inside the doors, which open directly into the produce department.

"We do big, big volume in produce at retail — \$120,000 a week in produce alone at this store," says Tony Seabra, the chain's director of operations, adding, "Thirty-five percent of the store is produce. Produce is the highest volume mover in the store. It's always been like that. We're known for our produce, getting the best value tailored to our customers' needs."

People like to smell and touch the produce, like

they're picking it fresh off the tree, according to Seabra. They want the farmer's market feel — loose, not packaged. Some buy more for big families and want volume. There's something for everyone. "We don't waste produce," he continues. For example, a shopper stocks up on slightly overripe Roma tomatoes that may not be the fancy, premium grade, but are ideal for cooking. The chain also does its own fresh-cut fruits and vegetables daily. "We've got seven produce people in the back, in addition to the crew."

Seabra says he capitalizes on the scope and flexibility of Hunts Point Market and the resourcefulness of the family's savvy, multi-million dollar import business. "At 5:00 a.m. our produce manager is at the Market. We buy many trailer loads at a very good price. Most of the bulk comes to this location and we send trucks out from here," he says. "We are able to have the lowest prices around by selling a lot of volume,"



he contends, pointing out that the chain also benefits from economies of scale “because of all our connected businesses.”

A&J Seabra began as a small corner store famous for its homemade sausages some 43 years ago. Americo and Jose Seabra are the father-son team and the A&J namesake behind the store — Jose had been his only son at the time he started the business. As he had more sons, they assumed their roles in the family business. Americo, Jr. and Albano now own the A&J Seabra stores, while Tony, another son, is the owner of the import business in Deerfield Beach, FL. The chain currently has a total of 12 stores, six in New Jersey, with the other half in Massachusetts. All the kids are involved in different aspects of the family empire as well, adds Seabra.

“Often, we’re the only carriers for some of these products. We bring in certain Portuguese, Brazilian, Costa Rican and Mexican items that the local Shop Rite or Pathmark won’t carry,” says Seabra, noting imported Sumol orange drink, Luso bottled water and a stream of fresh fish varieties direct from Portugal. “People come from all over to buy in bulk,” he says, taking advantage of a loyalty card program, where customers accumulate points for 10-percent-off shopping sprees.

“If you come in on a Saturday or Sunday, you have to wait your turn in the parking lot. We get 22,000 customers in the Lafayette Street store,” he says adding, “We expect to expand all the way past where the parking lot ends because the amount of customers is too much. We need more room.”

A&J Seabra New Jersey stores are in close proximity, but they are separated by friendly competition, notes Seabra, adding, “We’re looking to add more stores in New Jersey.” Seabra is a first cousin, who was ushered into the business a couple of years ago to work as finance supervisor for the Lafayette Street store, but quickly moved his way into his current position, and now he’s hooked. “This is a non-stop operation. The produce manager lives across the street in one of the family homes,” he explains, pointing to the residential building outside the Lafayette Street store. “Most everyone here speaks a couple of languages to better communicate with our customers.”

A produce employee is helping a mother juggling three children to her car with a full load of groceries, chatting with the family in Portuguese.



Meanwhile, an A&J Seabra van is shuttling some neighborhood regulars, who spontaneously called to be picked up from their homes to shop. “You don’t have to schedule in advance. We’ll pick up

customers from their homes; they come in and shop; we’ll help them load up; and then we’ll take them home — door-to-door service. We’re very customer-oriented.”

**pb**

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## Be Aware and Be Prepared

Undetected and unexpected, Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is claiming our youth. Cardiovascular disease is the second leading medical cause of death in children and adolescents in the United States. Data estimates that 1 in 50 high schools have a SCA in a student on school grounds each year. Affected youth usually appear healthy and normal...until they have an arrest. The good news is that early detection is possible, heart conditions are treatable and young lives can be saved. Knowledge of the observations and actions that can make the difference between life and death are key to a successful outcome.

Early detection is crucial. The Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation promotes the early detection of heart conditions in youth through heart screenings. Frequently, the warning signs and symptoms of a heart condition in youth go undetected.

Most occurrences of SCA in youth occur in public places. The increased availability of publicly accessible automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in schools and school-sponsored athletic events will dramatically increase the probability that youth and adults alike will survive a sudden cardiac arrest. Knowing and properly executing the critically time-urgent links of the Cardiac Chain-of-Survival can help save the life of someone in SCA.

In June of 2002, Governor George Pataki of New York signed Louis' Law, which requires AEDs in all New York public schools. To date 60 lives have been saved as a direct result of this law in New York public schools. Each time a vibrant, seemingly healthy child suffers a Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA), the Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation mission of protecting youth from SCA and preventable Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD) becomes even more critical. We know it happens and we need to collectively assure others realize it by sharing our Mission and Vision.

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# Garlic: The Silent Star Of Produce

Garlic's exclusive flavor and lasting popularity endure the test of time in produce. **BY JANEL LEITNER**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER RANCH LLC

Garlic is often cross-merchandised with tomatoes and avocados, especially for holidays such as Cinco de Mayo.

**G**arlic has a long history, and its versatility and flavor profile last from present dishes far into the future of cooking, making it a silent star in the produce department. “Garlic goes back to ancient times, and it has always been popular, whether added as an ingredient, roasted on bread or used fresh,” states Ian Zimmerman, sales and operations manager of Maurice A. Auerbach Inc., based in Secaucus, NJ.

“It is a high-profit, low-shrink item with a lot of diversity in countless recipes,” asserts Louis Hymel, director of purchasing/marketing with Spice World Inc., in Orlando, FL. “It drives incremental sales of many different items with endless cross-merchandising opportunities.”

Jim Provost, president of I Love Produce LLC, in Kelton, PA, says, “Garlic is a staple item and an integral part of many cuisines including Chinese, Italian, Spanish, Mexican, Indian and Thai. It helps add flavor, and increases the use of other vegetables such as tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, string beans and greens.”

The increased interest in gourmet and ethnic cooking has helped promote garlic. Anthony Sharrino, president of Eaton & Eustice Co., headquartered in Chelsea, MA, suggests, “People have become more educated through

the years and are cooking more ethnic meals. There is no way you can cook this type of cuisine without garlic.”

“Garlic adds flavor in a big, bold way when used raw, or in a smooth mellow way when roasted,” adds Patsy Ross, vice president of marketing with Christopher Ranch LLC, in Gilroy, CA. “It’s an important ingredient for people who really like to cook.”

Consumers have long been aware of garlic’s health benefits. “For 90 years, garlic has been touted as having many nutritious properties and has gotten very good press in regards to lowering blood pressure and being good for your heart,” states Zimmerman.

Recent publicity has rejuvenated this focus on health. Provost reports, “Dr. Oz did a show about superfoods that included black garlic and how it helps prevent aging, etc. You can imagine how many people wanted to buy that!”

## Quality And Location Sell

A display with good looking, top quality product will catch consumers’ attention. “Garlic is an important ingredient in a lot of dishes, but it often doesn’t make the grocery list, so properly merchandising the garlic is crucial,” adds Ross.

Promoting garlic year-round begins with a

good quality product. “Everything is really about quality and price,” explains Sharrino. “You must have good quality, and it starts with a good crop. It’s about supply, demand, quality and appearance, which means absolutely no staining on the product, plus it has to be pure and hard as a bullet,” he details.

“Make sure the garlic looks fresh in the bulk bulbs,” adds Bob Lords, a sale associate at The Garlic Co., headquartered in Bakersfield, CA. “Sprouting or old-looking garlic will be unappealing to consumers.”

“Garlic should be handled and merchandised like all fresh produce,” states Keith Cox, produce category manager of K-VA-T Food Stores, a 104-unit chain based in Abingdon, VA. “Bulk garlic should be fresh and well maintained, and jarred garlic should be well stocked and with a good sell-by date.”

Since garlic is used to enhance flavor, it makes sense to display it next to commodities it complements. “Usually, garlic is placed next to the onions,” notes Salvatore Vacca, president of A. J. Trucco Inc., in the Bronx, NY. “It could also be placed next to vegetables that require garlic, such as broccoli rabe or tomatoes, which would inspire a marinara sauce.”

“Garlic is a diverse item and complements a variety of foods,” acknowledges Hymel of

Spice World Inc. “The combinations are countless, but most recently we saw garlic cross-merchandised with tomatoes and avocados for Cinco de Mayo.”

Creativity in garlic displays encourage sales. “We recommend merchandising garlic next to tomatoes and avocados,” states Ross of Christopher Ranch. “Think ‘Italian Flag’ with the red and green setting off the white of the garlic. This increases visibility of the garlic, as well as sales.”

Sharrino of Eaton & Eustice suggests placing garlic near herbs such as cilantro.

“Maintain supplemental displays throughout the department,” Cox advises. “Bulk garlic always goes well with the tomato display.”



items,” suggests Hymel. “Keep the display full — stack it high and watch it fly!”

“A big part of moving garlic is making it easy for the consumer to find it,” explains Lords of The Garlic Co. “Once consumers find it, they buy it. For us in the business the challenge is

putting it in the right spot.”

“A lot of people can have trouble finding garlic,” says Nancy Grace, produce manager of George’s Dreshertown Shop N Bag, an independent upscale family-owned supermarket in Dresher, PA. “We put it on the end counter and display it nicely so it faces the shoppers. They see it better this way.”

Cox of K-VA-T Food Stores adds, “A good allocation of all varieties should be maintained in a high-traffic location.”

Make garlic a destination. Provost of I Love Produce shares, “We suggest making a one-stop-shop for the garlic category.”

“A big display of garlic, particularly in the summer months, or two to three times a year will definitely increase sales,” adds Ross of Christopher Ranch. “A garlic center also helps consumers find the type of garlic they would like to buy or try.”

Stores are advised not to limit themselves on

### Make Displays Visible And Full

Easy visibility for the consumer is key for increasing product sales. “The more exposure the better, especially with many different garlic

## LET THE CONSUMERS CHOOSE — DOMESTIC OR IMPORTS... OR BOTH

Domestic and imported garlic can work hand-in-hand to produce one outcome: a good profit. “Garlic comes from many growing areas, and it’s a once-a-year harvest no matter where it’s grown,” states Ian Zimmerman, sales and operations manager of Maurice A. Auerbach Inc., based in Secaucus, NJ. “California plants in late September/October and harvests in late May to late June, and sometimes into July, so it’s a long growing season. Some places may only want California garlic, and buyers can accomplish this through cold storage. However, when it gets to the end of its shelf-life, it isn’t as fresh as the newer sources, for example the Mexican purple garlic.”

“California garlic is an important component of our program for retailers with customers who want something other than Chinese garlic,” says Jim Provost, president of I Love Produce LLC, in Kelton, PA. “In order to keep the freshest garlic on the shelf for our customers, we carry Southern Hemisphere garlic grown in Argentina during the California storage season. Much like Chilean grapes are available in U.S. supermarkets throughout the winter and spring, we have Argentinean garlic to cover the California off-season.”

Consumers look at country-of-origin, especially those interested in supporting local produce. Bob Lords, a sale associate at The Garlic Co., headquartered in Bakersfield, CA, explains, “The country-of-origin labeling is very important to all of us in produce, and I think the ‘buy local’ movement is gaining more and more popularity, which obviously is positive when promoting California garlic.”

“The stores should be differentiating the garlic with the correct country-of-origin labeling,” says Patsy Ross, vice president of marketing with Christopher Ranch LLC, in Gilroy, CA. “I think consumers definitely are interested in where their garlic

is coming from.”

“Though Chinese garlic tends to be cleaner looking and less expensive, our customers are very aware of what they’re buying as far as garlic is concerned,” reports Nancy Grace, produce manager of George’s Dreshertown Shop N Bag, an independent upscale family-owned supermarket in Dresher, PA. “We see a lot of people choosing to buy local. The country-of-origin labeling is important in that aspect.”

Keith Cox, produce category manager of K-VA-T Food Stores, a 104-unit chain based in Abingdon, VA, agrees, “Consumers tend to look at the country-of-origin.”

Knowledge of the flavor profiles of the different growing regions can be important. “When garlic first came to the United States 80 years ago, it was brought here by immigrants of Mediterranean descent,” explains Lords, “so the garlic grown in California actually came from those Mediterranean origins and has that European flavor to which many chefs are accustomed. The Chinese garlic is a different variety and is more pungent. It doesn’t have that lingering garlic aroma,” he continues. “Garlic choice depends on the recipe so, for example, a chef designing an Asian recipe may be more inclined to use the Chinese garlic. It is all about the flavor profile and what the chef is trying to accomplish.”

Cox acknowledges, “Consumers are better educated today in the many uses and types of garlic offered.”

“What has been shown is if you give consumers choices and carry California bulk and Chinese packaged garlic, both products will sell and it will increase the overall dollars and volume sales from the category,” explains Provost. “After all, does it not come down to value to the consumer? And the consumer votes with dollars!”

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displays. Lords explains, “The consumer is used to finding garlic everywhere in the store, so having the garlic spread throughout the store may help sales. For example, peeled and fresh diced is in the value-added section, jarred is sometimes in the spice section.”

“Retailers must pay attention to displays by making sure to rotate properly, as product will dehydrate if left at room temperature for a long time,” explains Sharrino of Eaton & Eustice. “Keeping the display bulked up and fresh looking will make the customer want to buy it.”

Cox agrees, “The garlic display must be fresh, full, and include a full-line of varieties.”

### A Little Promotion Goes A Long Way

Partnering in promotion can help push garlic into customers’ carts. “We work with the individual stores for the right promotion program for them,” states Ross. “We do offer some great display boxes that hold fresh garlic and offer a way to catch the eye of the shopper.”

“We have some great in-store displays for added exposure for our Squeeze Garlic,” reports Hymel of Spice World. “Consumers are now using garlic in many different ways never thought of before.”

Take advantage of special “seasonal” events to advertise garlic. “We offer many different programs during the year,” adds Hymel, “many of which are based on different holidays and events.”

Ross suggests two to three promotions of fresh garlic sales during the year. “Harvest or summer months, plus Halloween/fall and winter holidays all are great opportunities to reach the home cook,” he details.

Retailers may find it beneficial to promote trends. “Retailers shouldn’t miss out on the newer fresh, convenient, consumer-friendly ideas out there,” states Lords of The Garlic Co. “These newer products are exciting. Though it sometimes means making a new footprint in a

different direction, it is important to keep an open mind to what consumers might be interested in.”

Promoting a variety of choices secures sales. “Consumers want garlic and they want options with their garlic,” states Ross of Christopher Ranch.

Pricing and presentation introduce additional options. “Chinese packaged garlic sold in five-bulb sleeves adds an important component to garlic sales and should not be ignored as a way to grow the category,” explains Provost of I Love Produce. “The unit cost of a five-bulb package has consistently been under \$.50 per unit for the last year, allowing an every day price of 99 cents. This is ideal for promoting ‘Buck-A-Bag’ sales and ‘BO-GOs.’ Sleeve garlic or

five-bulb garlic is very uniform, easy to stack and individually UPC-coded for an easy ring at check out. It is a clean, attractive and a low maintenance way to merchandise part of your garlic section.”

Keep a wide variety of consumers in mind when promoting bulk and packaged garlic. “Our customers will sell bulk garlic for \$2.99 or even \$3.99 per pound from California and make a strong margin and sell packaged garlic at 99 cents to increase movement and meet the price point for their value customers,” shares Provost.

Education also helps drive sales. “Display and promotion are important, but it is also important to teach the consumer about the quality of garlic,” explains Vic Carnevale, president of Veg-Pak Produce Ltd., in Toronto,



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### Don't Overlook Value-Added

Value-added garlic products show lucrative signs of growth. "Consumers are always looking for value-added garlic items," acknowledges Hymel of Spice World Inc.

"A lot of value-added products exist, such as whole peeled, chopped, crushed and ready-to-use," explains Sharrino of Eaton & Eustice. "Whole peeled, especially for the foodservice

industry, is a trend that has increased in the past few years."

"There has been growth in lots of different types of garlic products, including fresh, peeled, jarred, and tubes," says Ross of Christopher Ranch. "Some are a dry product and some require refrigeration."

Consumers are catching on to what restaurants have known for years. "Peeled has been increasing in growth in sales," agrees Vacca of Trucco.

"Today, if you go to any restaurant and they

**"Usually garlic is placed next to the onions. It could also be placed next to vegetables that require garlic, such as broccoli rabe or tomatoes, which would inspire a marinara sauce."**

— Salvatore Vacca, A. J. Trucco Inc

use garlic as an ingredient, they have bags or jars of whole peeled garlic," explains Lords of The Garlic Co. "We have recently been selling garlic in 6- or 8-oz. jars to consumers and trying to get them to see the convenience."

"We have taken our vacuum-packed whole peeled garlic one step further and we are now offering diced garlic in vacuum-packed pouches," continues Lords. "They are merchandised near the packaged salads and are consumer-friendly so they can have fresh, ready to use garlic without chopping cloves. With these bags, the shelf-life is better, they are individually packaged and it is a way for consumers to use fresh garlic in an easy, non-smelly, non-messy way."

In today's fast paced cooking world, a more convenient way of adding the flavor of garlic is gaining positive feedback. "Processed garlic plays a huge roll in sales due to the ease for the consumer," recognizes Cox of K-VA-T Food Stores.

Hymel reports, "We introduced Squeeze Garlic, which allows consumers to use garlic not just as an ingredient but as a condiment."

"The squeeze garlic is a hot trend and can be used for multiple recipes," agrees Cox. "Since the squeeze garlic is so popular, we are displaying shipper displays, which have driven sales."

The value-added products add to consumer options. "A full line of garlic products gives the consumer a choice," says Ross of Christopher Ranch. "For example, fresh garlic in the bulb form for the traditional cook, peeled garlic cloves for those who still want fresh but some of the work removed, processed garlic for the folks in the biggest hurry."

Hymel adds, "When retailers carry a full line of garlic items, the consumers then have the ability to fulfill recipe requirements,"

"We carry a full line of garlic products," agrees Grace of Shop N Bag. "However, we don't see any noticeable sales growth in the value-added."

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# What's New In Dallas/Fort Worth?



Despite a tight economy, many Dallas area businesses are finding the keys to success as they expand facilities, staff and services. **BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE**



**T**he Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex is the center point and a premier distribution hub for the entire United States for produce arriving from all over the world. Its central location, diverse demographics and abundance of produce offerings describe the region's unique fit into the produce industry. It is a major point of international and domestic distribution, while its growing ethnic diversity creates a lively cultural center for all ages. The geographic and economic benefits that come from the city's distribution efforts have also served to attract members of the international business community.

Produce wholesalers here concur that Dallas/Fort Worth has held up better than many comparable regions during the economic downturn. Nonetheless, business has been tougher in recent years. As a result, companies have worked to adapt to the changing buying and selling climates, while several long-standing companies have been forced to close their doors.

Those that remain are finding ways to survive, and even thrive. The companies listed below are expanding offerings and sales staff, constructing new and bigger operations facilities, and taking on new partners. Realizing the importance of value-added services to their clients, they are also stepping up their food safety programs and implementing new technological advancements. Additionally, they have their fingers on the pulse of important industry issues and are offering their support to ethnic trends and continual popu-

larity of locally grown produce.

**Combs Produce, Dallas, TX:** This three-generation tomato repacker and fresh produce distributor is under new ownership. Immokalee, FL-based Lipman Farming acquired Combs Produce. The finalization of the acquisition was officially announced on May 31.

In a move that expands the Florida company's access to the Southwest, Lipman has been a long-time strategic partner with Combs, according to Lipman CEO Kent Shoemaker. "The Southwest market is a key component of our growth plan. Combs Produce was our first choice and simply the perfect fit," he noted in a statement from the company. "They are highly respected in the fresh produce industry and share our core values. We are confident their customers will benefit from our farming company. We are pleased to welcome Brett Combs and his team to Lipman."

Combs, grandson of the founder, has been a part of the company leadership since 1990, and serves as general manager of the Dallas facility. Founded in 1958 by J.C. Combs, Combs Produce has grown to be one of the largest tomato re-packers in the Southwest region. Over the past four decades, the company has evolved into a full-line produce distributor.

"There is a tremendous opportunity in our region," notes Brett Combs. "Our people have provided first-rate customer service



The staff of Combs Produce at the United Fresh convention include Van Argiros, Tim Rogers and Vance Vonderheid.



Pam Dunning, Growers Exchange Co. Inc.



FreshPoint Dallas staff at the United Fresh convention include Bary Ramage, Shane Lovell and Joe Dodd Morrison.

that has allowed us to grow. By becoming a part of Lipman, we will have 'access to the acre.' Our customers want to deal directly with farmers, and now we are part of a farming company."

Most executives from Combs Produce retained their jobs after the Lipman acquisition, but some were not a part of the deal, according to a statement from Darren Micelle, Lipman's chief marketing and operations officer. Former Combs CEO Jeff Partridge is part of another ownership group affiliated with Combs and did not move forward with Lipman. Van Argiros remains as vice president of

sales and marketing, and is taking on an expanded, national role with Lipman. James Baker continues as foodservice sales manager.

Combs is Lipman's third acquisition in the past year and expands the company's reach in Texas, as well as Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arkansas.

The new ownership comes on the heels of Combs' launching of new services and product lines — JC's Local and Calidad. Both were officially introduced at the United Fresh Expo 2012 in Dallas in May.

JC's Local offshoot offers foodservice and retail customers an expanded line of

locally sourced, fresh delivered products "from trusted growing partners in the customer's state and/or region," details Argiros. "We are committed to strategically evolving our business in order to provide our customers with real solutions that meet their ever growing and evolving needs. Based on the growing demand for regionally and locally sourced produce, we designed JC's Local to be a resource for farm-fresh fruits and vegetables for our foodservice, retail and wholesale partners."

"Providing locally grown produce is a win-win scenario for both our customers and Combs Produce," adds Baker. "The JC's



Four members of the Ideal Sales staff include T. Huffhines, Butch Flinn, Joe Price and Sherman LaBarba.

Local program serves as a connection point direct to the farm, giving our customers a great story to tell about the products that they include in their menu or make available on store shelves."

The second new line launched at the United Expo was Calidad, Combs' Hispanic product label. "Calidad," meaning quality, "offers freshness and value, backed by the trusted Combs name," says Argiros. The line will offer seasonal produce and year-round offerings like jalapenos, Serrano peppers, Poblano peppers, Anaheim peppers, tomatillos, Roma tomatoes and avocados. "Eventually, Calidad will have a full line of Hispanic product running through the Combs Produce McAllen FOB facility, allowing for fresher products and guaranteed quality straight from the source in Mexico," explains Martin Moreno, hispanic director. "Calidad takes Combs to a new level. We aren't offering just a line of Hispanic produce items. We provide all-around expertise, from knowledge about fresh product trends to merchandising and menu solutions for foodservice and retail customers."

The Combs FOB service out of McAllen is also relatively new. The McAllen facet was initiated officially for the company on March 1. According to Doug Dobbs, chief operating officer of Combs Produce, "The McAllen FOB service gives us visibility and a reliable footprint in Mexico. Our own sourcing program ensures customers receive products that exemplify the high quality they've come to expect." The service has the potential to evolve into broader product offerings and services, he adds.

**Ideal Sales Inc., Dallas, TX:** T. Huffhines has joined the sales staff, reports Sherman LaBarba, a company owner and president. Huffhines was most recently affiliated with Sysco Foods as director of perishables.

Huffhines' 25-plus years of produce experience in the region also include stints at Ben E. Keith Co. and Adams Produce Co. LaBarba says Huffhines' focus will be on the foodservice sector. "We're working on expanding our foodservice business, and Huffhines has a good understanding of the needs and desires of that clientele."

In further efforts to enhance service, Ideal Sales continues to expand the use of Harvest Select, its Dallas warehouse. "Harvest Select has helped us to provide additional options for customers," LaBarba notes, "especially with items that may be harder to get. We also provide in-time delivery to customers and carry added inventory in case someone is suddenly short on an item or a truck is late. In general, the warehouse has helped service our regular customers better."

LaBarba specializes in potato procurement. Other staff members include another owner, Jason LaBarba; Gary Price, who handles onions and potatoes; and Susie Lacy and Joe Price who specialize in mixed vegetables.

**Growers Exchange Co. Inc., Fort Worth, TX:** Industry veteran Pam Dunning leads the newly opened Dallas/Fort Worth branch of Fort Fairfield, ME-based Growers Exchange Co. Dunning, who handles all produce sales but specializes in potatoes, reports that the additional outsourcing of eastern supplies "will round out my potato supply chain for my customers."

Dunning brings more than 25 years of produce buying and sales experience, including stints with four Dallas/Fort Worth-based firms, and with Mountain Valley Produce LLC., in Center, CO. She says the round white potatoes, Yukon Golds, and Russet varieties she will access through the Maine office will expand options available to clients in Dallas-Fort Worth, as well as customers with whom she does business

from other major potato-producing regions. She adds, "Hopefully, I'll be able to provide additional assistance with western supplies and services for GFE's existing East Coast clientele as well."

**Tom Lange Co., Rockwall, TX:** A change in leadership and office relocation have been major changes from this Texas division of the Springfield, IL-based Tom Lange Co.

Tim Rose, an 18-year Lange veteran, took over the Dallas/Ft. Worth area office as vice president of sales when Darrell Wolven retired last fall. Rose has been with the Dallas-area Lange office since the beginning of his produce career.

Relating to the office move, Rose notes, "Most of us live out in this vicinity, and we were limited on space at our old location." A continual increase in transportation logistics needs provided yet another reason for the new location. Brandon Powell now heads up Lange's Dallas/Ft. Worth logistics operation. Rose says the additional transportation help is especially important through the busy summer season when trucks are harder to find. He also notes that Rockwall County has had "the most job growth of any county in the United States."

**Brothers Produce Inc., Friendswood, TX:** The Houston-based company has expanded its facility with an additional 20,000 square feet on Produce Row in Houston. It also plans to take on an additional 30,000 square feet on the other side of its existing location this summer, according to vice president Brent Erenwert.

This follows the expansion at its Friendswood, TX, facility a few years ago, with the addition of about 20,000 square feet, according to Jason Erenwert, buyer.

With more than 80 percent of its customers in foodservice, Brothers Produce has added services such as cross-docking and bagging fruit for customers in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex.

The Brothers Produce Dallas-area branch opened in 2003. "We saw a great potential opportunity in this market area," Erenwert notes. "We expect things to get even better. We've got a great team here, with all the experience in the world."

**Ben E. Keith Co., Fort Worth, TX:** Construction is expected to be complete within the next year on a new distribution facility in Houston, according to Bill Sewell, director of produce, who estimates that

more than 200 truckloads weekly are already being delivered to the Houston area.

Sewell says the Houston location is closer to its Louisiana customers, and as such, will offer improved service to that state. The new facility will supply southern Texas from College Station through Houston and east into Louisiana.

**Murphy Tomatoes, Grand Prairie, TX:** The San Antonio, TX-based company

opened a warehouse in the Dallas-Fort Worth suburb of Arlington earlier this year. The facility includes about 12,000 square feet of refrigerated space, along with repacking lines, five loading docks, and a ripening room, according to Bradley Corlew, national sales manager. Corlew relocated from central Ohio to run the facility with sons Ryan and Craig. Ryan and Bradley both worked at Sygma, a Dublin, OH-based division of Houston-based foodservice distributor Sysco.



**FreshPoint Dallas Inc., Dallas, TX:** The Houston-based company added tomato repacking to its Dallas operations. This program continues to show strong growth, according to Lucian LaBarba, president. FreshPoint Dallas supplies tomatoes to Sysco distributors in Texas and surrounding states, to FreshPoint locations in Oklahoma City and Texas, and to Yum Brands in the Texas market via area suppliers.

**Hardie's Fruit & Vegetable Co. LP, Dallas, TX:** "One of our main initiatives continues to be local, sustainable agricultural support," reports Dave Allen, vice president of sales. "This has involved not only identifying local growers, but supporting them. It involves more support of organic produce and supporting local farmers who are growing organics. And we're doing promotions in cooperation with the Go Texan program."

In general, "We've had a phenomenal response from foodservice directors and other institution suppliers who believe in supporting the local team," Allen adds.

**Dallas Farmers Market, Dallas, TX:** Massive improvements continue at the downtown market, which remains a draw to locals and visitors alike. Janel Leatherman, market administrator, reports, "This is all a part of a huge resurgence of downtown development, which also involves the addition of a park and an urban market, which will include a grocery store, eateries, and other retail space."

**pb**

# Apples On The Menu For Breakfast, Lunch And Dinner

From white tablecloth restaurants to QSRs, chefs are finding unique ways to incorporate the crunchy bite of apples in all day-part meals. BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



PHOTO COURTESY OF WENDY'S INTERNATIONAL INC.

Wendy's Apple Pecan Chicken Salad is one of the chain's most popular salads on the menu.

**M**cDonald's puts them in every Happy Meal. Panera Bread offers them as a side choice in place of potato chips with signature sandwiches. Chef Jason Wilson at Crush in Seattle, WA, featured a whole menu around them. The star ingredient in each of these examples is fresh apples. Today, fresh apples are used in every foodservice segment from quick-serve restaurants (QSR) to fine dining, but it wasn't always this way.

Tony Freytag, marketing manager for Crunch Pak LLC, in Cashmere, WA, says, "When we first started slicing fresh apples, the majority went to retail. Now it's about 50-50, foodservice and retail. Over the past five years, the growth of fresh apples in foodservice has been driven by the QSR segment — McDonald's, Arby's, Chick-fil-A and others."

Some 3 million bushels of fresh sliced apples were sold through foodservice in 2011, according to USDA data as provided by the Vienna, VA-based U.S. Apple Association. This number is poised to grow as chefs and food-service operators expand the use of fresh

apples from snack and salad application to desserts, appetizers and even center-of-the-plate dishes.

## Big Start In Sides And Salads

Health is the trump card that helped put fresh apples on the menu at Subway, points out Les Winograd, public relations specialist at Subway's Franchise World Headquarters LLC, in Milford, CT. "Our customers have come to look at the Subway brand as a healthful alternative to traditional fatty and greasy fast food. With that in mind, we were looking to provide more nutritious side options that would go well with our sandwiches and salads, and apple slices perfectly fit the bill. They are also a choice for customers ordering a sandwich or salad as part of a Fresh Fit low-fat meal or Fresh Fit for Kids meal."

Dan Wenker, vice president of foodservice sales and marketing for Tree Top Inc., in Selah, WA, reports, "The two most popular ways fresh apples are used in foodservice are as a side item and in a salad."

The trend for sliced apples served as a side began in 2004 when Oak Brook, IL-based

McDonald's Corp. led the charge and introduced its Apple Dippers, approximately ¼-cup servings of pre-sliced, peeled and bagged apples served with low-fat caramel dip, as an option in its Happy Meal. Danya Proud, director of media relations at McDonald's USA, reveals, "When Apple Dippers were optional, 11 percent of Happy Meals were purchased with apples and 89 percent with fries. In September, 2011, as part of its Commitments to Offer Improved Nutrition Choices initiative, McDonald's USA enhanced its Happy Meal program so bagged sliced apples without the dip are included in every Happy Meal, along with a smaller order of French fries. Parents' reactions have been extremely positive about the change we've made. It eliminates the decision and offers the best of both worlds."

Considering that industry estimates sales of McDonald's Happy Meals at about 220 million annually, with only about 24 million of these being served with apples in the past, this change is huge news for the apple industry.

Jim Allen, president of the Fishers-based New York Apple Association (NYAA), says,

“Traditionally, 48 percent of the apples we grow went to the processing market, including fresh sliced. Five to seven years ago, the fresh proportion of the crop increased to 58 to 60 percent. Now, the processors are catching up, and we are seeing a 5 to 8 percent growth in the process market, driven by fresh sliced.”

“In Washington,” says Freytag, “we cut 100 million pounds of apples each week.”

Michigan is the second largest supplier of apples to McDonald’s restaurants in the United States, behind the state of Washington. According to Diane Smith, interim executive director of the Lansing-based Michigan Apple Committee, “In 2011, McDonald’s bought nearly 20 million pounds of Michigan apples last year.” McDonald’s products made with Michigan-grown apples not only include the Apple Slices, but Fruit & Maple Oatmeal and Fruit & Walnut Salad.

Apples have been added as a key salad ingredient in many chain restaurants over the past few years. A sampling of these chains and their salads, which are either regular menu items or introduced as limited-time offers, include Subway’s Orchard Chicken Salad Sandwich, Chick-fil-A’s Chargrilled & Fruit Salad, Arby’s Pecan Chicken Salad Sandwich, Red Robin’s Apple Harvest Chicken Salad, Burger King’s Grilled Chicken, Apple & Cranberry Salad and Wendy’s Apple Pecan Chicken Salad. Mary Wright-Rana,

director of marketing for Pro\*Act LLC, in Monterey, CA, points out, “Apples add color, crunch and a flavor profile to a green salad that is different than a tomato.”

Kitty Munger, spokesperson for Wendy’s International Inc., headquartered in Dublin, OH, remarks, “The inspiration for using apples came from looking at salads in the marketplace at that time (2010) and presenting different ideas to consumers. They really liked the idea of putting apples and cranberries in a salad, and because apples are available all year, this salad was a great addition to our menu. Today, our Apple Pecan Chicken Salad is among our most popular salads on our menu. One of Wendy’s newest on-trend uses of apples,” she adds, “is on our Caramel Apple Parfait, which we introduced last summer.”

**Varieties Equal Menu Versatility**

Apples used by Subway are a medley of red-

and green-skinned varieties such as Gala and Pink Lady, as well as Granny Smith, but Winograd adds, “The specs for our sliced apple packages include up to 11 different varieties.”

“At Wendy’s, we buy Gala, Jonagold, Pink Lady, Empire, Ida Red, Jonathan and Granny Smith for their taste, crispness, sweetness and color,” details Munger.

Preferred apple varieties change by desired usage. “For example,” the NYAA’s Allen explains, “Traditional New York-grown apple varieties such as Empire and Gala have been ideal for slicing, due to their high acidity, flavor and resistance to browning.”

Over the next few years as volume grows, Honeycrisp could be used for slicing to the extent Gala is today, predicts Crunch Pak’s Freytag.

Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for Selah, WA-based Rainier Fruit Co., details, “Slicers prefer Gala, Pink Lady, Granny Smith and Braeburn because the flesh tends to be very firm and white. Schools and other institutional operations generally specify Red Delicious because it’s on their spec sheet. In my experience, Gala and Granny Smith seem to be the most commonly used apples in salads. I think many times it depends on the chef’s creativity and what flavor experience he’s developing for his patrons.”

Large volume chains look for varieties with critical mass to support a menu application on a year-round basis. Conversely, white-tablecloth chefs often look for varieties that are seasonal in nature and unique, rather than mainstream. Jason Quinn, owner and executive chef at the Playground DTSA, a 76-seat upscale eatery in Santa Ana, CA, says, “We focus on seasonal ingredients and put fresh apples on the menu during the fall and winter. We also look for unusual varieties. For example, one of the coolest apples is the Hidden Rose. It has green skin and a dark red flesh. We’ll get a case a year and put one on every table. Customers are so surprised by the flesh color when they take a bite. It’s a lot of fun, and that’s why our customers come here.”

Lady apples and Crab apples are two lesser known varieties of cooking apples available from late September to January, says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for



Wendy’s newest on-trend use of apples is its Caramel Apple Parfait.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WENDY’S INTERNATIONAL INC.



**APPLES À LA CART**

Capitalizing on the growing popularity of food carts nationwide, the Vienna, VA-based U.S. Apple Association (USAA) and its public relations firm, Harvest Public Relations & Marketing, took fresh apples to the New York City curb in a not-so-traditional media tour by serving up apples and apple products — food-cart style!



Heidi Nelson, principal at Minneapolis, MN-based Harvest Publications & Marketing, says, “Since 2009, the number of trucks listed on the food-truck locator website, RoamingHunger.com, has grown 710 percent, to more than 2,300 trucks. What’s more, food truck growth is anticipated to grow another 260 percent by 2014. The growing popularity of food trucks was a key reason for our theme choice, but even more so, it would help keep a fresh polish on the image of the always-in-style, all-American apple.”

To design the Apples à la Cart sampling menu, the USAA teamed up with renowned Minneapolis food truck chefs Lisa Carlson and Carrie Summer of Chef Shack, who artfully added apple twists to quintessential food-cart fare. The tasting menu selections included an Apple Ginger Chiller, Spring Salad with Fresh Apple Slices, Bacon Brat with Apple-Fennel Slaw and Apple Butter and Fruit Bread. Nelson says, “By capturing the essence of street-food culture in these desk-side visits, USAA played on the allure of uncovering hidden values and culinary treasures to create a tasting experience in which participants rediscovered the versatility and novelty of the apple and apple products.” **pb**

Melissa's World Variety Produce Inc., in Vernon, CA, which sells apples direct to food-service accounts in Southern California and Nevada. "They are used in sauces for meat and poultry. The Crimson Gold is another seasonal apple often used by chefs for garnish and desserts. It's very small. One chef caramel dips it and serves it as a lollipop for dessert."

Ambrosia is another newer, yet increasingly popular variety used in foodservice, Schueller adds. "This is because it doesn't brown, meaning you don't have to put it in a citrus bath. It's used on fruit platters, as a dessert garnish and in fruit salads."

### Whole And Fresh-Cut

Some foodservice operators prefer to source apples whole, while others look for a fresh-cut form. According to Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers LLC, in Wenatchee, WA, the white tablecloth restaurants typically spec whole apples, "It's the large chains that want them pre-cut," he remarks.

Rainier's Wolter agrees, noting, "Our primary demand is for whole apples. Whole apples kept in refrigeration are certainly much more shelf-stable than cut products."

"Whole apples," adds Pro\*Act's Wright-

**"At Subway, the apples we offer are pre-sliced and packaged by our suppliers. This way, the slicing does not have to be done at the restaurant level, and food-safety and workplace-safety concerns can be avoided."**

— Les Winograd, Subway's Franchise World Headquarters LLC

Rana, "not only offer a longer shelf-life, but give the chefs flexibility to cut them however they'd like."

At Playground DTSA, Chef Quinn uses fresh apples in a variety of ways — sliced, diced, julienne and dehydrated into chips. "The staff will cut them by hand earlier in the day and keep the cuts in a citric acid bath until needed service," he says.

"At Subway," Winograd says, "the apples we offer are pre-sliced and packaged by our suppliers. This



PHOTO COURTESY OF CRUNCH PAK

customer, eliminating the need for specific training." way, the slicing does not have to be done at the restaurant level, and food-safety and workplace-safety concerns can be avoided."

Wendy's also purchases apples in both chunk and sliced form. "The chunks are packed in a 2-lb. bag and used in our salad and caramel apple parfait. The slices — without the skin — are packed in smaller single-serve packages that go directly to the

customer, eliminating the need for specific training."

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**“The company has charts/handouts listing all the varieties, the sweet-to-tart spectrum, usage suggestions and seasonality. We also have recipes to share with foodservice operators as examples of the many ways in which to incorporate apples into the menu.”**

— Suzanne Wolter, Rainier Fruit Co.



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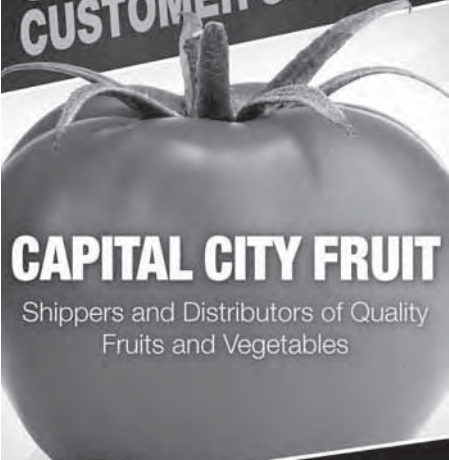
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Fresh-cut apples bring quality, consistency and price stability to an operator. Tree Top’s Wenker contends, “On a finished yield basis, fresh-cut apples are more economical than whole on a per-pound basis. Fresh apples can yield up to 50 percent loss. Plus, when stored between 34 and 40 degrees, they have a 19-day shelf-life.”

**Chef Support**

Apple suppliers offer chefs a variety of assistance. Rainier’s Wolter shares, “The company has charts/handouts listing all the varieties, the sweet-to-tart spectrum, usage suggestions and seasonality. We also have recipes to share with foodservice operators as examples of the many ways in which to incorporate apples into the menu.”

“At Crunch Pak, we have a chef that does extensive menu development for us,” reveals Freytag. “As a market leader in this category, we want to be the resource people come to at all levels.”

Similarly, Tree Top “offers culinary support with recipe ideas, custom-cuts and scientifically engineered packaging,” describes Wenker. “We also subscribe to data services such as Mintel and Technomic and can interpret this information for our foodservice customers so they are on-trend and poised to gain incremental dollars.”

**Foodservice Promotions**

Apple grower/shippers, marketers, distributors and state apple associations all offer special promotions targeting foodservice. For example, Stemilt partnered with Chef Jason Wilson, a 2010 James Beard Foundation winner for Best Chef Northwest, at his Seattle restaurant, Crush, for a promotion that featured a menu built around the Piñata apple in the late fall. Selections spanned from appetizers to desserts and included a Piñata Apple Salad with Bacon, Blue Cheese Dressing and Spiced Pecans. Stemilt’s Pepperl says, “Using a premium variety like the Piñata allowed the chef to differentiate himself with a unique apple, and it provided us with exposure in the



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUBWAY

fine dining sector by him telling the story of the apple. The big drive here is exposure more so than volume.”

Pro\*Act has partnered with a variety of foodservice operators nationwide on promotions. “One is called Apple a Day,” explains Wright-Rana. “The focus is on breakfast, lunch and dinner, and getting apples on the plate and not solely used for desserts.” In a second promotion, Pro\*Act partnered with the Rainier Fruit Co. to develop a recipe using the grower’s Grapple product. The recipe featured Grapples sliced over romaine lettuce with a light poppy seed dressing. The distributor also worked with foodservice mixologists to create cocktails where fresh apples are crushed and mixed in, similar to the use of mint in mojitos.

USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant funds allowed the Michigan Apple Committee to target foodservice in two promotions. “The first was a booth we hosted at the National Restaurant Association show in May 2010,” states Smith. “The idea was to increase the amount of Michigan fruit purchased by restaurants.” Celebrity chefs such as Paul Penney, Eric Villegas and Linda Hundt provided entertaining taste demos of recipes such as Michigan Apple Caramel Apple Tempura, Murdock’s Fudge Nachos with Apples, and a Chicken Stir-Fry with Maple and Apples.

A follow-up survey was sent to booth visi-



tors. Of those responding, 33 percent said they would purchase Michigan fruit whenever possible; 67 percent said they would either continue to purchase the same amount of Michigan fruit or more in the coming year; 58 percent said they would prefer to purchase Michigan fruit; and 63 percent said that the chef demonstrations inspired them to use and cook with Michigan fruit.

This season, the Michigan Apple Committee will host its Chef Road Show. According to Smith, "The idea is to target the Outback's of the world and show that apples can be used in more ways on the menu than just pie."

### Menu Trends

Fresh apples are served in trendy ways at Playground DTSA. "We will incorporate diced apples into steak tartare for sweetness and crunch," says Wilson. "Other ways we use apples are as a fresh apple curry under seared scallops, and vegetable salad with julienne fennel and apples with pork."

There are a number of other trends in fresh apple usage on menus. "For example," says Pro\*Act's Wright-Rana, "we're seeing fresh apples sautéed in a pan with brandy or

maple syrup and served next to the protein on the plate like you'd see carrots, green beans or potatoes. Another interesting use is chunks of fresh apples, such as Honeycrisp or Lady Alice, made into a sauce over pork or poultry. Yet another use is in making sorbets, either as a pallet cleanser or dessert. For example, I've seen a trio of sorbets made with Honeycrisp, Red Delicious and a green-skinned apple."

Chefs who want to incorporate more whole grains in menu offerings are also turning to apples. Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RD, director of programs and culinary nutrition strategic initiatives at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, in Saint Helena, CA, explains, "Chefs need much less sodium to flavor the dishes that contain whole, intact grains like wheat berries, quinoa, farro, or barley, but they also need produce. Ingredients like fresh apples provide sweetness that offsets the bitter notes from some whole grains. Many chefs — from school foodservice and campus dining to chain

restaurants and fine dining — are increasing the use of whole grains for salads and pairing them with fresh herbs, vegetables fruits like apples to create low-sodium dishes that meet consumer demand for healthful, flavorful foods."

"In addition," says Miller, "one of the demos at the Healthy Flavors, Healthy Kids National Leadership Summit in May was a Breakfast Porridge made with quinoa and fresh apples. The chef who presented this dish was Chef Cheryl Forberg, RD, former nutritionist for NBC's *The Biggest Loser*."



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEMILT GROWERS LLC

Stemilt partnered with James Beard award-winning Chef Jason Wilson of Seattle's Crush in a promotion that featured a menu built around Pinata apples.

# Let Dried Figs And Dates Boost Your Year-Round Produce Sales

Year-round, prominent placement in produce will increase rings of dates and figs. **BY PAULA HENDRICKSON**



Dried figs and dates unquestionably belong in the produce department, where consumers looking for healthful snacking options can find them.

**E**xperts in the dried fruit industry know there are two keys to boosting year-round sales of dried figs and dates. First, consumers need to be taught about the health benefits, taste differences and uses for dates and figs. Second, produce departments need to stock dates and figs year-round, and make sure they're easy to find.

"People still confuse the two, but they don't taste anything alike," says Linda Cain, vice president of marketing and retail sales at the Fresno, CA-based Valley Fig Growers Inc. "We don't get confused with raisins, and seldom get confused with prunes, but for some reason when consumers hear 'figs,' they also hear 'dates.'"

The date category alone has multiple varieties: domestic, imported, pitted, diced, and the renowned Medjool dates, which are universally considered to be the king of dates. Fittingly, each has its own personality.

The first step of the process — consumer education — has gotten a little easier in recent years, thanks to numerous studies proclaiming the health benefits of these energy-packed fruits. Earlier this year, figs were touted as one

of the trendiest foods at the Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco, CA.

Thanks to the abundance of positive publicity about dates and figs, consumers are eager to incorporate them into their diets. Unfortunately, they can't always find dates and figs at their local grocery store outside of peak holiday seasons. "Figs and dates are two of the healthiest fruits you can eat," says Andrew Stillman, president and CEO of Ampport Foods, headquartered in Minneapolis, MN. "The real problem is keeping a year-round presence on the shelf." Stillman knows if you ask any date lover where they buy dates in June they'll say, "I go to the health food store." You ask, "Why not your grocery store?" The answer will always be, "They don't have them." That's a lost opportunity for sales, according to Stillman.

## Looking Beyond Seasonal Sales

"If you want to be a true full-service produce department and appeal to everybody who is looking for healthful produce, then you need to carry the full family of these things," asserts Stillman. "That means including dates

and figs in the produce department year-round. Do that, and you'll send a message to your customers that you're a very health-conscious store, and you'll add greater value to the produce department."

Historically, dates and figs have been associated with holiday baking, making October through December the peak season. "There is certainly a seasonality spike around the holidays, and a secondary one around Easter and Passover," Cain says. "Figs are consumed for many traditional Jewish, Muslim and Christian holidays, and are a staple in many traditional dishes."

"The Muslim holiday, Ramadan, is probably the biggest sales period after the Christmas holidays," reports John Stewart, salesman at A.J. Trucco Inc., in the Bronx, NY. "During this month-long holiday, observant Muslims fast during the daylight hours, then after sundown they celebrate with traditional dishes and foods, primarily dates."

Often, Stillman says, stores won't display dates and figs outside the holiday season. "If they're not even in the stores for consumers to buy, it's hard to measure if sales would really be there," he states.



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Dried fig and date suppliers insist smart retailers are starting to go beyond seasonal sales by stocking figs and dates year-round, and the smartest retailers will stock them in the produce department. “Part of the uphill battle we have with produce departments is that many of them think consumers only want fresh fruits and vegetables,” says Valley Fig’s Cain. “Our contention is that consumers are also looking for portability in fruits, and are looking for other ways to get fruits and vegetables into their diets.”

**A Prominent Place In Produce**

Stewart has never understood why the few retailers that do carry dried fruits in their produce departments still give them short shrift. “I’ve always thought the habit of relegating dried figs and dates to the back of the produce section or to some obscure shelf is both an injustice to the items and a lost opportunity for sales,” he contends. “Many supermarkets I visit position their produce department front-and-center, yet it’s rare to see dates and dried figs as prominently displayed

**“It’s the healthiest food we can consume, next to green vegetables, so it should be in the same department. People enter the produce department with health in mind, so why not put your most nutritious items there?”**

— Andrew Stillman, Amport Foods

as seasonal fresh produce.”

Throughout his career, Amport’s Stillman has crusaded to get dried fruits out of the baking and snack food aisles and into produce sections. “What used to be a grocery item 30 years ago is now a produce item,” he says. “It’s the healthiest food we can consume, next to green vegetables, so it should be in the same department. People enter the produce department with health in mind, so why not put your most nutritious items there?”

Cain also notes another reason dried figs and dates belong with produce is because health-conscious consumers prone to purchasing dried fruits shop the perimeter of the store, seldom venturing to the center of store where packaged foods — and the baking aisle — are located.

Here are five simple steps experts say produce managers should be doing to boost yearlong sales of dried dates and figs:

**1. Dedicate A Visible Location**

“[It’s important to] provide a consistent, visible location so consumers can find them,” says Dave Anderson, marketing director for Yuma, AZ-based Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers’ Association. According to Anderson, optimum locations would be near bananas in upright value-added sections.

“Stores need to stop hiding their dates and dried figs in the back of the produce department,” Trucco’s Stewart adds. “Get them out front where they can be seen. Companies packing these items could help as well by providing larger and more eye-catching point-of-purchase displays.”

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## 2. Provide Options

Growers and suppliers believe full-service retailers should offer consumers a full complement of choices. “Some retailers still only carry one SKU,” marvels Anderson, “and consumers have difficulty finding fresh dates.” He says it’s common for customers to complain about the lack of year-round availability.

“You should have all four varieties to really be displaying dates properly,” Stillman says. “An imported pitted, imported chopped, California pitted and Medjool are the basics. Once that’s in place, if you don’t move it around or take some varieties away after the holidays you’ll have consumers start to build loyalty around the department. Before you know it, you’ll be selling even more.”

Stewart goes one step further and suggests retailers offer both dried and fresh figs — as well as packaged and bulk dates — to reinforce the fact that figs and dates are available all year long.

## 3. Play With Displays

“We sell our figs in display-ready cases that can make a great end-cap,” Valley Fig’s Cain says. “Stack five boxes of figs, remove the top of the carton and they’re ready to display.” She says the case is perforated to make it even easier for retailers to set up, as there is no fear of damaging product while cutting open the box. “Much of what’s involved in getting consumers to buy more product is simply to make sure they see it in the store.”

Likewise, Amport offers floor-shipper displays, so stores don’t have to sacrifice shelf space to carry their products. “It’s about one-third pitted dates and two-thirds chopped dates, which is our ratio of sales, so

it sells out evenly in most cases,” Stillman details, adding that shipper displays are an ideal way for stores to gauge sales without using shelf space. “Get yourself a shipper display that holds 100 8-oz. units, and you can see if they’ll sell in a different time of year. It’s a test tool. We had a chain try it this year for the first time and they had such tremendous success that they’re thinking of putting it in year-round.”

“Another suggestion we offer retailers is to cross-merchandise,” Cain says. “Many

consumers aren’t comfortable entertaining and are looking for simple ideas on what types of products to pair together. Figs and cheese are a natural combination, but we also do well with prosciutto.”


Amport’s Stillman adds, “If you’re not cross-merchandising, you’re making a huge mistake.”

## 4. Focus On Health


Both Stewart and Anderson agree that it’s crucial to extol the health benefits of dates and figs by using signage highlighting key nutri-

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**Cross-merchandising dates and dried figs with natural combinations, such as cheese, offer shoppers pairing ideas.**

tional attributes.

“We sell figs year-round to consumers who eat them for snacking, and to many athletes who value the slow release of the sugar,” Valley Fig’s Cain says. “It’s a natural item, with no added sugar and lots of fiber and minerals. Athletes, and bicyclists in particular, rely on them.”

**5. Promotions & Sampling**

A little promotion never hurts, especially

for dried fruit. “Put a little shine on the section,” Stillman advises. “Use shelf-talkers. Pull dates and figs out from the wall and place them in a center aisle of the produce department. Stimulate the consumer looking for healthy alternatives,” he suggests.

Although it’s expensive, Anderson says sampling is an unparalleled means of generating sales. “When consumers try Medjool dates for the first time, they’re hooked,” he says. “Sampling, advertising and/or display is key to

gaining trial.”

Cain agrees that once people taste the products they’ll want to buy them. “But unfortunately, it’s cost-prohibitive for us to do something like that,” she says. “That’s why we take a shotgun approach and advertise on cooking shows, to remind people that figs are nutritious and a great cooking ingredient.”

Trucco’s Stewart says samplings draw people in, but suggests taking it one step further. “An even better way to promote these items would be demonstrating some of the wonderful appetizers you can make at home such as roasted figs stuffed with goat cheese and wrapped in prosciutto or pitted dates wrapped in bacon or stuffed with almonds.”

The bottom line, Stillman says, is that consumer demand for dried dates and figs has changed dramatically in recent years, and produce executives need to adapt to those demands. “The discovery of health benefits associated with these foods has now opened the door for us to move back into produce. And the produce departments that have welcomed us have seen the greatest success.” **pb**

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# COMPANY LOYALTY: PERCEIVED OR ACTUAL?



**C**onfrontation at retail between management and employees is often observed in the area of company loyalty, perceived or actual. In my experience, it always seems that many times, management does not believe that the rank-and-file share the same vision of the company or embrace the company as an entity. This is yet another example of management throwing up its hands, claiming the employees, “Just

don’t get it!”

While many retailers try to cultivate the image of their company to be one of service to consumers and a friendly, helpful place to shop, it is far easier said than done. This effort to portray the company as the consumer’s best friend in the grocery business is designed to make the shopping experience for their customers pleasant and enjoyable, and provide a positive image for their stores.

What many retailers neglect to include as a key part of this image is the buy-in and active participation by the employees in this common goal. There are retailers in various areas of the country that do a very good job of projecting this image as a company and as employees. Unfortunately, there are also many retailers that “talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk.” These retailers failed to establish this type of image because they are unable to garner the support of the employees in portraying the type of store that they strive to be.

Many times in my retail career, I had to face the challenge of creating or enhancing the image of the company. From this experience I found that the key to making this work was to reach all the employees by convincing them that they *are* the company. This approach of identifying the employees as being the identity of the company, and in fact, bigger than the whole, has proven to be successful throughout the industry. Many successful retailers who use this approach now have the best reputation among their customers and throughout the industry of being the best, most friendly stores with excellent customer service and outstanding, helpful employees. With the employees acting as actual stakeholders in the company, these retailers are often viewed as a key component of the community and generate a halo effect with consumers that sets them apart from their competition.

The successful results of this type of approach cannot be refuted. All

one has to do to view this success is walk into one of the successful retailers (we all know who they are) and view the operation. One cannot help notice the positive environment of the store in the cheerful interaction of employees with their peers and supervisors, providing a pleasant and friendly environment for the customers. It is also obvious that instead of ignoring customers to perform a task, they actively interact with the customers in their various departments throughout the store and create the positive image of the company.

For many retailers, this type of approach is very difficult to achieve. Many still cling to the us-against-them theory in their relationship with their employees, and this is especially prevalent in retailers with union employees. In these companies, employees look upon their jobs as a necessity for personal survival and do the minimum required to keep their jobs, relying instead on the unions for protection of their positions. The often contemptuous negotiations on labor contracts only compound the situation and reinforce the negative feelings of employees toward the company. Management promotes these ill feelings by seeming to be motivated only by cost control and profits of the company instead of the welfare of their employees.

This attitude presents a major challenge to developing the type of culture that is needed to convince the employees that they are the most important asset to the company. While changing the culture is a daunting task, it can be done, but it will require a firm, positive commitment, beginning with upper management. This commitment has to be shared and promoted by all levels of management to be successful. If the employee perceives it to be “just another program” instead of a real change, it will fail. This program has to be ongoing, and

it must be a permanent change in the culture. The change will need to be a longer-term project, as it is not easy or quick to change the culture and establish a new image, not only with the employees, but also with the customer.

The companies who are able to adopt this type of strategy will be in a better position to compete with “the best of the best” retailers using this approach. This type of action will go a long way to dispelling consumers’ skepticism and provide them with a pleasant shopping experience. And we all know the economic and image rewards that can be gained from the successful conclusion of such a program. Given such benefits, it would seem to not be in the company’s best interest to ignore this opportunity and continue with the status quo.

**pb**

**This approach of identifying the employees as being the identity of the company, and in fact, bigger than the whole, has proven to be successful throughout the industry. Many successful retailers who use this approach now have the best reputation among their customers and throughout the industry of being the best...**

**By Don Harris**

Don Harris is a 38-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to [editor@producebusiness.com](mailto:editor@producebusiness.com)

# NEW EU-U.S. ORGANICS PARTNERSHIP BENEFITS BOTH SIDES OF ATLANTIC



**O**n February 15, 2012, the European Union and the United States announced a historic partnership to make it easier to trade in organic foods, opening up opportunities for organic farmers and ranchers, small businesses, and jobs in packaging, shipping and marketing on both sides of the Atlantic.

EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Dacian Cioloș said,

“This agreement comes with a double added value. On the one hand, organic farmers and food producers will benefit from easier access, with less bureaucracy and less costs to both the U.S. and the EU markets, strengthening the competitiveness of this sector. In addition, it improves transparency on organic standards and enhances consumer confidence and recognition of our organic food and products.”

The new arrangement, which began on June 1, allows products certified as organic in the United States to be sold in the European Union and vice-versa, eliminating significant barriers for producers. Until recently, a separate additional certification was required, meaning additional costs and bureaucracy for organic farmers. To help reduce paperwork and expenses, the arrangement is simple in its aim: it recognizes that the European Union and the United States have credible organic certification systems and that we share common perspectives about what constitutes the production of organic products.

The partnership also establishes a strong foundation from which we will promote organic agriculture and benefits to the organic industry on a global scale. By removing barriers to organic farmers and companies, we are giving our producers expanded access to the world’s two largest markets for organic products — valued at nearly 40 billion Euros combined — whose 800 million consumers increasingly seek out high-quality organic foods.

We also know that economic activity around the production, distribution, and sale of organic products packs a punch. For example, in the United States, nearly half of organic growers and food companies surveyed last year expected to add jobs in the near future. These expectations will only flourish as U.S. organic producers seek to demonstrate their high-quality, safe and affordable products to EU consumers. Organic production in the European Union is also on the rise — having enjoyed more than a 6 percent annual growth during the past decade, and this agreement will encourage more EU exporters to market their products across the United States as the American appetite for healthy and organic food grows.

In addition to this, the EU organic logo — as opposed to regional or Member State national logos — will become compulsory on all organic food sold in Europe, moving forward from July 1, which only reflects the growing importance of the sector. The logo — a white leaf of stars on a light green background — will also help improve the organic “brand” among consumers on both sides of the Atlantic.

And there are broader benefits for EU and U.S. consumers, alike. Organic production is still small compared to overall agricultural production, but by making a greater variety and quantity of organic ingredients more broadly available, it will be easier to prepare organic foods and to find organic foods in restaurants and stores. This is welcome news for the growing number of consumers looking to incorporate organic products into their diets and routines.

Most importantly, the new arrangement demonstrates something most refreshing: that the European Union and United States can work closely and cooperatively on agricultural policy. To prepare for this arrangement, we conducted thorough on-site audits to ensure that our regulations, quality control measures, certification requirements, and labeling practices were compatible.

As a result of this work, both sides are moving closer to each other’s standards. For example, European dairy products traded to the United States under the equivalence arrangement will have to be free of antibiotics to meet U.S. standards and, in turn, U.S. fruits traded to Europe under the agreement will have to

be free of antibiotics to meet EU rules.

Another important aspect of the arrangement is that efforts do not stop here. Mutual recognition has been the tool used until now in international organic trade negotiations. This time, however, we even go further, in so far as both administrations will continue to meet regularly to discuss each other’s standards and control systems and reflect on their evolution. The objective of this continued cooperation — translated in practice by a working group meeting twice a year — is to gradually increase convergence on both sides of the Atlantic.

This concretely means that 95 percent of the world’s organic food market will be sharing an increasingly common understanding on organic food production. We see this as a major step forward, especially in the context of efforts to promote harmonization and equivalence of organic standards and certification undertaken at a global level, for example by the Global Organic Market Access (GOMA) project.

In conclusion, the EU-U.S. partnership in organics is good news for farms and businesses on both sides of the Atlantic. It opens new opportunities and underscores our shared optimism for a world where farmers and consumers alike have a wide range of choices about their food, and how that food is produced.

**pb**

**By removing barriers to organic farmers and companies, we are giving our producers expanded access to the world’s two largest markets for organic products — valued at nearly 40 billion Euros combined — whose 800 million consumers increasingly seek out high-quality organic foods.**

**By Roger Waite**

Roger Waite is spokesperson for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.



# A LOOK AT BRAZIL'S EXPORT POTENTIAL



Recently we have seen a definite increase in the number of U.S.-based growers and receivers wishing to hop on the Brazilian agricultural bandwagon. This is no samba train, but a powerful locomotive increasingly pulling the country and other parts of the world. As this new agricultural powerhouse, dubbed the world's "new bread basket," expands, many want a piece of the action.

U.S. importers and chain receivers want new items that can become big: the "next kiwifruit" or the "ultimate mango," perhaps. Growers all over the world are also looking for local partners and investment opportunities in Brazil. Many are looking to test new varieties of proven produce that can grow in the myriad climates of this vast country.

On the other side, Brazilian producers are also looking for opportunities abroad, especially the fruit sector, which benefits from market windows in the Northern Hemisphere.

The Brazil fresh fruit sector, specifically, is a highly developed, sophisticated industry, focused on both fresh and processed, which has seen impressive growth in the past few years. The country overall produced more than 40 billion tons of fruit during 2010 — an increase of almost 3 percent from the previous year. Value also increased 16 percent YTD, for a total of US\$20 billion.

Total area for cultivation of fruit also expanded and exceeded three million hectares. Oranges were the No. 1 fruit produced, followed by bananas, grapes, papayas and pineapples. These represented almost 70 percent of all fruits produced in the country. Fruit exports also saw a net increase of almost 300 percent over the past seven years. However, growth has recently stalled.

According to the Brazil's Agricultural Research Institute reports (EMBRAPA), produce exporters have been hurt by the European crisis, with a 10 percent drop in volume in 2011 from a reported total of 680 tons in 2010. The industry is avidly looking to develop new markets, thus the interest in U.S. and Canadian investors.

We remind these potential investors and marketers who come to us that, as with every opportunity, there are also pitfalls. We are often surprised that although most are convinced there is gold in the hills of Brazil, they have no idea how to start mining it.

As a Brazilian native, I am very familiar with the Latin dance rituals of vetting potential *parceiros* that can frustrate a typical

American grower accustomed to a straightforward style. Also, when we conduct trade missions and retailer tours to the ag regions, we never do it ourselves. Instead, we rely heavily on a team of local agronomists and market expert partners to "separate the wheat from the chaff."

Information is power, and the right information at the right time is king. That's why we believe we can offer some basic but sound advice on this subject:

- **KNOW THE LANDSCAPE:** The country is huge and separated into key climate regions (and further into hundreds of microclimates). The North is hot; the South is colder. Knowing what grows where and where to focus efforts is key because it's difficult, if not impossible, to target the whole country at once.

- **WORK THE STATES:** Narrow the focus and remember to fish where the fish are. Launching efforts in the regions with the most "ag action" and where the most contacts can be made makes sense. For example, The State of Sao Paulo is the major producer in the country, with many sophisticated, investor-friendly growers.

- **RELY ON EXPERTS, NOT UNRELIABLE SOURCES:** As with many Latin America countries, reliable ag research and reports like the expert USDA releases are difficult to find. Most published stats are several years old and some of the trade publications out of date. If you want to know the real facts, conduct your own trade and/or consumer study, as well as rely on the powerful regional ag groups (who

often keep meticulous records). It also helps to make friends with EMBRAPA personnel and other politicians in Brasilia (the capital). This helps all over the world!

- **KNOW THE PEOPLE:** A common mistake we see are foreign investors who think Brazilians are like their Spanish neighbors: Chile, Argentina, etc. Brazilians not only speak a different language (Portuguese) but are a different animal altogether. They're influenced by European culture (remember the Dutch sold them some of their first seeds) and, while expansive, are also protectionists. Another key point to remember is that the Japanese launched the Brazilian ag sector. In fact, to underestimate the power of the Brazilian Japanese in their ag industry is perilous.

Of course, knowing all this and even more will not ultimately guarantee success in this complex country. As with any investment, it's important to not be seduced by the media or competitor reports of instant success, but to take your time and do your homework... just like here at home.

pb

According to Brazil's Agricultural Research Institute reports, produce exporters have been hurt by the European crisis, with a 10 percent drop in volume in 2011...The industry is looking to develop new markets, thus the interest in U.S. and Canadian investors.

By Veronica Kraushaar

Veronica Kraushaar is Managing Partner of VIVA International Partners Inc, a U.S. and Brazil-based consultancy specializing in agribusiness development and perishables marketing. For more information, visit [www.vivainternationalpartners.org](http://www.vivainternationalpartners.org).

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Mooney Farms	123	530-899-2661	www.moneyfarms.com
Morris Okun, Inc.	101	718-589-7700	www.morrisokun.com
Mucci Farms	122	866-236-5558	www.muccifarms.com
N2N Global	12	407-331-5151	www.n2nglobal.com
Nathel & Nathel	114-115	718-991-6050	www.nyapplecountry.com
New York Apple Association, Inc.	81	585-924-2171	www.nyapplecountry.com
Niagara Fresh Fruit Co.	122	716-778-7631	www.niagarafreshfruit.com
Nunhems USA	37	615-584-8794	www.nunhemsusa.com
P-R Farms, Inc.	59	559-299-7278	www.prfarms.com
Pacific Tomato Growers	124	209-835-7500	www.sunripeproduce.com
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	46	661-725-3145	
Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program	122	717-783-5418	www.pennsylvaniaapples.org
Peri & Sons Farms	32	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
Pero Family Farms Food Company LLC	119	561-498-5771	www.perofamilyfarms.com
Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association	50-51	610-284-0326	
Jerry Porricelli Produce	93	718-893-6000	www.poricelli.com
Prime Time	29	760-399-4166	www.primetimeproduce.com
Primus Labs	159	805-922-0055	www.primuslabs.com
Produce for Better Health Foundation	78	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Produce Marketing Association	19	302-738-7100	www.freshsummit.com/unusual
J. Renella Produce, Inc.	110	718-991-4210	
Rice Fruit Company	121	800-627-3359	www.ricefruit.com
RockHedge Herb Farm	123	845-677-6726	www.rockhedgeherbs.com
Rubin Bros.	90-91	718-589-3200	www.rubinbros.com
SAGARPA - Embassy of Mexico	40-41	202-728-1727	www.sagarpa.gob.mx
Sandrini Sales, Inc.	124	805-792-3192	www.sandrini.com
SIAL Paris	156	704-365-0041	www.sial-group.com
Silver Creek Software	62	208-388-4555	www.silvercreek.com
Southern Specialties	123	954-784-6500	www.southernspecialties.com
Spice World, Inc.	151	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Spice World, Inc.	149	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Sun World International	21	661-631-4160	www.sun-world.com
Sunlight International Sales, Inc.	5	661-792-6360	www.dulcich.com
Sunview Marketing International	59	661-792-3145	www.sunviewmarketing.com
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	27	800-772-4542	www.taproduce.com
Target Interstate Systems, Inc.	111	800-338-2743	www.targetinterstate.com
Top Banana	109	718-328-6700	www.topbananany.com
Top Brass Marketing, Inc.	45	661-746-2148	www.topbrassmarketing.com
Top Katz, LLC	116	718-861-1933	www.topkatz.com
Trinity Fruit Sales	123	559-433-3777	www.trinityfruit.com
A.J. Trucco, Inc.	103	718-893-3060	www.truccodirect.com
Uncle Vinny's Enterprises	92	917-676-6609	www.unclevinnysproduce.com
United Fresh Produce Association	56	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
United Fresh Produce Association	161	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
The USA Bouquet Co.	18	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Village Farms	124	877-777-7718	www.villagefarms.com
Vision Import Group	83	201-968-1190	www.visionimportgroup.com
W.P. Produce	124	305-326-8333	www.wpproduce.com
Well-Pict Berries	123	831-722-3871	www.wellpict.com
Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum	39	610-688-3164	www.westerncapcitrus.com
Western Fresh Marketing	163	888-820-0001	www.westernfreshmarketing.com
Wonderful Pistachios	6-7	732-546-8994	www.getcrackin.com

# SOME THINGS STAY THE SAME



**I**t is an often sung-about fact that some things change, and some things stay the same. In no photo could this be more evident than the one above, taken at the Eastern Produce Council golf tournament on June 26, 1979. Founded in 1966 in New York City as the Produce Sales Club, the organization has a long and storied history, which includes the Annual Golf Outing, an event that brings together many of the 500-plus members of the EPC. Naturally, a beautiful day spent with friends and colleagues on the greens is something to get excited about, and one that members look forward to all year long.

Such was also the case in 1979, when Tom Kearney, Stephen D'Arrigo and Ray Signore joined each other for a round of golf at the annual EPC tournament. Matthew D'Arrigo, Stephen's son, who is now vice president of the family business, D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York Inc., located on the Hunts Point Market, recalls, "Tom and Dad were great friends, as they both were on the Market. Tom was a partner at

[the now closed] Vita Wellbrock & Kearney. They played golf together frequently. Dad was a twice-a-month golfer. He wasn't that great or effective, but he kept at it," D'Arrigo chuckles. "It's funny because Dad was a pretty even-tempered guy. He didn't really get mad, but boy, on the golf course, he did!"

Signore, another produce industry colleague who worked at Benjamin Signore & Sons joined Kearney and D'Arrigo that day on the greens. While he wasn't as close with D'Arrigo as Kearney was, they enjoyed each other's company. "They had more of a business/employer/employee relationship," recalls D'Arrigo, "as Ray came to work the specialty division at our company — back when we did specialties — after Signore closed."

Some things change, and some things stay the same. While the Market, the EPC and the produce industry as a whole have undergone many changes over the years, some things stay the same, like good friends, a day on the greens and a golfer's preference for plaid.

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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