

# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

**30**  
YEARS  
INITIATING  
INDUSTRY  
IMPROVEMENT



## Produce Moves To Head Of The Class



WAL-MART PRICING



NEW YORK MARKET PROFILE



FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO



BOB DIPIAZZA

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RETROSPECTIVE

floralbusiness  
INITIATING INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT

### INSIDE

THE PUNDIT EXAMINES HOW PRODUCERS NAVIGATE INDIAN MARKET  
NEW JERSEY PEACHES • SPECIALTY PRODUCE  
FRESH THYME RETAIL PROFILE • MERCHANDISING HERBS  
DISTRIBUTION SOFTWARE • NEW YORK STATE VEGETABLES  
REGIONAL PROFILE: IOWA • GARLIC • DATES & DRIED FIGS  
ZESPRI & MCDONALD'S PARTNER • MEDITERRANEAN DIET





• GET UP •

# AND GROW!

*for a happier world*

Dole is out to make the world a healthier, happier place. We're providing delicious new recipes, unique retailer partnerships and other fun incentives designed to drive store traffic by getting North Americans to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.

Here's how customers can Get Up and Grow! in 2015:

## TOUR



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## PLEDGE



Take our pledge to eat and live healthier in 2015 and receive recipes and nutrition tips to help you reach your goal.

## RECIPES



Try dozens of delicious Dole recipes packed with fruits and vegetables...all designed to make healthy eating easy.

## LEARN



Find the latest fruit & vegetable research, articles and healthy tips from the Dole Nutrition Institute.

Contact your Dole representative to provide you with all of the ways to Get Up and Grow! in 2015. Visit [Dole.com/GetUpAndGrow](http://Dole.com/GetUpAndGrow) for more information. #GetUpAndGrow





## cover story

### 32 PRODUCE MOVES TO HEAD OF THE CLASS

If you want to taste the future of produce, then dine at a college campus.

## commentary

**16 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT**  
 As Retail Morphs Into Foodservice,  
 Procurement Agents Will Have  
 New Hurdles

**175 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE**  
 The X Factor In Produce

**176 WHOLESALE MARKET**  
 Lettuce And The Little Guy

**177 EUROPEAN MARKET**  
 How US Exporters Can  
 Prepare For New Competition  
 Infiltrating Europe



40



18

## features

### 18 PUTTING A LITTLE 'GOLD' IN MEXICO'S HAPPY MEALS

Consumers get a 'Happy' introduction to kiwi in children's meals as McDonald's and Zespri team up for better nutrition.

### 40 WAL-MART PRICING REPORT ROUND XXVII

Report From Omaha: Are Grocers Competing With Wal-Mart? Or Getting Out Of Its Way?

### 46 DEFINING SPECIALTY PRODUCE

New items continue to flock to the shelves, but what exactly is 'specialty produce'?

63



46



55

### 52 DELIVER ON CUSTOMER DEMAND FOR FRESH HERBS

How to boost sales with tips from produce executives and industry experts.

### 55 NEW JERSEY PEACHES AND NECTARINES OFFER LOCAL APPEAL TO 45 MILLION CONSUMERS

Marketers explore strategies to expand sales.

### 59 SMARTPHONES AND TABLETS DRIVE CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION SOFTWARE

Software for smartphones and netbooks opens horizons.

### 63 NEW YORK VEGETABLES GAIN SALES FROM LOCAL EMPHASIS

The Department of Ag looks to promote locally grown within the state.



# special features

**13**  
**INAUGURAL EVENT SPEARHEADS  
 MOVE TO MAKE MEDITERRANEAN  
 DIET A REALITY IN NONCOMMERCIAL  
 FOODSERVICE**

**14**  
**UNITED CELEBRATES  
 IN A TROPICAL OASIS**

**22**  
**FROM THE PAGES OF  
 THE PERISHABLE PUNDIT**

The Rise Of India: An Opportunity  
 For Producers As Retailers Compete  
 For The Best Produce

**28**  
**ASCENDENT INDEPENDENTS:  
 FRESH THYME**

Building an organic grocery  
 brand in the Midwest.

**30**  
**RESTROSPECTIVE**  
 Bob DiPiazza of Sun Pacific Marketing  
 Highlights Major Produce Changes  
 During His Versatile Career

**147**  
**FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO**

**147**



**67**

# departments

## REGIONAL PROFILE

**163** **GROWING IN THE HAWKEYE STATE**

A glimpse at Iowa's produce and how  
 industry players carve their niches  
 for business.

## MERCHANDISING REVIEW

**166** **GARLIC: THE PUNGENT  
 SMELL OF SUCCESS**

Ethnic and nutritional appeal bode  
 well for this complementary favorite.

## DRIED FRUIT

**171** **DATES AND DRIED FIGS**

These companion items can  
 energize fresh produce.

# in this issue

- 6** QUIZ
- 8** WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE
- 10** PRODUCE WATCH
- 20** RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES
- 21** COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS
- 26** FORWARD THINKING
- 178** INFORMATION SHOWCASE
- 179** BLAST FROM THE PAST

## 67 SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT NEW YORK REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE

**68** **The Evolution Of The  
 Hunts Point Produce Market**  
 Success at this wholesale cooperative  
 requires changing with the times and  
 updating both products and facilities.

**78** **Buying On The Market**  
 Insight to a purchasing strategy,  
 goals and logistics at Hunts Point.

**84** **A Sound Partnership**  
 An examination of the dynamic between  
 wholesalers and their retail customers.

**90** **Reflection Of Consumption**  
 Healthy lifestyles, Millennials and  
 ethnic diversity add to a transformation  
 of wholesale purchasing.

**98** **An International Flavor**  
 The ebbs and flows of global  
 business on the Market.

**110** **Through The Generations**  
 Many Market companies  
 make business a 'family' affair.

**116** **Innovation Helps Produce Regional  
 Wholesalers and Distributors Thrive**  
 Companies around the New York  
 Metro area evolved into intricate  
 businesses aimed to meet the needs  
 of a diverse customer base.

**127** **As New York's Distributors  
 Expand Reach, Transportation  
 Becomes Crucial**  
 Product integrity presents future  
 challenges as well as opportunity for  
 innovative transportation companies.

**136** **FOODSERVICE PROFILE:  
 La Palapa 'Flare'**

**138** **FOODSERVICE PROFILE:  
 Tertulia Evokes The Spirit Of Spain**

**140** **RETAIL PROFILE:  
 Mrs. Green's Shifts  
 Focus To Local Produce**

**142** **RETAIL PROFILE:  
 Gastronomie 491: A Mediterranean  
 Oasis In Manhattan**





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GROWERS, INC.

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Your customers will love Sunkist's new twist on an old favorite

Tart, sweet and juicy, grapefruit is not only delicious but also an excellent source of antioxidants, Vitamins A and C, and is growing in popularity among younger consumers for its versatility. Sunkist can help turn this trend into sales results with the Not Your Mother's Grapefruit program, aimed at millennial consumers.

Like a cherished family recipe handed down through generations, our citrus is nurtured by more than 120 years of experience. At Sunkist, we're deeply committed to tradition, but also to innovation and sustainability, both on the farm and in the marketplace — embracing fresh approaches for citrus lovers today and tomorrow.

To see how grapefruit can put a positive twist on your sales, contact Sunkist sales: [sales@sunkistgrowers.com](mailto:sales@sunkistgrowers.com).

To learn more about Sunkist's family growers, visit [familystories.sunkist.com](http://familystories.sunkist.com).

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a cooperative of family farms since 1893™



## THIS MONTH'S WINNER



**DEREK POWELL**  
 Director of Retail  
 General Produce  
 Forest Park, GA

Derek Powell began his career in produce at the retail level working for stores such as Kroger and Winn-Dixie. In 2002, Powell joined General Produce (which is now a member of the Newport, KY-based Castellini Group of Companies) as a sales clerk, and his retail history helped pave the way for his current position as director of retail.

"The biggest help would be in regard to product," says Powell about his work in the retail environment. "Seeing product after it is delivered to stores helps me understand the challenges at that level; we try to relieve

some of those challenges by offering fresh product in a timely manner."

Powell's current responsibilities encompass the entire retail operation from productivity, to ad planning, to transportation, to profitability. "We have an office staff of 10, with about 60 drivers, and about 30 warehouse personnel," explains Powell regarding his crew.

As a reader of **PRODUCE BUSINESS** for the past six years, he appreciates "the new ideas and innovations that are shared within the industry."

**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.

### WIN A FAIRWAY WOOD DRIVER

For the golf aficionado, this TaylorMade RocketBallz Stage 2 Fairway Wood boasts a faster ball speed, higher launch, and lower spin, resulting in better playing. Its ultra-high strength TaylorMade RocketSteel (supplied by Carpenter) creates a thinner and faster-flexing face, for improved speed and more distance. A shallower face and lower head profile offer a right-handed golfer increased playability and easier launch.



### QUESTIONS FOR THE JULY ISSUE

- 1) List the four ways Dole suggests companies can Get Up and Grow! \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) How many family generations have been growing garlic for Spice World? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) True or false: Are Taylor Farms' Chopped Salads now available in family-sized portions? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) In addition to Butternut Squash Zig Zags, what other new item is available in the Mann's Culinary Cuts division? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is the website address for Avocados from Mexico? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) What is the city and state for the headquarters of Western Fresh Marketing? \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_  
 Company \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
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Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:  
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# BIG THINGS ARE HAPPENING



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# Political Activity Heats Up As The Government & Produce Industry Reach Crossroads



BY JULIE MANES, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

**S**ummer is officially here, and while the kids are out of school, the halls of Congress and federal agencies are bustling with activity. In the coming weeks, the House and Senate will feverishly tackle high priority issues before adjourning for August recess. Of concern to the fresh produce industry: reauthorization of child nutrition programs that expand access and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables; transportation policies that impact the safe flow of commercial goods; and food safety regulations that prevent illness, death and economic loss.

## Child Nutrition

This spring, the Committee on Education and the Workforce and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry — both of which have oversight of federal child nutrition programs — conducted several rounds of hearings, interviewing dozens of witnesses from the private sector, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations and regulatory agencies. All of these efforts are to review the efficacy of current nutrition standards, seek input on ways to improve overly burdensome administrative procedures, and eliminate wasteful spending.

In June, Representative Tim Ryan (D-Ohio) introduced separate legislation to make school meals healthier. Specifically, HR 2627, the “Salad Bars in Schools Expansion Act,” establishes grant funding to place salad bars in elementary, middle and senior high schools across the country.

No longer critical to just a small, select group of recipients facing food insecurity, child nutrition programs are now under a brighter spotlight as 30 percent of today’s youth are overweight or obese, and only one-third consume the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Lead-

**No longer critical to just a small, select group of recipients facing food insecurity, child nutrition programs are now under a brighter spotlight as 30 percent of today’s youth are overweight or obese, and only one-third consume the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables.**

ership of both committees expressed a shared goal of working across party lines to enact policies in the best interest of today’s youth. Already on a tight schedule, Congress must move quickly to hold any last-minute hearings, mark up legislation, and move bills out of committee for floor votes before these programs expire at the end of September. However, should both chambers not make the deadline, Congress can pass an extension, as it did in 2009, allowing the programs to continue to operate on a short-term basis.

## Transportation

Just as families will be hitting the roads for summer vacation, lawmakers must also move ahead on transportation policies. The House recently passed a two-month extension to MAP-21, the federal government’s surface transportation funding legislation that was set to expire May 31. While the extension provides a short-term fix to public transportation, and the roads, bridges and rails that are essential to moving agricultural commodities, Congress still must find a long-term transportation funding solution before commerce grinds to a halt.

Other critical policies aimed at improving safety within the transportation industry include S. 1454, the “Transportation and Logistics Hiring Reform Act,” which enhances interstate commerce by establishing a national standard for hiring motor carriers. Currently, there is no standard or

duty of care an entity must take when hiring a carrier, and industry stakeholders are often asked to second-guess which carriers are safe to operate and those that are not. This bill is a huge step toward removing unsafe carriers from the highways.

## Food Safety

Four years ago, a revolution of the nation’s food system was promised with the passing of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). Aside from 48 million illnesses, 128,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000 deaths attributed to foodborne illness, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates economic losses to industry are more than \$75 billion per year.

After a meeting in April with industry representatives, the FDA is currently in the process of issuing final rules that will implement FSMA. The key to transforming our food system into one that prevents problems rather than merely reacts to them, of course, is money. While, the President’s FY 2016 budget request included an increase of \$109.5 million of new budget authority, Congress is still in the process of considering appropriations bills that could impact additional funding to FDA.

We encourage you to capitalize on this dynamic intersection of policy and potential reforms and hear directly from government officials at the United Fresh Washington Conference, September 28 - 30, 2015, in Washington, D.C.

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TRANSITION



**INTERRUPTION FAIR TRADE BROOKLYN, NY**

Interruption Fair Trade announces the addition of Mike Iannacci to its U.S. team as exchange coordinator. Iannacci now plays a key role in overseeing logistics and inventory management along with his co-worker, Colin Sharpe. Iannacci intends to use his production and logistics experience to boost efficiencies and improve customer service to keep up with the growing demand for TASTE ME DO GOOD fruits and vegetables.

ANNOUNCEMENT



**MUSHROOM COUNCIL AND THE BEEF CHECKOFF PARTNER FOR SUMMER GRILLING PROMOTION**

A Muenster Stuffed Veal Mushroom Burger is the star of a new summer grilling retail partnership, sponsored by the Centennial, CO-based Beef Checkoff and the San Jose, CA-based Mushroom Council. During the promotion, consumers will find the new burger recipe and details about a supporting \$500 grocery sweepstakes, on specially marked veal package labels. A digital and social media advertising campaign also will drive promotion awareness and contest entry at VealMadeEasy.com. Developed by the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), the Muenster Stuffed Veal Mushroom Burger incorporates the Mushroom Council's Blend model by mixing finely diced mushrooms into the ground veal patties. After grilling the veal patties, they're topped with sautéed mushrooms, adding an extra serving of vegetables, vitamins and nutrients.

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**THE WONDERFUL COMPANY UNIFIES BRANDS**



Roll Global, Los Angeles, CA, officially changed its name to The Wonderful Company. This strategic move aligns the company's products served to America and around the world. The company's 7,300 employees worldwide are dedicated to bringing consumers everywhere the freshest pistachios, almonds, citrus and pomegranates; bottling water and wines. As one of America's largest and fastest-growing produce companies, The Wonderful Company continues to build upon its tree nuts, citrus, and a series of other products. In addition to The Wonderful Company name change, the following operating units also have new names: Wonderful Pistachios & Almonds (formerly Paramount Farms); Wonderful Citrus (formerly Paramount Citrus); and Wonderful Orchards (formerly Paramount Farming).

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

ANNOUNCEMENT



**BAY VALLEY FOODS LAUNCHES NEW SALAD DRESSING**

Bay Valley Foods, Oak Brook, IL, launches Naturally Fresh Brand Organic Salad Dressings, which are found in the refrigerated produce aisle. The company introduces the new line of organic salad dressings to address the rapid growth of organic products and provide the consumer with a broad range of flavors for any occasion.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION PROMOTES 'DISTINCTLY CALIFORNIAN' SANDWICHES CAMPAIGN**

The California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA, began its sandwich-themed program for the summer that encompasses consumer advertising, social media, retail and foodservice activity, public relations and influencer outreach. California



Avocado foodservice sandwich and burger promotions this year include Del Taco, Denny's, Habit Burger, Johnny Rockets, and Togo's. For retailers, CAC developed a recipe booklet with 16 California avocado sandwiches. Nearly 25,000 booklets were distributed to

retailers that use the booklets on California avocado displays and for in-store activity.

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**ROUNDY'S PARTNERS WITH PRODUCE FOR KIDS TO SUPPORT SALAD BARS FOR MIDWEST SCHOOLS**

For the second year, Roundy's (Milwaukee, WI) partners with Produce for Kids (Orlando, FL) for a healthy eating-focused campaign to raise funds for the United Fresh Start Foundation's Let's Move Salad Bars to MIDWEST Schools' campaign. To help Roundy's support the initiative, shoppers are encouraged to add more produce to their grocery carts. Seven fruit and vegetable suppliers are participating: Avocados from Mexico - Mexican Hass Avocados; Chiquita Fresh - Fresh Express Packaged Salads; NatureSweet Glorys Tomatoes; Naturipe - Blueberries, Blackberries, Strawberries & Raspberries; OrganicGirl - good clean greens; POM Wonderful - Pomegranate Juice & Teas; Shuman Produce - RealSweet Vidalia Onions. Each company will make a consumption-based donation to support Let's Move Salad Bars to MIDWEST Schools. The goal is to donate salad bars to schools in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin.

ANNOUNCEMENT



**CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRIES PARTNERS WITH WENDY'S**

California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, is now featured at one of the largest fast food chains. Wendy's is offering fresh strawberries on its summer Strawberry Fields Chicken Salad and gaining a lot of positive consumer attention along the way. The company produced two YouTube videos, a full and abbreviated version, to tell the story of the strawberries that originate in the fields and end up in the restaurant's salad dish.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**SAKATA SEED AMERICA EARNS GSPP ACCREDITATION**

Sakata Seed America, Morgan Hill, CA, announced the company's GSPP certification. This new certification will bring added-value to Sakata's



distributor network and customers. GSPP (Good Seed and Plant Practices) accreditation is based on a process approach (prophylactic measures) to prevent seed and plant transmitted pathogens in tomato seeds.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**NATURAL DELIGHTS EXPANDS WEBSITE**

The Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers Association (BVMDGA), Bard Valley, CA, one of the world's largest Medjool date growers groups, is enhancing its website and adding a user-friendly mobile site to keep up with demand. The BVMDG re-launched its Natural Delights Medjool Dates website (www.naturaldelights.com) to more fully capitalize on its role as a one-stop-shop portal for Medjool dates overall. The site features Medjool recipes, nutritional information, serving suggestions, store locator and historical insights. The refreshed site offers new mobile functionality and the first-ever opportunity for date fans to order Natural Delights online.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**MANN PACKING OFFERS SUMMER FUN WITH VEGGIES**

Mann Packing Company, Salinas, CA, is shipping an 18-ounce seasonal Summer Fun-themed veggie tray that features an assortment of washed and ready-to-eat fresh vegetables including celery, carrots,



sugar snap peas and broccoli florets and a 3-ounce container of Ranch dip. The tray is available to customers in the United States and Canada through September.



# INITIATING INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT

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**CALIWATER CACTUS WATER AVAILABLE AT GELSON'S MARKET AND LASSEN'S NATURAL FOOD**

Caliwater Cactus Water, Los Angeles, CA, will introduce its wild prickly pear in a 1-liter Tetra Pak to shoppers at both Gelson's Market and Lassen's Natural Foods stores. Gelson's operates 16 top-tier grocery stores and Lassen's owns 11 top-tier natural foods stores in Southern California. The 1-liter package complements the already available 11.2-ounce Tetra Pak. The brand's "not-from-concentrate" formula, which launched at Natural Products Expo West this year, contains fewer calories and less sugar than all of the leading coconut waters and leading aloe juices currently on the market.



the

ANNOUNCEMENT



**HLB SPECIALTIES' GROWER CALIMAN NOW FAIRTRADE-CERTIFIED**

HLB Specialties, Pompano Beach, FL, announces its main Golden Papaya supplier, Caliman Agrícola, receives Fairtrade Certificate by FLOCERT. Caliman is one of the world's largest papaya growers. With more than 35 years of experience, Caliman upholds high standards, including being the oldest Brazilian Papaya grower with the Fairtrade Certificate. According to Fairtrade America, there is only a handful of countries that have growers with the certificate. Brazil is the second largest papaya producing and exporting country, and HLB Specialties is the main distributor of Brazilian papayas worldwide, through offices in the U.S. and Germany.

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**STEMILT INTRODUCES SKYLAR RAE BRAND CHERRY**

Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA, introduces a new cherry, and a third SKU to the cherry category, with the launch of Skylar Rae brand Tip Top cultivar cherries in select markets. Grown and marketed exclusively by Stemilt, the Tip Top cherry cultivar, which goes to market under the Skylar Rae brand, is a bi-colored cherry with a firm texture and flavor profile. Skylar Rae cherries are both extremely firm and sweet, with naturally high sugar levels. Volumes are limited in 2015, but the company looks to increase volumes as trees come into production in the years to come.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**KINGDOM FRESH FARMS EXPANDS WITH NEW EQUIPMENT**

In an effort to improve efficiencies to meet increased volumes, Kingdom Fresh Farms, Donna, TX, installed new tomato sorting equipment. The new machinery will provide not only labor and financial savings, but also increase output. The new equipment will be used for handling Beefsteak and Roma tomatoes and is expected to more than double the current capacity and offer substantial monthly operating savings. Those savings show a tangible return on investment and are symbolic of the keen business strategy that is guiding facility improvements and expansions that are part of a series of strategic changes that Kingdom Fresh is undertaking to grow the business.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**LOVE BEETS PARTNERS WITH WEBER GRILLS FOR SWEEPSTAKES**

"Beet Meets Grill: A Summer Love Story," is a sweepstakes by Love Beets, Bala Cynwyd, PA. Beet enthusiasts vote for their favorite grilled beet recipe through Love Beets' Facebook page. Each vote is a chance to win, and choosing the tastiest recipe will be a tough choice for voters with custom-created and unique recipes that include: Grilled Beet Kabobs with Chicken, Bell Pepper and Pineapple, Grilled Beet Sliders with Guacamole and Mango Salsa, and Grilled Vegetable Quinoa Salad among other recipes. In addition to the digital platform, Love Beets will be hosting in-store demos to promote the sweepstakes in select retailers nationwide. Shoppers will be able to enter the contest at each demo. Twenty-five randomly selected winners from the combined entry pool will win a custom purple Weber Q 1200 grill.



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ANNOUNCEMENT

**NEW CMI CHERRY POP-TOP LID DEBUTS IN EXPORT MARKETS**

Columbia Marketing International (CMI), Wenatchee, WA, pioneers the first cherry shipping box of its kind, offering a premium display option for its export customers. The high-graphic lid (pictured) incorporates a picturesque scene of the Columbia River Valley, and easily pops open and folds up to create an instant retail display.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**PURE FLAVOR & ENZA ZADEN ANNOUNCE EXCLUSIVITY AGREEMENT**

Pure Hothouse Foods' (Leamington, Ontario, Canada) Pure Flavor and Enza Zaden announce a partnership where Pure Flavor is one of the exclusive marketers to grow and market the Tribelli branded mini pepper for North American consumers. Tribelli is a well-known brand in Europe and signifies the outstanding seed varieties and characteristics that Enza demands in its peppers.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**SMARTTRAXX GO LUX WINS AWARD AT UNITED FRESH 2015**



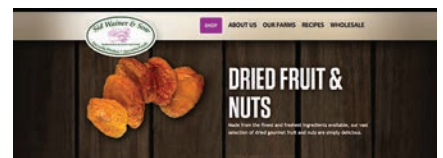
Locus Traxx Worldwide's (Jupiter, FL) SmartTraxx GO LUX provides real-time global monitoring of location, temperature, and security of products while in transit, enabling control of the supply chain for real-time business decisions. Quick and simple installation, combined with

comprehensive business intelligence reporting and responsible recyclable platforms. The monitoring system was one of 45 finalists for the United Fresh Produce Association's 2015 New Product Awards and ultimately won the New Product Safety Solution Award.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**SID WAINER & SON NOW OFFERS RETAILERS UNIQUE DRIED FRUIT & NUTS PROGRAM**

Sid Wainer & Son, Mattapoisett, MA, adds repack capabilities to its newly built manufacturing facility in Mattapoisett. The technology will pack dried fruits and nuts to order, giving resellers a customized experience and a fresh, juicy, high-quality product. Retailers will have packaging options of both clamshells and/or gusseted bags in a variety of size options from 2 ounces to 10 pounds. There are more than 50 varieties from around the world, including the exotic (dried kiwi, mulberries, cantaloupe, etc.), and the familiar (cranberries, cherry), and organic options.





# Inaugural Event Spearheads Move To Make Mediterranean Diet A Reality In Noncommercial Foodservice

BY CAROLINE PERKINS

The inaugural Mediterranean Diet Roundtable was an exclusive networking event that brought together the entire spectrum of decision-makers in the U.S. Food Industry, along with doctors, nutritionists, and directors of Food Service programs. The goal of the event back in April (held in New York City at CUNY Graduate Center), created by Daniela Puglielli, founder of Florham Park, NJ-based Accent PR, was to explore ways to offer Mediterranean food choices in schools, hospitals and healthcare facilities, as well as business and industry operations. The Mediterranean diet is based on eating lots of produce in every meal. It recommends eating

seafood twice a week, cutting consumption of meat and using healthy fats, such as extra-virgin olive oil, nuts, peanuts, sunflower seeds, olives and avocados.

The first session was kicked off by Sara Baer-Sinnott, president of Oldways, a Boston, MA-based nonprofit food and nutrition education organization that helps consumers understand and adhere to traditional cuisines. Her panel focused on scientific evidence proving that the Mediterranean diet promotes health and longevity. It particularly reduces the risk of certain diseases, such as cancer and heart disease.

College dining programs were the topic of the following panel, moderated by Ken Toong, executive director, auxiliary enterprises at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Panelists were: Rafi Taherian, executive director of Yale University Dining; Johnny Curet, director of campus dining at Rice University; and Craig Mombert, executive chef at Davidson College. Toong led a discussion about the measurable benefits of increasing the use of plant-based foods on college and university menus. He said his menu provides “crazy good food.”

Taherian noted that his goal is not just to feed students but

to create memorable experiences that will create a connection with healthy eating for a lifetime. He gave his Top 10 reasons why Mediterranean food is important to college dining, starting with versatility and ending with taste.

Mombert said that it is sometimes necessary to teach students how to eat properly, but that the Mediterranean diet is easy to promote. He is focused on controlling the amount of salt, sugar and fats that are in menu items. Food is prepared in-house, with about 90 percent made from scratch. Curet said it is important to have the right staff to prepare produce-based menus. He has a Moroccan and a Lebanese chef, both of whom believe strongly in the Mediterranean way of eating.

John Lawn, former editor-in-chief of *Food Management* magazine, moderated a discussion of menu development and purchasing processes, with a special focus on Mediterranean food choices. Veronica McLymont, director of food and nutrition services at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, said her department had been reshaping the food environment at the hospital. For instance, in the cafeteria, they replaced high-carb, high-fat snacks with fruits as

an impulse purchase at the cash register.

Debbie Kasper, director of clinical nutrition and wellness development at Premier, Inc., addressed purchasing issues, starting with making sure that certain products are inventoried at the distributor. Other decision factors ranged from cost to customer/patient/resident satisfaction. Premier serves 3,400 U.S. hospitals and 11,000 other foodservice providers. Afternoon sessions covered how the Mediterranean diet can be applied in any foodservice operation, creation of food traceability systems and pasta as a healthy carb.

Puglielli, who harkens from Abruzzi, Italy, is passionate about educating professionals and the public about the proper combination of ingredients to result in the Mediterranean way of eating. She emphasized that local purchasing of produce is important. “I’m trying to help people be more conscious of what they eat and serve.

“This event was a solid first start,” Puglielli said, citing positive feedback from attendees. The next event will be a true measure of success, however. “The first edition was great. Now, the challenge will be No. 2.” The next event will be a tasting, planned for early fall. **pb**





# UNITED

## CELEBRATES IN A TROPICAL OASIS

The guests for this year's Opening Night Party for the United Fresh Produce Association's conference mixed and mingled under the glass dome above Chicago's Navy Pier. The tropical greenery and water fountains provided an ideal setting for the industry to commence the show on Monday, June 8. **PRODUCE BUSINESS** along with Allen Lund Company and IFCO sponsored the evening's intimate occasion.

\*PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF CALLEN AND BRITTANY GRAY



(L-R) George Garcia, Patterson Companies; Chris Lafferty and Michelle Korte, Locus Traxx; Leonardo Tarriba, Farmer's Best International



(L-R) Susan Reimer-Sifford, Darden; Rich Dachman, Sysco



(L-R) Brett Puckett, Crest Fresh Market; Vonnie Jones, Topco



(L-R) Randi Dykstra, Bay Baby Produce/AMF Farms; Jennifer Pierce, Giro Pack; Tyann Schlimmer, Bay Baby Produce/AMF Farms; Michele Youngquist, Bay Baby Produce/AMF Farms



(L-R) Hillary Femal, IFCO Systems; Sparky Locke, Apio; T.J. Rahll, Edward G. Rahll & Sons



(L-R) Randall Freeman, Dave Russell, Danny Dumas and Mike Walsh, Del Monte Fresh Produce



(L-R) Tracie Levin, M. Levin and Company; Ryan Miller, M. Levin and Company; Dan Vaché and Carolyn Vaché, United Fresh Produce Association





(L-R) Andy Smith, Andrew Smith Company; Ron Mioyett, Apio; Steffanie Smith, Colorful Harvest; Jerry Butt, Mixtec Group; Marvin List, Andrew Smith Company



(L-R) Derek Derdivanis and Cindy Derdivanis, Braga Fresh Farms



(L-R) Heather Shavey, Costco; Fred Williamson, Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce; Frank Padilla, Costco



(L-R) Katy Blowers, Church Brothers; Emily Fragoso, Mixtec Group; Robert Guenther, United Fresh



(L-R) Bob Cummings, Crunch Pak; Mark Haun, Walter P. Rawl & Sons



(L-R) Bob Besix, Country Fresh Mushrooms; Kristen Reid, Mixtec Group; Jeff Busch and Laura Matar, Country Fresh Mushrooms



(L-R) Lucas Dyer, Freshpoint; Mark Sanders, Freshpoint; Jeff Deboer, Sysco Corporation



(L-R) Charlie Eagle, Southern Specialties; Michael Muzyk, Baldor; Gino Valdez, Southern Specialties



(L-R) Ross Foca, East Coast Fresh; Jason Lambros, Coastal Sunbelt Produce; Thomas Brown, East Coast Fresh



(L-R) Missy McDill, McDill Associates; Kyla Oberman, Naturipe Farm; Jesse Curtis, Naturipe Farms; Cammie Wheelus, Naturipe Farms



(L-R) Tony Marmon, Ty Thready; Ezra Bowen and Cem Yildirim, Multivac; Hugh Topper, H-E-B.



(L-R) Becky Roberts, Produce Marketing Association; Kevin Edwards, Harster Greenhouses, Inc.



(L-R) Heather Shaffer, Renaissance Food Group; Kelly Catchot, Renaissance Food Group



(L-R) Tom Brugato, Pacific Coast Fruit Company; Robert Gordon, Freshpoint



(L-R) John Cameron, Naturesweet; Aaron Deherra and Erin Smith, Rainier Fruit Company



(L-R) Suresh DeCosta, McDonald's; Kelly Catchot, Renaissance Food Group; Raina Nelson, Renaissance Food Group; Pheakdey Ith, Dupont Nutrition & Health; Stacy Stoltenberg, Dupont N&H Diagnostics





# As Retail Morphs Into Foodservice, Procurement Agents Will Have New Hurdles

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

There are very few things for which we have more than 100 years of good data. One of the rarities is the government's records on consumer household expenditures on food — where measurements have been taken for more than a century. Particularly enlightening are expenditures on food to be consumed outside the home versus food to be consumed inside the home.

No data set is perfect, and there are problems with the data. For example, supermarket deli sales are generally counted as a grocery expenditure. Some might argue that deli sales are more similar to restaurant takeout, which should count as a food-outside-the-home expenditure. Also, though retailers may salivate at the prospect of seizing “share of stomach” by way of claiming back some of these food sales for consumption outside the home, they will never be able to touch a great portion of food consumed at institutions such as colleges and universities, day care centers, hospitals, nursing homes, etc.

Yet the trends are dramatic and clear: For as long as records can show, the movement is toward increasing percentage of expenditures for food to be consumed outside the home (such as dining in restaurants), and a declining percentage of money spent on food to be consumed at home (such as food purchased in the local grocery store).

In recent years, these lines crossed, whereby more money is spent on food consumed outside the home than spent on food consumed in the home. Of course, we are speaking about dollars, not volume of food, because much of the expenditure in restaurants and other venues is for preparation, atmosphere, service etc. The volume of food still heavily favors food sold at supermarkets and other retail venues rather than restaurants etc.

But retail is changing to become more like foodservice. Read the “Research Perspectives” and “Comments & Analysis” in this issue on pages 20 and 21, and you can see a discussion of how online vendors are going beyond mere delivery of bulk produce and are really selling ready-to-cook meal solutions.

The distinctive difference between retail and foodservice has always been that retailers sell a broad selection and let consumers decide what they want to buy, while restaurants edit the selection before they make it available to consumers.

The difference is substantial. A honeydew melon grower can call

any supermarket and know that chain will carry honeydew melons. The only question is whether he can persuade the chain to buy his own honeydew melons.

This scenario is different with restaurants. Most foodservice orders are for very few commodities — potatoes, tomatoes, onions, lettuce, etc. Our honeydew melon grower has to persuade restaurant chains that they ought to include honeydew melons on their menus.

This has long been a challenge for produce shippers. Few have expertise in culinary creation and menu development. Commodity margins make it tough to invest in these areas. Also, the nature of produce creates short-term orientation, because many marketers don't own what they sell.

One way the largest retail and foodservice operations evolved in the same way is that previously both groups seemed poised to engage with vendors to demand a more value-based supply chain. Now, the relationship has veered away from such a detailed engagement. Instead, operators are looking to procure based on an arbitrary checklist in which “sustainable” (whatever that actually means) is a box that gets checked off before a vendor is approved.

There is a great disconnect in foodservice today as the chefs who design menus are typically passionate about infusing their supply chain with “other” values. But the actual procurement agents, constrained by financial, liability and food-safety concerns, are less likely to base procurement decisions on an abstract set of values.

Yet restaurant chains, with prominent brands, run grave reputational risk every time they buy fresh produce. Virtually no savings on food costs can compensate for a bad news story about mistreated workers in the growing field. Making things worse, the complexity of these issues is likely to be lost in any news story.

So the produce industry confronts a great dilemma: The industry's growth is likely to come from the foodservice sector, yet few vendors are well equipped to market effectively to increase demand in this sector. The big restaurant chains want more than produce. They want a guarantee against reputational loss and the chance to drive value decisions through their procurement. Yet they wrestle with how to make all this happen and inevitably choose to make marks on a checklist.

**The growth in the industry is likely to come from the foodservice sector, yet few vendors are well equipped to market effectively to increase demand in this sector.**





# NEW FROM MANN'S!



WOMEN OWNED BUSINESS







PHOTO COURTESY OF ZESPRI

# Putting A Little 'Gold' In Mexico's Happy Meals

Consumers get a 'Happy' introduction to kiwi in children's meals as McDonald's and Zespri team up for better nutrition.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Every Happy Meal sold across Mexico last month contained a bit of "gold" from Down Under. During the month of June, McDonald's Happy Meals in more than 400 McDonald's Mexico restaurants featured a Zespri SunGold Kiwifruit from New Zealand.

"We wanted to offer our customers something new and healthy with great taste," reports Felix Ramirez Montiel, corporate communications director for Arcos Dorados McDonald's NOLAD (North Latin America Division) in Mexico City. "The Happy Meal is one of our iconic products. McDonald's commitment always has been to offer the best quality and healthiest options. Kiwi is a great answer to meet this commitment."

This unique opportunity landed Zespri in a favorable position in front of millions of Mexican consumers. "We are thrilled to partner with one of the world's largest and best-known food retailers to introduce consumers in Mexico to Zespri's great-tasting new gold variety," says Carol Ward, general manager marketing at New Zealand's Zespri and Singapore office. "Our hope is not only to expose children to a great product in the foodservice environment, but to encourage retail sales in Mexico as well."

## DRIVEN BY NUTRITION

Since 2011 in the U.S., McDonald's has been testing and offering a variety of produce options in Happy Meals. Apple slices, baby carrots, Chiquita's junior bananas and Sun

Pacific's Cuties clementines are a few examples. But this partnership between Zespri and the fast-food chain sets a precedent on many levels — including the type of fruit and the country. One of the major factors for including the SunGold Kiwifruit in Happy Meals revolved around nutrition. "This partnership is primarily due to our quest to offer our guests the best quality product," explains Ramirez. "When looking at new fruit options for the McDonald's Happy Meal, we found the SunGold Kiwifruit to be a great choice."

"What was compelling to McDonald's was not only how great the fruit tasted but also how it provided excellent nutritional aspects," concurs Ward. "McDonald's has been putting increasing emphasis on improving the nutritional quality of Happy Meals and SunGold fits well."

According to Zespri, SunGold contains three times more vitamin C than oranges and a powerful combination of fiber, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals without the calories.

"We're confident Mexican parents appreciate this healthy addition to their children's diets," says Ward. "A lot of moms worldwide are looking for more fruits their kids like so they can increase fruit in their children's diet."

The novelty of offering a unique product to the marketplace was another selling point. "In the past, we offered mango, apple, pineapple and melon, so kiwi is big news for our customers," says Ramirez. "Kiwi is not typically a very popular fruit in Mexico due to its low availability and cost; we made it possible for every family in Mexico to find kiwi at a very



Specific packaging for McDonald's was developed by Zespri and Cocanmex to highlight the branding and the spife (combination spoon-knife).

reasonable cost in every Happy Meal."

The physical form of the product presented an added benefit to the deal. "McDonald's was also attracted by the package — it's the whole fruit," says Ward. "It doesn't need pre-cutting or slicing. It travels well in its own skin. The kiwifruit is just an easy package with something great inside."

Providing a fruit perfect for kid's hands opened opportunity to market an alternative size. "We worked with size 39 kiwifruit, which is small and 'kiddie-size' for the Happy Meal format," reports Ward. "Usually the market carries sizes 22 through 27 but this was a special size for small hands."

## A GREAT BEGINNING

Though conversations began at the end of the 2014 season, it took until the first

quarter of 2015 for supply and marketing to come together. The SunGold Happy Meal launched the weekend of June 6 with Zespri and McDonald's representatives in Mexico City to observe. "We went to one of the largest McDonald's restaurants in Mexico City to watch the reaction," reports Ward. "We were confident in the product taste, because we did lots of taste-testing previous to this launch. But, it's the first time we went to a McDonald's with it."

Children may have been a bit leery at first, but soon found the fruit's treasure. "At first impression, the kids did not know how the kiwi may taste or even how to eat it," shares Ramirez. "However once they tried it, we saw a very positive reaction because of its sweetness and great taste."

"It was amazing to see the excitement of the kids cutting it open and tasting it," adds Ward. "All the kids ate *all* the kiwifruit. We were blown away with their excitement."

Each Happy Meal also included a spife (combination spoon-knife). "A lot of people don't know how to eat a kiwi so we promote cutting it in half and eating it with a spoon," explains Ward. "The spife is something we came up with. We have a patent on it and produce millions every year. We supply them globally and use them as a way to promote the convenience of eating kiwi."

"A specific packaging for McDonald's was developed by Zespri and Cocanmex (a Mexican fruit exporter located in Cuautitlán Izcalli, Mexico) to highlight the branding and the spife," says Ward. "It is branded with Zespri information and the cut and scoop message."

A SunGold advertisement played on McTV in McDonald's stores during the promotion, and signage was placed in windows and on menuboards in McDonald's stores around Mexico. McDonald's 8,000 Mexican crew members received training about Zespri and SunGold, including sampling. Zespri hopes these educational tools will assist in building awareness and demand for SunGold in multiple sectors throughout Mexico.

"Through the Happy Meals, we have about 1 million Mexican families trying SunGold who likely have never eaten a kiwi before," says Ward. "We're looking for them to have a positive eating experience and then look for the product in the supermarket — to see it as a great addition to their fruit consumption."

SunGold is available in the Mexican market through wholesalers, traditional markets and retailers. Ward adds, "In Mexico, Zespri kiwi-fruit retails for between 80 to 120 pesos per kilo. This is typically twice the price of other

## Though Zespri sells in 54 countries around the world, the Happy Meal deal is a first for the company and was forecast to result in sales of more than 1 million pieces of fruit.



(L-R) Carol Ward, Zespri and Felix Ramirez Montiel, Arcos Dorados McDonald's

kiwifruit from Chile and is due to the quality, taste and size difference."

### A DEAL FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE

Though Zespri sells in 54 countries around the world, the Happy Meal deal is a first for the company and was forecast to result in sales of more than 1 million pieces of fruit. Enthusiasm, hard work and the right collaboration all intersected to yield this partnership. "Our excitement about the new SunGold kiwi had us talking extensively to our customers about the growth in volumes and the huge potential we see nutritionally," explains Ward.

Zespri began its relationship with distributor Cocanmex 23 years ago. Cocanmex has imported SunGold into the Mexican market for two seasons and in 2014 introduced McDonald's to the product. "Our distributor in Mexico, Cocanmex, heard and shared our vision for this SunGold," says Ward. "Cocanmex won Supplier of the Year to McDonald's in Mexico and has a great relationship with the restaurant. Cocanmex really played a crucial role in implementing this project."

Ensuring the quality of the fruit was crucial to encouraging consumption. "Cocanmex delivered to McDonald's distribution center," explains Ward. "Store-by-store distribution was made through the McDonald's transportation supplier. Cocanmex communicated the cold chain specifications of transporting the kiwi-

fruit nationwide."

Cocanmex also pre-conditioned the fruit so it would be ready to eat in each Happy Meal. "McDonald's then stored it in the proper temperature to extend the shelf life before the pieces were sold," says Ward. "McDonald's has strict supply-chain requirements and quality control and trains store personnel in temperature management and ripeness."

The venture promoted a synergy shared by the two companies in health and nutrition.

"All around the world, we see many organizations putting a high priority on healthy diet and increasing consumption of produce," says Ward. "Within the industry, we are all committed to programs like 5+ A Day Charitable Trust [out of New Zealand] and other educational agendas to promote healthy eating — especially among children. Playing a role in terms of encouraging fruit as part of an everyday diet is important and needs promotion and support."

Ward continues, "Throughout McDonald's and other fast food restaurants globally, the future demands increasing attention to ensure there are healthy meal options included, particularly in kids meals. Companies embracing this will benefit greatly."

The SunGold Mexico project reveals the power of unique solutions to improve nutritional options. "The big lesson here is about looking outside the box," suggests Ward. "It's about breaking the norm and preconceptions about what's possible and what's not possible. For the food sector, what we do has got to taste good to kids, it must be available and it has to be convenient. Healthy options in addition to just fries as a side must become the norm and must be realistic. We need to work out the logistics to ensure a good product all the time that's part of the normal offering."

"In the future, we need to continue to deliver a high quality product at a competitive cost, with great taste and nutritional benefits for children," concurs McDonald's Ramirez. "If a brand or a product can accomplish these four elements, success is mostly guaranteed. Hopefully this project represents the beginning of having the kiwifruit in the entire McDonald's system not just Mexico." **pb**



# How Fresh Produce Plays Key Role In New Generation Of Delivery Services

BY MAEVE WEBSTER, SENIOR DIRECTOR; MIKE KOSTYO, PUBLICATIONS MANAGER, DATASSENTIAL

**L**ate last year, Datassential asked consumers which factors were most important to them when choosing a meal delivery service. Topping the list was fresh ingredients. Forty-eight percent of consumers said fresh ingredients were very important to them, beating factors such as: healthy meals, the use of local ingredients, and options for special diets (gluten-free or vegetarian).

In fact, fresh produce is one of the most important differentiators for a whole new generation of meal and grocery delivery services that are growing fast and earning lots of attention. These services often make claims of “disrupting” traditional industries and becoming the “Uber” of meal delivery. And those claims may not be far off.

For Datassential’s *Creative Concepts TrendSpotting Report* on meal delivery services, we took a comprehensive look at these services, from the ingredients and flavors you’ll find on the menu to the technologies making these services possible. We also surveyed consumers for their thoughts on these companies, from their interest in the types of dishes being offered to the concept’s overall appeal. In particular, we looked at three types of services: prepared meal delivery, meal kit delivery, and grocery/packaged goods delivery.

## Freshness & Produce Is Key

“From kale to baby bok choy, we’re choosy about what goes into your box,” Plated.com proclaims. “Great meals start with fresh ingredients,” says Sprig.com. Blue Apron promises produce that is “fresher than the supermarket.” For companies focused on prepared meal delivery (such as Plated, Sprig and Blue Apron), this focus on freshness is designed to de-stigmatize pre-made dinners. These aren’t your typical frozen dishes. Many of these companies hire renowned chefs or partner with local restaurants to deliver hot, on-demand,

restaurant-quality dishes. Berkeley, California-based SpoonRocket uses algorithms to position delivery drivers around the city before customers even order, using specially-designed delivery vehicles with built-in hot and cold compartments.

For those consumers using meal kit delivery services, which deliver pre-portioned ingredients to customers to be prepared on the customer’s schedule, novelty and reducing food waste are key factors. Many note that these boxes allow any customer, anywhere in the country, to find ingredients that are typically only available in specialty grocers or urban areas — for example, daikon radishes, escarole, or Calabrian chili peppers. A mix of healthy dishes, customer favorites, and on-trend produce is also key for many services. Almost everyone offers a variation on a kale salad. Because the ingredients are portioned out for each dish, these services noted that customers don’t have to buy entire bunches of cilantro or even an entire lemon if a dish only calls for a sprinkling or a squeeze.

While grocery delivery may be the most mature segment of the delivery market (Peapod launched in 1989), fresh produce is sometimes a pain point to try and convince customers that a surrogate shopper will choose produce that’s up to the customer’s standards. Almost every company goes to great lengths to reassure customers that the company’s standards are exceptionally high, and that it will return, replace, or reimburse any produce that isn’t up-to-par. It seems to be working. Grocery delivery services are one of the fastest-growing segments of the meal delivery market. Last year the *New York Times* reported Instacart’s gross revenue grew more than 10 times last year, to more than \$100 million annually. Now the company is expanding to suburban markets and directly partnering with supermarket chains after showing that a majority of Instacart orders do not replace traditional

- **45% of consumers said meal choice was important in choosing a delivery service.**
- **31% of consumers said healthy meals were an important factor in choosing a meal delivery service.**
- **14% of consumers used a supermarket/local grocery delivery service (Instacart, Peapod) in the past.**

Source: *Creative Concepts TrendSpotting Report*

shopping trips, they augment them.

## Customers & Companies Are Responding

According to Datassential’s research, one-fifth of consumers tried an online or mobile-based delivery service, and more than a third love the idea. Now everyone is getting into the game. In addition to Amazon, Google Express partnered with brands like Costco, while Wal-Mart expanded both its pickup and delivery services this year. In April, Chipotle announced it would begin offering delivery in 67 cities through a partnership with Postmates on-demand delivery service. Celebrity chef David Chang announced he is curating the menu for Maple, a recently-launched, Manhattan-based delivery-only restaurant.

Even Uber is aiming to be the “meta-Uber” of meal delivery with its UberEats platform, leveraging the company’s drivers to deliver meals from local restaurants. Investment capital continues to flow into the delivery startup space, as investors make bets that technology usage (most delivery services are web or app-based), urban population growth, and an on-demand economy will continue to drive interest and growth in these services.

In the near future, customers may only have to go as far as their doorstep for fresh produce.



Maeve Webster is the senior director and Mike Kostyo is the publications manager at Datassential, a leading supplier of trends, analysis, and concept testing for the food industry.

# Poised For Growth

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

**D**atassential always does interesting work, and this piece by Maeve Webster and Mike Kostyo raises important issues for the produce industry.

First, it points to the rise of a new business category selling meal delivery services. Although some produce companies are participating in this segment by actually assembling the boxes that go to consumers — and all these services are buying produce from somewhere — few shippers established divisions or sales desks with personnel specialized in these markets.

Much as like selling to foodservice depends crucially on influencing the menus of operators until these companies are persuaded to add these items to menus — after all, sales of sliced apples, blueberries and Clementines to McDonald's were zero a decade or so ago — the industry must engage with meal delivery services to highlight opportunities to use more fresh produce. After all, the Datassential research showing that consumers value fresh foods means that meal delivery services will be open to new opportunities. Yet how many produce shippers are organized to place a sales priority on this fast growing industry segment? How many companies have the expertise necessary to credibly engage in assisting these meal delivery services in menu planning, delivery execution, etc.

The meal delivery service would seem to hold the potential for being a real boon to specialty produce vendors. After all, consumers typically refrain from buying specialty items because of: unfamiliarity with taste; uncertainty of usage and cooking techniques; cost; and fear of waste. Yet, if meal delivery services incorporate these items into their menus, all these “problems” are mitigated.

Consumers pay for meal delivery services to have chefs develop great recipes, so consumers will be inclined to give specialty items a try — even if they don't know how they taste. Since whatever cooking required comes with clear explanation, and the services wouldn't allow anything too

**These delivery services start out selling convenience, but in the end, they will deliver superior quality produce, and that will be a major cause of their triumph.**

complicated, lack-of-cooking expertise will not be a serious problem for consumers. Relative to other produce items, specialty produce costs a lot, because retailers use these items as margin-enhancers and do have concerns on shrink.

Meal delivery services sell a meal at a fixed margin, don't try to make more on one item than another, and there is no shrink due to lack of sales as the services buy exactly the quantity they need for the number of meals contracted. Finally, consumers buy exactly what they need — an individual meal — so there is no waste as there could be in cooking small quantities. Since many meal delivery services appeal to urban singles and couples, this is a big win.

One can imagine these services growing substantially. As the elderly portion of the population grows, these services, delivering meals with pre-cut portions, serve so many needs of the elderly: ease of transport, avoidance of waste, avoidance of too much knife work in cooking, etc.

Also, the growth in health concerns and specific diets will play into this trend as well. Ordering a gluten-free meal or one that conforms to the Paleo diet, a carb-free option, or a peanut-free diet for someone allergic is often easier than trying to hobble together such options at a restaurant. In the hullabaloo of a busy restaurant, it is much harder to really ensure that no knife used to spread peanut butter is used on a peanut-free meal without thorough sanitation. On an assembly line, this is less of a challenge.

The broader grocery delivery industry is obviously set to explode. Amazon, after years of experimentation, is now in a roll-out stage. This platform alone could become one of the largest grocers in the world. The reactions of other players, from Wal-Mart

to Google, all demonstrate that this area is not only hot but perceived as a long-term growth strategy.

This growth offers the produce industry the potential for a more satisfied consumer. Fundamentally, the standard practice in stores — which is to remove items from their packages, disturb the cold chain, put them out in a venue where consumers can touch the produce — all lead to reductions in product quality and opportunities for food safety problems, all while increasing shrink.

The obvious next generation of produce packaging is consumer packaging. Just as shippers often prepare special boxes for warehouse clubs, if the typical consumer order is for six clementines, the ultimate outcome will be source-packing of small trays of six Clementines so that the delivery services can sell that unit without having to repack. This will allow for a much improved cold chain, more efficiency, and a more sanitary product.

These delivery services start out selling convenience, but in the end, they will deliver superior quality produce, and that will be a major cause of their triumph.

Although it may seem as if consumers will be hesitant to trust a delivery service with produce selection, the best research we have indicates the opposite is true. Consumers are so doubtful about their *own* ability to select a ripe pineapple or flavorful melon that they are happy to outsource this function to experts. Online retailers (with their various ranking systems), which almost always include some sort of message such as: “This is bad, but we make it available in case you really need it,” actually have more credibility with consumers than brick-and-mortar retailers who almost never speak so bluntly.

**pb**



# THE RISE OF INDIA

## An Opportunity For Producers As Retailers Compete For The Best Produce



**JIM PREVOR**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**T**here are countless efforts in Europe, America and other mature markets to increase consumption of fresh produce.

To the best of our knowledge, none of these have worked. If you talk to the people who run these various programs you will know the cat is out of the bag. When you ask about increases in consumption one typically receives statistics as to how many plastic bags had a logo or how many menus mention produce items.

For those concerned with health, this is an enormous problem. Intense research is necessary to try to find ways to change diets to be more healthy — thus incorporating more fruits and vegetables.

For those whose primary interest is commercial, and they want to sell more fruits and vegetables, the lack of effectiveness of these consumption-boosting programs leads them to look for new markets.

That is not easy either. Think about those who had focused on Russia and now find the companies in Russia struggle to pay the bills or that trade is blocked by political fiat.

In countries such as India and China, the massive growth in the middle class is noted, but finding identifiable marketing targets is not always easy as these populations are not necessarily in one defined area geographically.

Still, it is pretty clear that if you want to dramatically increase sales, finding new markets, rather than waiting for incremental growth, is important.

This fact creates a new reality for big retailers in the West for it means that producers will be seeking alternative homes for their produce. Perhaps these developing markets will pay more for the best stuff or, perhaps, they won't be so quick to reject product or demand producers jump through as many hoops.

But how real is the opportunity in developing markets? One man is expert in both how to market into these markets and how to retail and promote the product once it gets there.

He once represented the California Table Grape Commission, Pear Bureau Northwest, Washington Apple Commission, U.S. Apple Export Council and California Prune Board in marketing commodities into India. Now he heads up the fresh division for a major retailer in India.

Sumit Saran is chief executive of fresh business and head of international foods. At Gurgaon, India-based Future Group. *The Pundit's* special projects editor, Mira Slott, interviews Saran and investigates opportunities in developing markets.

**Q: What should produce industry executives know about Future Group and your role at the company?**

A: Future Group is one of India's largest retailers. We have 600 stores with different shapes and formats servicing customers in 100 cities. We have supermarkets, convenience store formats and gourmet stores, so we cater to all segments of the population throughout the country. I head the international food

business for the group and I also head the fresh business, as in fruits and vegetables.

**Q: Why is India's market so complex?**

A: The reason is that when you're talking about a population of 1.2 billion to 1.5 billion, depending on what product you're marketing, your market will be anywhere between 200 million to 300 million. The problem is those 300 million customers are mixed in a 750 million-people market area, a myriad of small towns, mid-size towns, etc.

In essence, we're a diverse country, extremely heterogeneous, so how do you reach your customers? It's very complex. Along the food chain, the languages and customs change. So how do you get through all that? A lot of people are not able to figure out how to enter the market and tap into it.

**Q: As a retailer, how do you navigate those heterogeneous markets?**

A: We have the reach and formats to change our product and positioning depending on where we are. We have store chains that cater to various segments of the population. For example, the Food Bazaar is the large format hypermarket





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that targets middle class India, while Foodhall is a gourmet store focusing on more upmarket consumers. Hence depending on products and its appeal, we are able to tailor-make promotions.

**Q: How is the import mix changing?**

A: When we look at imported foods, we have two distinct categories, that of supplementary and complementary foods. Supplementary foods are those that our country needs to import to meet the demands of a 1-billion-plus population. Products like cereals, pulses, edible oil and sugar fall into this category. Complementary foods are those that are imported to cater to the demands of a burgeoning Indian middle class and its aspirations to be a part of the global consuming family.

**Q: How important is fresh produce in that makeup? And how quickly is demand increasing in connection with rising incomes and modern trends?**

A: According to various trade reports and analysis, market size for imported food products in India for complementary foods is estimated to be close to US\$ 1.5 billion. Fresh fruits, dry fruits and nuts, certain type of oils like olive oil and processed foods like confectionery items, beverages and pasta products etc., are the fastest growing import items in this category.

The key driver for the development of the imported food segment in India is the modern Indian consumer. In very simple language, Indians are eating more; Indians are shopping more; Indians are spending more and consequently Indians are demanding more.

**Q: With India's population size, couldn't these consumer spending and lifestyle changes translate to big sales and profit opportunities?**

A: From a food marketing perspective, these seemingly extremely straightforward and simple statements have huge ramifications. It should not come as a surprise that in the changing world order, India is becoming one of the most sought after markets. The growth of imported foods in India in some ways has mirrored the overall prosperity in the

**As far as the future is concerned, it is extremely bright. The growth we are seeing currently is still only the tip of the iceberg.**

— Sumit Saran

Indian economy, which has continued to boom despite the overall global slowdown.

The growing Indian economy, combined with the media revolution, has meant that more Indians are aware of global consumption patterns and trends. Their aspirations towards a better and healthier life are bringing about fundamental changes in food consumption patterns. The Indian consumer today is not only exposed to the world but is also ready to spend that extra buck for buying foods that are nutritious and of superior quality.

**Q: What produce categories show the most potential in India?**

A: Tremendous growth rates can be seen in products that can sustain themselves comparatively better in non-refrigerated environments, such as apples, pears and oranges. Import volume of very temperature-sensitive products, such as fresh grapes, stone fruits (peaches, plums and nectarines), etc., is also growing as modern retail establishes its footprints and gradually creates the necessary infrastructure for these fruits.

As far as the future is concerned, it is extremely bright. The growth we are seeing currently is still only the tip of the iceberg. The infrastructure challenge in India confines the opportunities for imported fresh produce to only the more prosperous areas of India. There are tremendous opportunities in the small and medium cities of India. The real growth in the market will come when importers and retailers are able to reach

the consumers across the country.

**Q: How does Future Group go about sourcing fresh produce? What can produce suppliers do to help you in your efforts? Are you looking for new companies to work with?**

A: The international sourcing model for fresh produce is getting established within Future Group. We are already importing some apples and citrus. My endeavor will be to increase the size and the assortment of the basket.

For products that are established, such as apples and citrus, we are looking at bringing in more varieties. For products such as pears, grapes, cherries, kiwis etc., that we currently do not source, I am looking to get these items added to the import basket immediately. For products like avocados, berries etc., that are new for Indian consumers, we are very willing to import small loads by air or sea and then partner with grower associations or bodies to launch and market these across our store formats.

**Q: It is exciting to hear you talk about your strategies to build your fresh produce offering and your desire to work with a range of produce companies and associations in those efforts...**

A: Fresh consumption is on the rise, and we see consumers every day at our stores buying more and consumers demanding better.

India is a huge market with varied tastes and patterns. If marketed and promoted properly, there is tremendous potential for foods across categories. Naturally some categories will be faster growing than others, but opportunities exist across the board. What is important for the global food marketers is to spend time and effort in understanding the market and the target consumer base and then launch their products accordingly. Partnering in modern retail will be key.

There are no formulas for instant success in India. Companies will need to do their ground work and enter this market with a clear long term vision to have any chance of success. The market is extremely rewarding for those who can persevere.



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# Fresh Thyme

Building an organic grocery brand in the Midwest.

BY ANNEMARIE MANNION



Instead of going west for opportunity — as historical newspaperman Horace Greeley once recommended — the founder of a new grocery chain is going back to his roots: the Midwest.

Chris Sherrell, founder and chief executive of Fresh Thyme Farmers Markets, who grew up in Wisconsin, launched the grocery chain in 2012. It now has stores in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio and is moving into Minnesota and Missouri this year.

For Sherrell, 38, the Midwest is the place to be. The company plans to open a total of 60 stores that emphasize fresh, organic and local produce by 2019 throughout the region.

“The farmer’s market concept is the hottest thing in the grocery market and space,” says Sherrell. “There’s a huge void in the Midwest for it. It made all the sense in the world to bring this concept here.”

Sherrell has the experience to make his plan succeed. He was president and chief executive of Sunflower Farmers Market, which grew from one store to 44 in eight states during the

10 years he was there. Sunflower merged with Sprouts Farmers Market. Prior to Sunflower, he worked for nine years in operations at Wild Oats Markets.

Sherrell was on hand at the grand opening in late April of one of Fresh Thyme’s newest locations in Downers Grove, IL.

## GRAND OPENING

With a musical duo playing soft rock in the background and customers tasting samples while examining fresh produce, Sherrell explained the company’s mission. “We’re trying to bring a natural, organic lifestyle to the masses,” he says. “We’re targeting the customer who’s a conventional shopper today, but who wants to transition to a natural, organic, healthy lifestyle.”

The goal, at the same time, is to bring value. “We go by the motto: Healthy Food, Healthy Value,” says Bruce Van Overloop, director of operations.

Mike Krage, vice president of merchandising, agrees. “I think our customer wants to

eat better, to have more options for healthy, organic, local and non-genetically modified foods and to do it at value pricing.”

Like many of their customers, Van Overloop, Krage, and Sherrell were clad in jeans at the opening, reinforcing the company’s goal to make healthy and organic seem within the reach of the average shopper. No one will be intimidated by coming in here,” says Van Overloop. “That’s why we wear casual clothes.”

The stores will carry about 160 organic produce items and up to 200 during summer’s peak season. Organics are expected to account for about 25 percent of sales and take up about 20 percent of floor space at each store, which boasts about 28,000 square feet.

The company wants to provide a wealth of produce that won’t leave shoppers wanting for more. Krage says there is nothing more disappointing for an organic shopper than not finding what you need. “If you’re an organic shopper, and you’re making an organic recipe, you have to find every item in it. Otherwise you’re compromising the recipe,” says Krage.



## CHAIN'S FUTURE PLANNED WITH THIRD-PARTY AND LOCAL DISTRIBUTORS

To provide the healthy produce that fills its shelves, Sherrell says the company works with a couple of third-party distributors and plans to continue to do so while branching out to new local providers.

"Third-party distributors are a huge part of our success, and we'll continue to rely on them," says Sherrell. "From a logistics and buying-power standpoint, we'll continue with third-party distributors for the foreseeable future."

At the same time, Fresh Thyme is building relationships with local producers. Representatives of Fresh Thyme met with local growers recently at an event sponsored in Michigan's state capital, Lansing, by state officials. It plans to have similar meetings with local providers in other states.

"We're meeting now with growers and building those partnerships, so we can bring those products into our stores," says Krage.

To capitalize on the trend of customers wanting to know where their food is coming from, Fresh Thyme plans to feature its local growers in ads and in signage in its stores. Those ads and signs will have pictures of the farmers and the farmers with their families. "Consumers are wanting to have more information about where their products are coming from, and this will help bring it to them," says Krage.

The company is also committed to giving leeway to stores on what they purchase. "We give them guidelines on what we want to see and cost is controlled by us, but they can purchase whatever they want," says Sherrell.

Fresh Thyme wants to provide customers with produce that reflects the local flavor of the areas where the stores are located.

"Local is a huge part of our future, and seasonal is a huge part of it," says Sherrell.

In the Midwest, of course, there will be some weather-related realities that Fresh Thyme will need to work around. "The seasonal market is limited in the Midwest," says Sherrell. "In the winter months a lot of produce comes from the West Coast and Florida." He says stores can expect frequent deliveries, however, of five or six times a week.

## DISTRIBUTION CENTER OPENS

For distribution throughout the Midwest the retailer opened a 30,000-square-foot distri-



**Fresh Thyme sources seasonal produce locally and features farmers on signage throughout the store.**

bution center, also in Downers Grove. The location was selected because of its easy access to major highways and two airports, Chicago Midway International Airport and Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

The distribution center opened May 1 and will have 150 employees within a year, says Sherrell. The exteriors of the stores, that each employ about 100, feature a red barn-like design that brings to mind farm-fresh produce. It also echoes the retailer's emphasis on locally grown and organic foods. Each store will also have a natural meat section and 400 bulk food bins.

To ensure customers, even ones just driving by, are aware of the company's emphasis on natural, organic and local produce, the company plans abundant outdoor displays and sales.

"We'll be flowing out into the vestibule and into the outside as we get into spring," says Krage. "We'll have farmer's markets on weekends where we go out into the front to sell our products."

Because Fresh Thyme is focusing on providing value and high quality to the shopper, the chain's leadership acknowledges it will have to operate a bit differently from stores that have different pricing strategies. "We have a lower profit margin than the Big Box stores. We have to make that up on volume," says Krage.

Because customers want fresh produce, Krage says he expects them to visit the stores an average of a few times a week. "If you're going to eat fresh, you have to visit three times a week," he says.

## AN EASY PLACE TO SHOP

To make navigating a shopping trip easier, the stores cannot be too large or overwhelming for the consumer. Upon entering the stores, the fresh produce department will be the first area that customers see.

"It's an easy place to shop," says Krage. "It's a convenient store for people who are buying for tonight or tomorrow."

There is no plan to differentiate the layout or design of each store based on locale. "Our format is the same, so when you walk in it's going to feel the same and it's going to be the same," says Van Overloop.

The stores' other assets include local honeys that will be offered throughout the stores, as well as local selections of craft beers and wines. Each store will also have a large, natural health and beauty-care section featuring more than 7,000 vitamins, supplements and beauty care items.

Those sections are intended to make Fresh Thyme stand out from other stores. "We're carrying things that other grocery stores won't — like a huge vitamin and natural body care section," says Sherrell.

## COMPANY PLANS EMAIL BLASTS AND WEEKLY FLIERS

The company is making its presence known through email blasts, social media and a weekly flier that is mailed to 100,000 people per store.

Fresh Thyme also wants to be an integral part of the lives of its local communities and customers. At each grand opening, the store is making large donations to a local charity.

Each store will feature a giving tree where customers can seek support of a nonprofit organization, community group, school, sports team or other cause they are passionate about. "The tree shows our support and lets people ask us for support," says Sherrell.

Because Fresh Thyme is serious about providing value, the company will also highlight every week a particularly well priced item such as three avocados for a dollar. "Every week we're putting something out that we're calling a 'crazy priced product,'" says Sherrell. "That's our business model, and we'll continue that forever."

Company officials are excited about getting to know their customers, but are aware that introducing Fresh Thyme will take time. "Customers are getting to know us every time they come in the door," says Van Overloop. **pb**

RETROSPECTIVE

**BOB DIPIAZZA OF SUN PACIFIC  
 MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS MAJOR  
 PRODUCE CHANGES DURING  
 HIS VERSATILE CAREER**

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**T**hroughout his 38 years working with innovative retailers and seven on the supply side, Bob DiPiazza has seen a myriad of evolutionary changes in the produce industry. He was formerly vice president of produce and group vice president for all fresh

foods at Dominick's in Chicago. DiPiazza is a past chairman of the PMA. In 1998, he joined Wal-Mart Inc. as a vice president and shortly after was promoted to senior vice president and general manager of Sam's Club U.S. Perishable Food Operations. After retiring from Wal-Mart in 2007, he remained active in the industry, consulting with retailers and growers. In 2011, DiPiazza was appointed president of Sun Pacific, a leading California grower, shipper and marketer of citrus, grapes, kiwi and tomatoes.

**Where were you in 1985, and what were you doing?**

I was in Dominick's corporate produce office in the Chicago area. My first corporate job was to implement salad bars and bulk foods into the stores as part of the produce division.

**What was the produce department like in 1985?**

Very different from today. I'd have to take a wild guess about the number of products it held because back then there wasn't any syndicated data, and it wasn't easy to track; we had maybe 150 SKU's then. PLU's were not yet established. A few of us involved in PMA were pushing for standardized PLU adoption a few years later — around 1988. UPC's were limited, because branded packaged goods were very limited. There were no organic SKU's and no

After spending more than 25 years as a retailer, in 2011, DiPiazza became president of Sun Pacific, a California grower/shipper/marketer of citrus, grapes, kiwi and tomatoes.

bagged salad mixes. However, we did have salad bars and fresh-cut and packaged fruit as well as some veggies, but all [the preparation] was done at store level.

**What was the overall retail environment like then?**

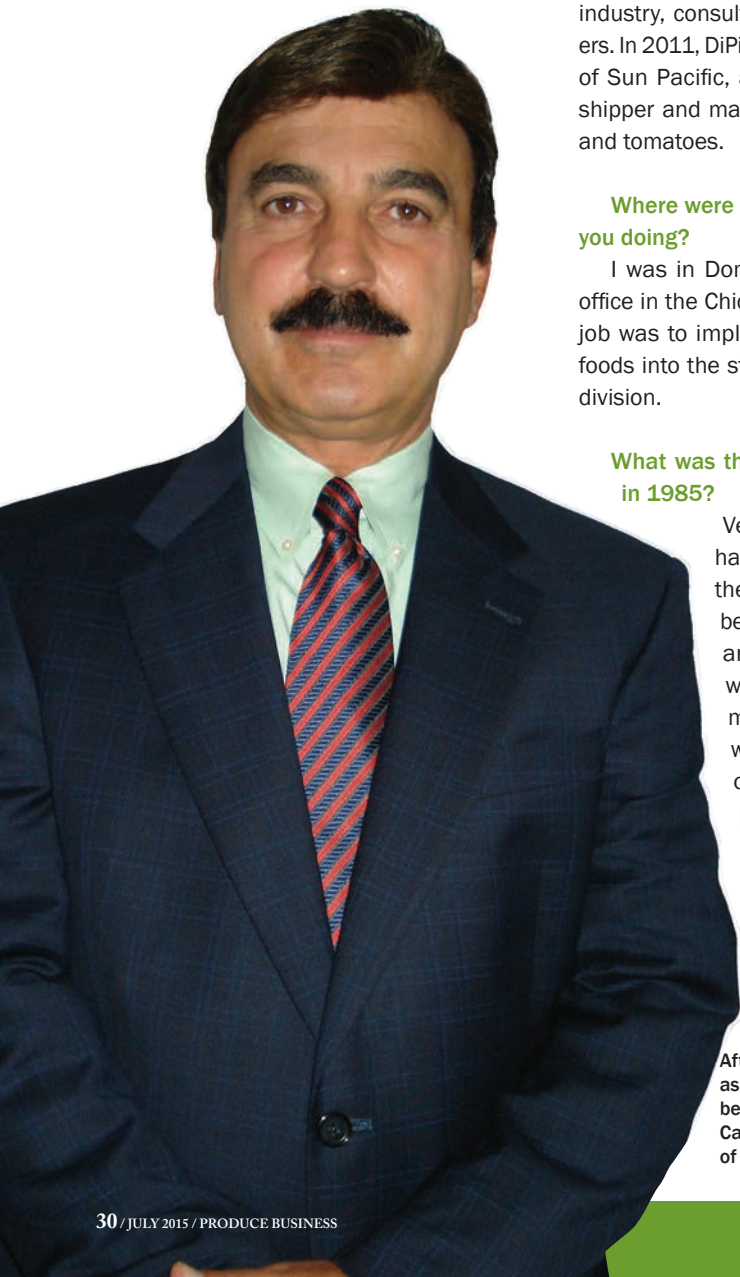
A lot less complicated! You did not have all the alternative channels like mass retailers Wal-Mart, Kmart and Target selling perishables. Dollar stores, drug stores and convenience stores were not selling fresh produce either. The warehouse club industry was just starting to gain some traction in the West. The development of all these different channels makes the landscape more competitive.

**What were some of the prime influencing changes in the past 30 years?**

I think Wal-Mart/Sam's and Costco were the big game changers. They really started to make a difference in the mid 1990s. They and other price-conscious stores resulted in a price impact in the marketplace and consumer mindset. Suddenly the industry and consumers were noticing warehouse clubs and stores like Aldi.

Also, the standardization of supply chain elements has had a huge impact. In 1985, we couldn't be assured we would get a standardized pallet. If you look at all the supply chain-related changes such as the standardized pallet, having cartons standardized, and the PLU system, they greatly influence how we do business today.

Finally, the development of year-round supply revolutionized the way we sell and the way consumers think about produce. When I was with Wal-Mart, I was given the added responsibility to develop and launch Wal-Mart's Fresh-Food Global Sourcing and Procurement program for Wal-Mart business units worldwide. I remember going to Chile in 1987 when I was with Dominick's and starting





to make some direct relationships. Back then, to find green grapes in January or February was unheard of. Now, even our own domestic production expanded due to new varieties that come on at different times. Year-round supply is mostly a combination of imports and varietal development.

### What have been some of the biggest innovations in the industry over the past 30 years?

The growth of processed fresh veggies and fruit by transferring that labor from the stores to the supply side for greater efficiency has been significant. It was around 1989 when Bruce Taylor [founder and chief executive of Salinas, CA-based Taylor Farms] came to me and said, "I have this thing called a bagged salad." Several innovative retailers took a chance with it. We had to make some changes in refrigeration to accommodate it, but the rest is history.

Another big impact was the development of supply-side packaging for a lot of other produce products. I remember being a produce manager, and if you put strawberries on sale, you had to have two people all day making up pints of strawberries in the backroom to keep up with sales. When we started the transfer of packaging out of the store to the supply side, it opened the door to not having that labor in the produce department. Innovative suppliers such as Driscoll's (with its clamshell) foresaw the benefit of this and really made it work.

### What does today's produce department look like?

Today, because of the advances made in the supply chain, the overall quality of produce is pretty good; the supply chain gets product from the field-to-fork pretty fast. Now the pressure is on handling and execution. Handling includes managing your inventory so you're turning product [from store to warehouse]. This process is where a lot of differentiation comes into play.

The other big change in retail now is the resurgence of the independent grocer. Back in the 1980s, the chains had so much scale and leverage it was hard for independents to gain market share. However, as the chains grew larger, overhead grew as well. From a selling standpoint, independents now have a niche; independents may not have the same buying power, but they can keep selling costs down.

The year-round supply has also complicated merchandising. Overall giving consumers choice is a good thing. However, it does fragment merchandising. Years ago, one product would finish and leave room for the next one coming in, but it's not that simple anymore.

Carrying everything all the time takes up space. Now, you have to design your department to accommodate all the items.

### What do you see in the future for produce?

In the past 10 years, I have seen us really return to developing varieties for flavor. There is a growing focus on making products eat really well. The new varieties of premium grapes and stone fruit are excellent. It's refreshing to see the industry developing varieties for flavor rather than shelf life. I think we're going to see

a consumer willing to pay for a product that really differentiates itself flavor-wise within a category. This is an area where companies, and especially retailers, can differentiate themselves. To adopt another slogan: "If it doesn't eat right, then 'just say no.'" **pb**

### What was the greatest lesson you learned about retailing over the past 30 years?

Be different and be good at it. There are multiple formulas for success in retailing, but they all require passion. **pb**

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# Produce Moves To Head Of The Class

IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE FUTURE OF PRODUCE, THEN DINE AT A COLLEGE CAMPUS. **By John Lehndorff**

If you pay attention to what's cooking on America's college campuses, you can catch a glimpse of the future of fresh produce. The same cafeterias that horrified earlier collegiate generations with meat-loaf and plops of instant mashed potatoes, gravy, frozen green beans and canned fruit cocktail are now leading sites for culinary development.

To a produce grower or supplier, the modern university dining hall can look like the Promised Land. The salad bars can compete with those at Whole Foods Market and Wegmans. Stir fries are cooked to order for students. Beautiful composed salads, vegetable-topped pizzas and side dishes (such as sautéed broccolini) are on the menu

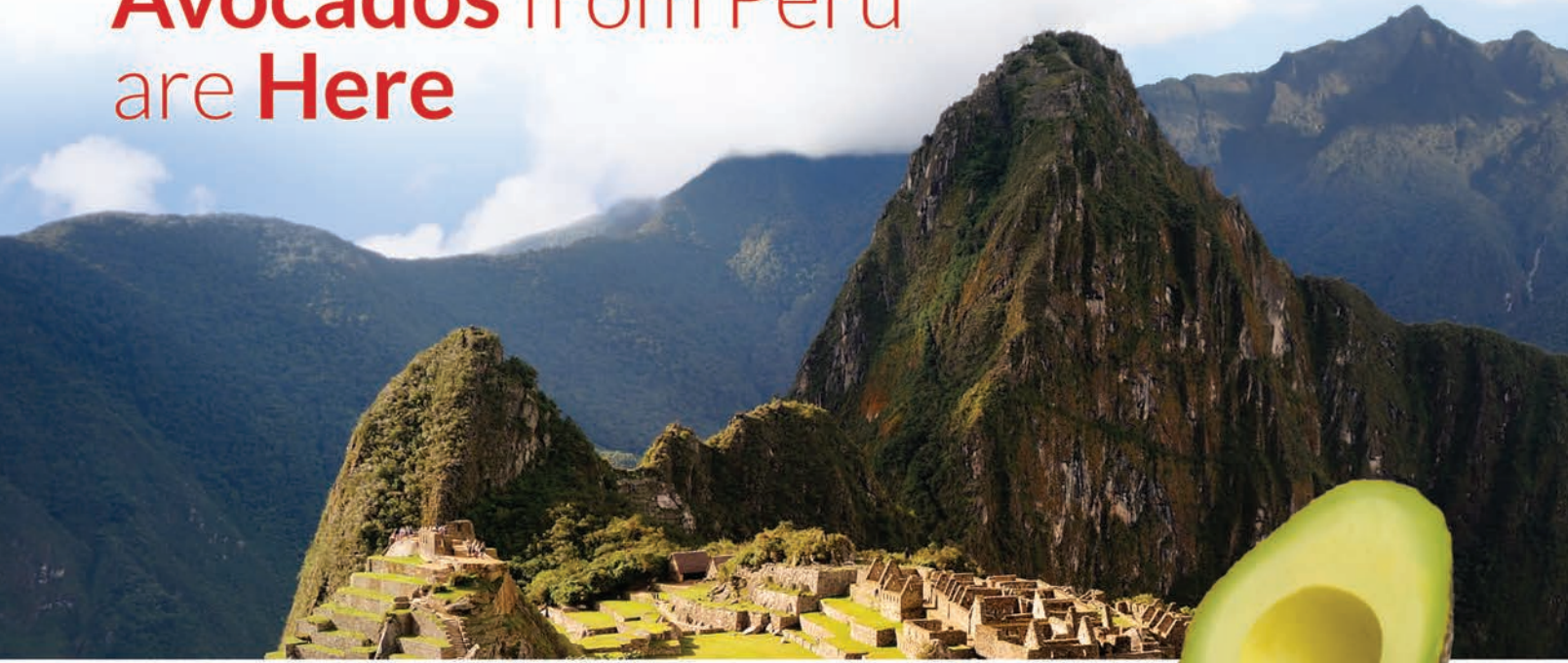
along with "stealth health" burgers, a 50/50 blend of lean beef and roasted fresh mushrooms. Friendly folks hand out samples of fresh-fruit desserts, and restaurant-like seating areas where information is posted about the farmers who grow the fruit are prevalent.

Meet the Millennials, the demographic driver behind the phenomenon. Born between 1980 and the mid-2000s, they are 80-million strong, fill every university classroom, and are one-third of the current U.S. population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The Port Washington, NY-based NPD Group, a market research firm, defines the generation's importance in its May 2015 *Five Consumer Trends Shaping the Future of the Food and Foodservice Industries*. The report



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notes that, “Millennials are driving changes in this country’s eating behaviors with their approach to food choice and preparation. They like fresh, less processed food.”

Millennials grew up going out to dinner and trying new cuisines, says Amy Myrdal Miller, president of Carmichael CA.-based Farmer’s Daughter Consulting, a nutrition communication and marketing firm.

“This generation of students is super-demanding as consumers. They have knowledgeable and highly demanding ‘helicopter’ parents. Schools have to offer more dietary options to keep students eating on campus,” she says.

To uncover the roadblocks and opportunities available to the produce industry in campus foodservice, PRODUCE BUSINESS talked with college foodservice directors and produce professionals across the country.

### Beyond The Freshman 15

Institutions of higher learning are eager fans of American-grown fresh produce, but there are challenging particulars to this market. It’s a given that the grapes and greens are tasty, good-for-you and convenient. These consumers and institutions may also want their food grown locally and socially responsible in terms of sustainability, animal welfare, worker fairness and food waste reduction.

The fare must also satisfy a mélange of special diets ranging from vegan and halal to food allergies related to peanuts, tree nuts, eggs, soy, gluten and dairy.

On top of those variables, this generation is burdened with heavy tuition debt and typically short on expendable income. If the fare is not affordable, it doesn’t matter how local, organic and healthful it is.

“For many years, college dining was all institutional food and mystery meat. Now we are centers of culinary innovation,” says Rafi Taherian, executive director of Yale Dining at New Haven CT-based Yale University. In his eight years at Yale, Taherian and his team have overseen a transformation in the way produce is served at the Ivy League institution.

“The first place we looked was at the

salad bar. It was not the solution but rather the problem, because it was filled with poor-looking produce and processed dressings,” he says.

“We increased composed salads from various cuisines that are all great sources of vegetable recipes. The make-your-own salad bar includes better ingredients such as roasted — not raw, mushrooms.”

Taherian brought in noted chef and Mediterranean cuisine expert Joyce Goldstein to develop produce-focused recipes that fit the dietary goals. “We needed to pay as much attention to the produce as we did to the proteins,” he says. Yale’s ambitious goal is to double fresh produce consumption on campus by 2020.

While there are clear trends, Millennial college students are no more monolithic than their Baby Boom and Gen X parents. “Some students are foodies. They talk about street food, restaurants and recipes and watch the Food Network. They might eat bone marrow because it’s cool,” says Taherian of Yale Dining. Others have dietary and environmental concerns while a certain percentage of diners are just trying to get something to eat, he says.

### Engineering A Menu

“Convenience,” “service” and “variety” top the surveys for the students at Golden, CO’s Colorado School of Mines, says Susan Fukushima, general manager of Mines Dining operated by Sodexo North America. (Sodexo operates food facilities at more than 600 colleges and universities.)

Mines Dining feeds 1,300 engineering students every day at a central dining hall. Other buildings on campus are home to Starbucks, Pizza Hut and Einstein Bros. Bagels.

At the School of Mines, broccoli still rules as the No. 1 vegetable, says Fukushima. Students can have it raw, steamed or stir-fried with peppers, onions and other ingredients. The menu also offers Indian and Asian vegetable dishes and a fairly standard salad bar. One highlight is creamy hummus made from freshly ground garbanzo beans in two flavors: garlic and roasted red pepper.

## New Produce Items On College Shopping Lists

Newer produce items being used in campus dining halls in New England include:

- Heirloom spinach
- Organic mesclun
- Mixed medley colored tomatoes
- Black kale
- Nopales (cactus pads)
- “Graffiti” eggplant
- Enoki mushrooms

Source: FreshPoint-Connecticut

The Mines dining hall is getting a makeover this summer and will debut a sushi station and Chipotle Mexican Grill-style burrito station with fresh salsas in the fall, says Fukushima. “Over the years, students’ palates became more sophisticated, and we changed to accommodate that. They are much more conscious about eating healthy and not just eating burgers,” she says.

Patience is sometimes required on the part of college foodservice operators with specific sourcing goals, she says. “It takes our vendors time to get to the point where they have the volume we need.”

Mines’ produce supplier, FreshPoint-Denver, sources locally when possible, but the range of available products is limited because of Colorado’s short growing season, she says.

### 4,000 Sushi Rolls Daily

At the nation’s largest university foodservice program, UMass Amherst Dining, about 45,000 meals per day are served to more than 18,000 students. “We have 4,000 students who live off of campus, and don’t have to eat with us, but do anyway,” says Ken Toong, executive director of UMass Amherst Dining at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

From 2012 to 2014, produce consumption went up 26 percent at the school, which spends approximately \$3 million a year on produce, he says.

Because the pool of college-aged students is flat and not predicted to increase significantly in the next decade or so, universities will be competing for students and their dollars. “One of the things you need to attract and keep good students is great food. The difference between campus foodservice and restaurants is that we see the same customers several times a day, so it has to be exciting,”



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asserts Toong.

One way to achieve that goal is exploring Mediterranean, South American and Asian cuisines, which naturally use a lot of produce, he says.

“We do dim sum items and make 4,000 sushi rolls a day. Our most popular station is the stir fry — where you pick from 15 vegetables and give it to the chef to cook. You decide the protein and how spicy you want it.”

The winter fruit program at UMass has also been amped-up well beyond “The Three” — bananas, apples and oranges, says Toong.

“Now we offer blueberries, strawberries, lots of mangos, grapes and kiwi all the time. In our experience, the more kinds of fruit you offer the students — the more they will choose them.”

### Sourcing: Location, Location

The Hartford, CT-hub of FreshPoint distributes produce to more than 40 colleges and universities in five New England states including the University of Massachusetts. Each school and state may have its own definition of what “local” and “regional” mean, says Rich Adams, vice president for sales at FreshPoint-Hartford. FreshPoint, the largest foodservice distributor of fresh produce in the United States, is part of Houston TX-based Sysco Foods.

“We have a good partnership with the University of Massachusetts, which is very proactive in wanting to support local and regional sourcing,” says Adams.

“The challenge for us is getting more local produce to supply to the university. We have an agreement with the school to source as much as possible within 50 miles of the school, and then as much of the remainder within 250 miles. We have relationships with more than 100 farms in New England, so we encourage schools to consider regionally sourced produce as well as local. It lengthens the local season and increases the available varieties,” says Adams.

Weekly market basket reports are sent to schools listing produce in season (from fiddleheads to pears) and the mileage from farm to school. This also provides operators with tracking information they need to meet local produce purchasing goals.

FreshPoint creates materials on fruits and vegetables for the schools. “We provide information on where, for instance, the yellow squash was grown and a bio of the farmer who grew it so schools can post it in the dining area,” says Adams. Some colleges also launched “Meet the Farmer” programs connecting undergraduates with the families who grew it.

Despite the complexity of fulfilling locally grown needs at universities, Adams says that it is a large and growing market opportunity for growers and suppliers.

“The local food movement has only become more popular in the schools, and students are asking for it. If it was up to some universities, they would buy 100 percent local because their goals include sustainability and economic development,” he says.

However, most colleges will still invest much of their budget on produce grown in California and elsewhere because of the sheer volume of product needed and ongoing budgetary constraints.

“Local” doesn’t have to be synonymous with “fresh,” says Myrdal Miller of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting.

“Sometimes local means capturing a wonderful regional crop like tomatoes at their peak before the students arrive, so it’s available during the winter for a special marinara sauce.”

### ‘Inveterate Vegetable Haters’

Willamette University’s location near the lush Willamette Valley in Oregon means the small private school can source much of its produce locally and support small farmers during the year.

“The Willamette Valley has a vibrant

**Top 10 Vegetables on University Menus 2014**

Potatoes .....	94.2%
Beans .....	87.7%
Tomatoes.....	85.7%
Broccoli .....	85.1%
Corn .....	83.8%
Onions .....	77.3%
Spinach .....	74.7%
Carrots .....	74.0%
Peppers .....	70.8%
Peas.....	70.1%

*Source: 2015 Technomic College & University Consumer Trend Report*

culture of small-scale growers. One provides us with diverse sweet melons, another has heirloom tomatoes, and there are new varieties of potatoes and lots of berries coming all the time,” says Chris Linn, general manager of foodservices at Salem OR-based Willamette University.

Willamette Dining is operated by Palo Alto, CA-based Bon Appétit Management Company, which has foodservice operations at more than 100 campuses in 33 states.

“Locally grown food and food raised in an ethical manner are bigger deals here than organic. Food waste is also huge. We have more conversations with students about cutting waste than anything else,” says Linn.

At Willamette, the most heavily used produce resource is the salad bar, says Linn. One side of the salad bar is build-your-own, and the other features composed salads made frequently in small batches. These include roasted vegetable salad, Caesar salad, wheat berry salad with apples and an Asian noodle salad with baby bok choy and sweet onions.

“We can quickly draw in seasonal things that catch our eye — like roasted golden beets, sautéed Brussels sprouts and grilled leeks — and add them to the menu,” says Linn.

“With 1,200 diners to feed every day, we are in a balancing act. We still have French fries and chicken strips for some, and you still have your inveterate vegetable haters. What has changed in the past decade is the amount of attention and concern being paid to what kind of produce we are serving, who grew it and where,” he says.

### Menu Changes Offer Opportunities

Changing a university menu item isn’t quite as slow as turning an aircraft carrier, but it is a complicated process because of institu-



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tional goals and budgeting. Feedback starts with students who are not shy about offering colorful opinions about university cuisine — especially on social media.

Most university foodservice operators also do annual satisfaction surveys. UMass Dining distributes 4,000 surveys twice a year. “In the last survey, the top item was produce — almost 93 percent said fresh produce was very important to them,” says Toong.

Campus foodservice directors are open to new produce product ideas from suppliers and growers, but many underestimate the wide scope of university foodservices, says Taherian of Yale Dining.

“They think campus dining is just one thing: a cafeteria. We also have retail food sites, on-campus catering, and event concessions for students, staff and visitors.”

Getting college operators and produce suppliers in the same place at the same time is always the challenge, says Myrdal Miller of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting.

“More people on the producer side need to engage with the culinary side. You need an intermediary, someone who speaks the same language as the producers and operators.”

Foodservice management staff needs to get out and interact with the produce industry at events such as the New York Produce Show and its Foodservice Forum, says Taherian.

“I went to the show for the first time last year and found many new items. One is broccoli leaves — the ones that are usually trimmed and tossed. They are absolutely delicious, full of nutrients, and we have them on the menu now. We formed relationships with three growers from going there.”

Another recent menu addition is Kalettes, the cross between kale and Brussels sprouts.

Another option is collaborating with produce marketing groups on menu innovations, says Toong of UMass Dining.

“We have a program using Avocados from Mexico for more than just guacamole. Because it has healthier fat, we want to use it in entrees and especially as a sandwich spread to cut down on mayo.”

### Making Produce Sexy

Universities inviting Millennials to expand their produce consciousness craft their pitches carefully, according to the *2015 College & University Consumer Trend Report* from Chicago-based Technomic. The report notes that “Health-halo claims (such as fresh and natural) resonate strongly with students and are most likely to increase purchases. Also, claims regarding social and environmental

### Top 10 Fruits On College Menus 2014

Lemons.....	46.8%
Apples .....	41.6%
Blueberries.....	40.9%
Oranges.....	31.8%
Pineapples .....	30.5%
Limes.....	29.9%
Bananas .....	28.6%
Cranberries .....	23.4%
Strawberries .....	21.4%
Raisins .....	20.1%

Source: 2015 Technomic College & University Consumer Trend Report

responsibility are just as likely as traditional health descriptors to increase purchases and drive price points.”

Offering samples is essential to marketing a new dish, cuisine or produce product on campus, but the message has to be enticing. “You look at the history of the health and wellness movement and you see that we failed, because we tried to sell health and wellness. Nobody has spent any money making produce sexy,” says Taherian of Yale Dining.

Menu timing is also a critical factor to success, says Myrdal Miller of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting.

“Don’t introduce new produce-forward dishes on chicken tenders day. The students love their chicken tenders, and they won’t pay attention.”

To connect with students about cuisine, schools also have to speak their language, she says. There’s a lot that can be done with social media and the platforms students’ prefer to use. “They run away from our social media channels. It’s also important to have a sense of humor and not be preachy.”

Brevity is vital. Think funny, share-worthy, short-attention-span videos — only six to 15 seconds long — on platforms such as Vine, Instagram and Snapchat.

### What’s Hot?

Foodservice directors can point to a wide range of successful produce-focused cuisines from smoothie bars that are open all day to standalone carts serving street tacos made with fresh fish, produce and served with lime and various salsas, plus certain dishes that are winners.

“We started serving a roasted half tomato — with salt, pepper and olive oil and a little Parmesan cheese. The students love them



## New Ways To 'Eat Your Vegetables' On College

### Foodservice Menus

Dishes served at college foodservice outlets during the 2014-2015 school year:

- Jicama, mango and cucumber salad with chile: University of Southern California (Los Angeles)
- Adobo sweet potato tacos (avocado, salsa verde, red cabbage, pickled red onion, cashew-lime crema): Vanderbilt University (Nashville, TN)
- Eggplant curry: Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH)
- Grilled vegetable Reuben sandwich: Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, GA)
- Broccoli rabe sautéed with garlic and olive oil: Manhattan College (New York City)
- Crepes with goat cheese and grilled vegetables: Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD)
- Roasted cherry tomato and balsamic onion flatbread: Stanford University (Stanford, CA)

Source: [college.usatoday.com](http://college.usatoday.com)

now and there would be a revolt if we didn't have them," says Toong of UMass Dining.

Protein is also the major buzz-word in dining halls, says Myrdal Miller of Farmer's Daughter Consulting.

"At breakfast, students are moving away from cereal and pastries and looking for protein. I'm seeing a lot of eggs paired with produce such as savory egg sandwiches, omelets, egg bakes, frittatas and breakfast burritos. What's important at colleges is that the item be handheld so they can walk across campus with it in one hand and operate a device in the other."

### Quest For The Holy Kale

Produce people seeking the next game-changing fruit or vegetable trend can look toward college foodservice for an inkling of what's to come.

"Cauliflower isn't sexy enough to be the next kale. I look at aromatic ingredients like fresh lemongrass and Thai basil. Chilies of all sorts are on the rise," says Myrdal Miller of Farmer's Daughter Consulting.

Toong of UMass Dining says traditional vegetables from South and Central America

are on the horizon along with old flavors used in new ways such as pistachios (as a crust for baked chicken) and fresh ginger (in salads).

"The other one is bitter melon; we use it in stir fries for a bittersweet flavor. I think it is a vegetable to watch," he says.

### Generation Z

"With closer collaboration between growers and foodservice operators in the future, we can get some things done in terms of produce consumption. Remember: We

are training the next generation of produce consumers and creating the new palates," says Taherian of Yale Dining.

The impact of those palates is huge, because 60 percent of adult Millennials attended — or are now attending — college, versus only 46 percent of Baby Boomers, according to data from [Whitehouse.gov](http://Whitehouse.gov).

So it's less a question of "if" and more a question of "when" the trends migrate from academia to mainstream restaurants and supper tables. **pb**



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# Report From Omaha: Are Grocers Competing With Wal-Mart? Or Getting Out Of Its Way?



**M**uch media attention has been paid to the rise of the deep discounters. In the United States, these stores include Aldi, Save-A-Lot and, soon, Lidl. There is good reason for this attention. In 10 countries, market share for this concept exceeds 10 percent and Aldi is, by PRODUCE BUSINESS' estimates, the fastest growing grocer in America. Still, Aldi has a total market share of less than 1 percent in the United States. So even while analysts ponder the implications of this thriving competitive sector, it is important not to lose sight of Wal-Mart and how conventional grocers are still competing with Wal-Mart.

This time, in the 27<sup>th</sup> iteration of the "PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report," we visit the heartland, Omaha, NE — a city that has an often-overlooked link to Wal-Mart's produce program. It is well recognized that former Wal-Mart vice president of perishables, Bruce Peterson, worked at Meijer, and his experience with this supercenter-type concept made Peterson an attractive candidate for Sam Walton, who personally hired him to run Wal-Mart's then nascent produce program.

What is less widely known is that Peterson didn't go directly from Meijer to Wal-Mart. He made a brief pit stop at the now Kroger-owned Baker's, which is one of the retailers we study this edition. Peterson implemented some pretty impressive initiatives when at Wal-Mart.

The store's success at moving into produce and perishables was in no way guaranteed, so had Meijer or Baker's managed to retain that one key employee a long time ago, perhaps the Wal-Mart produce and perishables program would not have blossomed as they did under Peterson; Baker's, Meijer and other retailers could be facing a very different supercenter today.

In this report, we compared Wal-Mart to Baker's, Hy-Vee, Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe's. Because Trader Joe's does not carry a complete enough produce assortment to allow for our typical market basket, we present three charts. The first excludes Trader Joe's, but offers the prices of Wal-Mart, Baker's, Hy-Vee and Whole Foods Market across our customary market basket. The second compares just Wal-Mart and Trader Joe's on a longer list of items they both carry. Finally, the third chart compares all five stores but excludes from comparison items not carried by Trader Joe's, and is thus a smaller market basket.

So how are the conventional grocers competing with Wal-Mart in Nebraska? Certainly not on price! Baker's came in over 20 percent over Wal-Mart, and Hy-Vee priced out at an astounding 51.17 percent over Wal-Mart. What about Whole Foods Market's long-term effort to establish that it is not worthy of the "Whole Paycheck" moniker? It came in at 55.72 percent over Wal-Mart.

Although we have to add the usual caveats — notably that this is a study of produce department pricing and not the entire store. So some



**Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 3 Chains  
Price Comparison — Omaha, NE  
Prices Available To The General Public**

Produce Item	How Sold	Wal-Mart Supercenter	Baker's	% Over Wal-Mart	Hy-Vee	% Over Wal-Mart	Whole Foods	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples - Red Delicious	Lb	\$0.97	1.39	43.30%	1.98	104.12%	2.49	156.70%
Apples - Golden Delicious	Lb	\$0.97	1.39	43.30%	1.29	32.99%	2.49	156.70%
Apples - Fiji	Lb	\$1.47	1.99	35.37%	1.88	27.89%	2.99	103.40%
Asparagus	Lb	\$1.97	2.49	26.40%	3.89	97.46%	2.48	25.89%
Avocados PLU 4046	Each	\$0.78	1.09	39.74%	0.99	26.92%	2.00	156.41%
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	\$0.55	0.59	7.27%	0.48	-12.73%	0.57	3.64%
Beets	Each	\$1.98	2.49	25.76%	2.99	51.01%	2.49	25.76%
Blackberries	12 oz Pkg	\$3.74	7.98	113.37%	7.92	111.76%	5.98	59.89%
Blueberries	6 oz Pkg	\$2.78	3.99	43.53%	3.99	43.53%	3.99	43.53%
Broccoli Crowns	Lb	\$1.56	0.99	-36.54%	1.98	26.92%	6.65	326.28%
Cabbage - Green	Each	\$0.58	0.99	70.69%	0.69	18.97%	1.49	156.90%
Cabbage - Red	Each	\$0.84	0.99	17.86%	0.99	17.86%	1.49	77.38%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	\$1.98	1.99	0.51%	2.50	26.26%	3.99	101.52%
Cauliflower	Each	\$2.98	2.99	0.34%	3.99	33.89%	3.99	33.89%
Celery	Each	\$1.38	1.39	0.72%	1.48	7.25%	1.49	7.97%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	\$0.74	0.89	20.27%	0.98	32.43%	1.99	168.92%
Dressing - Marketside	12 oz Bottle	\$2.98	3.68	23.49%	4.99	67.45%	3.42	14.77%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	\$2.98	2.79	-6.38%	3.39	13.76%	2.47	100.00%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	\$2.48	2.79	12.50%	2.99	20.56%	2.99	20.56%
Guacamole	16 oz. Pkg	\$4.88	4.49	-7.99%	11.98	145.49%	4.99	2.25%
Kiwi	Each	\$0.45	0.65	44.44%	0.50	11.11%	0.50	11.11%
Lemons - Bulk	Each	\$0.48	0.75	56.25%	0.99	106.25%	0.79	64.58%
Lettuce - Iceberg Bulk	Each	\$0.98	0.99	1.02%	1.59	62.24%	2.49	154.08%
Limes - Bulk	Each	\$0.58	0.79	36.21%	0.67	15.52%	0.40	100.00%
Mangos	Each	\$0.98	1.69	72.45%	1.50	53.06%	2.00	104.08%
Mushrooms - White Package	8 oz. Pkg	\$1.78	1.85	3.93%	1.99	11.80%	2.99	67.98%
Onions - Yellow Bag	3# Bag	\$1.98	2.29	15.66%	4.25	114.65%	2.99	51.01%
Pears - Anjou	Lb	\$1.47	1.49	1.36%	1.68	14.29%	1.47	0.00%
Pineapple	Each	\$2.68	2.69	0.37%	2.99	11.57%	3.99	48.88%
Raspberries	6 oz Pkg	\$2.78	3.99	43.53%	4.99	79.50%	3.99	43.53%
Strawberries - 1# Pkg	1# Pkg	\$1.88	2.50	32.98%	3.99	112.23%	3.49	85.64%
Tomatoes - Plum/Roma	Lb	\$1.24	1.19	-4.03%	1.59	28.23%	1.99	60.48%
Tomatoes - Regular Large	Lb	\$1.98	2.99	51.01%	2.89	45.96%	3.49	76.26%
Turnips	12 oz Pkg	\$1.58	1.49	-5.70%	1.69	6.96%	1.87	18.35%
<b>MARKET BASKET</b>		<b>\$59.33</b>	<b>71.53</b>	<b>20.56%</b>	<b>89.69</b>	<b>51.17%</b>	<b>92.39</b>	<b>55.72%</b>

*RED is adjusted price*

chains that choose to price aggressively in, say, meat but not produce will show up better in overall studies. However, our experience has been that at price differentials of over 20 percent, it is difficult for competitors to grow in a city where Wal-Mart has substantial market share. The exception being those retailers that do not so much compete with Wal-Mart as that try to avoid competing with Wal-Mart.

**The program had better work, for as Wal-Mart, Costco and others increasingly sell organic and specialized products that were previously Whole Foods Market's domain, consumers will be tempted to buy elsewhere if Whole Foods Market is priced over 55 percent over Wal-Mart.**



Another caveat is Whole Foods Market (in its national advertising campaign) is aiming to differentiate its products based on its own proprietary sustainability index. What Whole Foods Market would like consumers to believe is that there is no such thing as a parity product sold at Wal-Mart and Whole Foods Market,

and that somehow the higher price points at Whole Foods Market filter down through the supply chain, ensuring more environmentally friendly production methods, higher paid farmers and farm workers, and much more.

The program had better work, for as Wal-Mart, Costco and others increasingly

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sell organic and specialized products that were previously Whole Foods Market's domain, consumers will be tempted to buy elsewhere if Whole Foods Market is priced more than 55 percent over Wal-Mart.

### CLOSER COMPARISON: TRADER JOE'S

What about when we restrict the market basket to allow a comparison with Trader Joe's? How does this reshuffle the deck?

Well, it is a mixed bag. With a limited market basket, restricted by Trader Joe's

common items with Wal-Mart, Trader Joe's comes in at 24.12 percent over Wal-Mart prices, and Hy-Vee's limited market basket brings it closer to Wal-Mart, coming in at 44.26 percent over Wal-Mart. Both Baker's and Whole Foods Market come out as less competitive with Wal-Mart, with Baker's being 28.25 percent over Wal-Mart and Whole Foods Market an astounding 60.66 percent over Wal-Mart.

Trader Joe's is one of the fastest growing chains in America. It has much that consumers

## Wal-Mart SuperCenter vs Trader Joe's Price Comparison — Omaha, NE

Prices Available To the General Public

Produce Item	How Sold	Wal-Mart	Trader Joe's	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples - Granny Smith PLU #4017	Lb	\$1.67	0.69	-58.68%
Apples - Honey Crisp PLU #2383	Lb	\$2.77	1.29	-53.43%
Apple - Fiji PLU #4131	Lb	\$1.47	0.69	-53.06%
Apples - Gala - PLU #4135	Lb	\$1.67	0.69	-58.68%
Apples - Sliced	14 oz Pkg	\$3.48	3.49	0.29%
Asparagus	Lb	\$1.97	2.99	51.78%
Beans - Green	Lb	\$1.88	2.79	48.40%
Blackberries	12 oz Pkg	\$3.74	4.49	20.05%
Blueberries	6 oz Pkg	\$2.78	2.99	7.55%
Broccoli - Whole	Each	\$2.28	1.99	-12.72%
Broccoli Crowns	Lb	\$1.56	3.05	95.51%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	\$1.98	2.99	51.01%
Carrots - Baby	16 oz Pkg	\$1.28	1.79	39.84%
Carrots - Organic	1# Bag	\$0.88	0.89	1.14%
Cauliflower	Each	\$2.98	2.29	-23.15%
Cucumbers - English	Each	\$1.98	2.49	25.76%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	\$0.74	1.69	128.38%
Eggplant	Each	\$1.78	1.79	0.56%
Grapefruit - Red	Each	\$0.88	0.99	12.50%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	\$2.98	3.69	23.83%
Lettuce - Iceberg Bulk	Each	\$0.98	1.29	31.63%
Limes - Bulk	Each	\$0.58	0.39	-32.76%
Mangos	Each	\$0.98	1.79	82.65%
Mushrooms - White Package	8 oz. Pkg	\$1.78	1.99	11.80%
Onions - Sweet	Lb	\$1.18	0.89	-24.58%
Oranges - Navel bulk	Each	\$0.58	0.79	36.21%
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	\$0.74	0.99	33.78%
Peppers - Red	Each	\$1.38	1.19	-13.77%
Pineapple	Each	\$2.68	2.99	11.57%
Potatoes - Russet 5# Bag	Bag	\$2.47	3.69	49.39%
Potatoes - Russet Bulk	Lb	\$0.68	0.49	-27.94%
Raspberries	6 oz Pkg	\$2.78	3.98	43.17%
Salad - Spring	5 oz Pkg	\$3.28	1.99	-39.33%
Squash - Zucchini	Lb	\$1.68	2.29	36.31%
Strawberries - 1# Pkg	1# Pkg	\$1.88	2.99	59.04%
Tomatoes - Grape	12 oz Pkg	\$2.98	2.99	0.34%
Watermelon - Personal Size	Each	\$3.48	3.79	8.91%
<b>MARKET BASKET TOTAL</b>		<b>\$70.86</b>	<b>78.28</b>	<b>10.47%</b>

RED is adjusted price



**Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 4 Chains  
Price Comparison — Omaha, NE  
Prices Available To The General Public**

Produce Item	How Sold	Wal-Mart	Baker's	% Over Wal-Mart	Hy-Vee	% Over Wal-Mart	Trader Joe's	% Over Wal-Mart	Whole Foods	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples - Fiji	Lb	\$1.47	1.99	35.37%	1.88	27.89%	0.69	-53.06%	2.99	103.40%
Asparagus	Lb	\$1.97	2.49	26.40%	3.89	97.46%	2.99	51.78%	2.48	25.89%
Blackberries	12 oz Pkg	\$3.74	7.98	113.37%	7.92	111.76%	4.49	20.05%	5.98	59.89%
Blueberries	6 oz Pkg	\$2.78	3.99	43.53%	3.99	43.53%	2.99	7.55%	3.99	43.53%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	\$1.98	1.99	0.51%	2.50	26.26%	2.99	51.01%	3.99	101.52%
Carrots - Baby	16 oz Pkg	\$1.28	1.79	39.84%	1.25	-2.34%	1.79	39.84%	1.85	44.53%
Cauliflower	Each	\$2.98	2.99	0.34%	3.99	33.89%	2.29	-23.15%	3.99	33.89%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	\$0.74	0.89	20.27%	0.98	32.43%	1.69	128.38%	1.99	168.92%
Grapefruit - Red	Each	\$0.88	0.99	12.50%	0.69	-21.59%	0.99	12.50%	1.69	92.05%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	\$2.98	2.79	-6.38%	3.39	13.76%	3.69	23.83%	2.47	-17.11%
Lettuce - Iceberg Bulk	Each	\$0.98	0.99	1.02%	1.59	62.24%	1.29	31.63%	2.49	154.08%
Limes - Bulk	Each	\$0.58	0.79	36.21%	0.67	15.52%	0.39	-32.76%	0.40	-31.03%
Mangos	Each	\$0.98	1.69	72.45%	1.50	53.06%	1.79	82.65%	2.00	104.08%
Mushrooms - White Package	8 oz. Pkg	\$1.78	1.85	3.93%	1.99	11.80%	1.99	11.80%	2.99	67.98%
Pineapple	Each	\$2.68	2.69	0.37%	2.99	11.57%	2.99	11.57%	3.99	48.88%
Potatoes - Russet 5# Bag	Bag	\$2.47	2.29	-7.29%	2.49	0.81%	3.69	49.39%	4.97	101.21%
Potatoes - Russet Bulk	Lb	\$0.68	0.99	45.59%	0.68	0.00%	0.49	-27.94%	1.47	116.18%
Raspberries	6 oz Pkg	\$2.78	3.99	43.53%	4.99	79.50%	3.98	43.17%	3.99	43.53%
Strawberries - 1# Pkg	1# Pkg	\$1.88	2.50	32.98%	3.99	112.23%	2.99	59.04%	3.49	85.64%
<b>MARKET BASKET TOTAL</b>		<b>\$35.61</b>	<b>45.67</b>	<b>28.25%</b>	<b>51.37</b>	<b>44.26%</b>	<b>44.20</b>	<b>24.12%</b>	<b>57.21</b>	<b>60.66%</b>

RED = adjusted price

find attractive, from a warm and friendly atmosphere to distinctive flavor profiles on private

label products that consumers covet. The secret sauce, though, is that the chain does all this

while maintaining price competitiveness. If you look at the chart on page 42, you will see

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**It is not much of a stretch to say that national branded specialized retail concepts will continue to gain market share at the expense of the local grocer for a long time to come.**

that on an extensive market basket, Trader Joe's comes in at just 10.47 percent over Wal-Mart. When you consider gas costs and transit time to get to a more remote Wal-Mart Supercenter, that 10 percent difference keeps Trader Joe's looking very competitive.

It used to be said that there was no such thing as a national supermarket chain in America. But a very substantial part of the growth in the business is now coming from national concepts: Aldi, Costco, Trader Joe's, Wal-Mart Supercenters, Wal-Mart Neighborhood Markets, Whole Foods Market, etc.

And it is interesting to note in this prototypically American Midwestern city that national chains copped both the low-price and the high-price positions, leaving conventional supermarkets to fight for the mushy middle. Yet this is not where the growth is in American society.

And it is not just about price. Trader Joe's is mostly an epicurean concept. Aldi manages to sell inexpensive products without embarrassing its customers by forcing them to buy unattractive generics. Costco is known for selling upscale food at value prices. Will any conventional grocers play in this space? There is talk that Kroger might make a play for the U.S. division of a combined Ahold/Delhaize, which would bring it close to being a national chain.

In general, one can see retail evolving as foodservice has in America. Whereas not all that long ago, every town had its little diner, nowadays it is more likely to have an Applebee's. National branded foodservice operations — in which every outlet has a well-known specialty, an advanced supply chain to support it, and a well-established training program and market program to ensure uniformity and attract customers — these national branded concepts have spread across America at the expense of local eateries.

**How They Stack Up Against Wal-Mart Supercenter**

Region	Store	% over Wal-Mart		Store	% over Wal-Mart	
Connecticut-5/02	Super Stop & Shop . . . . .	23%		Shaws . . . . .	34%	Big Y . . . . . 36%
Salt Lake City-10/02	Harmons . . . . .	2%		Smith's . . . . .	6%	Albertsons . . . . . 12%
South Florida-2/03	Super Target . . . . .	22%		Publix . . . . .	31%	Winn-Dixie . . . . . 52%
Dallas, Texas-10/03	Albertsons . . . . .	23%		Brookshire's . . . . .	7%	Kroger . . . . . 19%
	Neighborhood Market — 1.2%			Tom Thumb . . . . .	27%	
Portland, OR-3/04	Albertsons . . . . .	30%		Fred Meyer . . . . .	22%	Haggen . . . . . 27%
	Safeway . . . . .	37%				
Phoenix, AZ-8/04	Albertsons . . . . .	22%		Basha's . . . . .	25%	Fry's . . . . . 15%
	Safeway . . . . .	17%				
Palm Springs-10/04	Albertsons . . . . .	19%		Jensen's . . . . .	60%	Ralphs . . . . . 16%
	Vons . . . . .	20%				
Detroit, MI-1/05	A&P Food Basic . . . . .	— 17%		Farmer Jack . . . . .	24%	Kroger . . . . . 28%
	Meijer . . . . .	3%				
St. Louis, MO-5/05	Dierbergs . . . . .	22%		Schnucks . . . . .	14%	
Houston, TX-9/05	H-E-B . . . . .	15%		Kroger . . . . .	30%	Fiesta Mart . . . . . — 0.3%
Atlanta, GA-11/05	Harry's . . . . .	18%		Ingles . . . . .	16%	Kroger . . . . . 25%
	Publix . . . . .	13%		Target . . . . .	3%	
Denver, CO-5/06	Albertsons . . . . .	16%		King Soopers . . . . .	21%	Safeway . . . . . 25%
Portland, OR-10/06	Albertsons . . . . .	32%		Fred Meyer . . . . .	21%	QFC . . . . . 54%
	Safeway . . . . .	30%				
Toronto Canada-7/07	A&P . . . . .	35%		Bruno's . . . . .	28%	Loblaws . . . . . 13%
	Sobeys . . . . .	45%				
Kansas City, KS-10/07	Dillons . . . . .	20%		Hen House . . . . .	15%	Hy-Vee . . . . . 18%
	Price Chopper . . . . .	13%				
Los Angeles-4/08	Fresh & Easy . . . . .	15%		Stater Bros . . . . .	8%	Ralphs . . . . . 25%
	Vons . . . . .	14%				
Orlando, FL-10/08	Publix . . . . .	32%		Super Target . . . . .	22%	Whole Foods . . . . . 38%
	Winn-Dixie . . . . .	28%				
Phoenix, AZ 4/09	Wal-Mart Markewtside . . . . .	23%		Wal-Mart Neighborhood . . . . .	7%	Basha's . . . . . 30%
	Fresh & Easy . . . . .	32%		Fry's . . . . .	27%	Safeway . . . . . 37%
Raleigh, NC 9/09	Food Lion . . . . .	24%		Fresh Market . . . . .	31%	Harris Teeter . . . . . 35%
	Kroger . . . . .	21%		Super Target . . . . .	11%	
Philadelphia 4/10	Acme . . . . .	17%		Genuardi's . . . . .	22%	Giant . . . . . 26%
	Super Fresh . . . . .	21%		Wegmans . . . . .	5%	
New Jersey 10/10	FoodBasics . . . . .	— 1%		Pathmark . . . . .	15%	ShopRite . . . . . 8%
Dallas 10/11	Albertsons . . . . .	25%		Central Market . . . . .	19%	Kroger . . . . . 21%
	Sprouts . . . . .	— 7%		Super Target . . . . .	10%	Tom Thumb . . . . . 51%
Savannah 6/12	Food Lion . . . . .	7%		Fresh Market . . . . .	51%	Kroger . . . . . — 2%
	Piggly Wiggly . . . . .	27%		Publix . . . . .	22%	
Lake Worth, FL 11/12	El Bodegon . . . . .	— 9.5%		Presidente . . . . .	— 18.4%	Publix . . . . . 29%
	Sedano's . . . . .	6.47%		Winn-Dixie . . . . .	17.4%	
Tulsa, OK 10/13	Reasor's . . . . .	43.6%		Sprouts . . . . .	— 1.9%	Target Supercenter . . . . . 12.9%
	Warehouse Market . . . . .	8.8%		Winn-Dixie . . . . .	17.4%	
Des Moines, IA 6/14	Dahl's . . . . .	24.84%		Hy-Vee . . . . .	40.48%	Target Supercenter 25.11%
	Trader Joe's . . . . .	3.98%				
Omaha, NE 6/15	Baker's . . . . .	28.25%		Hy-Vee . . . . .	44.26%	Trader Joe's . . . . . 24.12%
	Whole Foods . . . . .	60.66%				

It is not much of a stretch to say that national branded specialized retail concepts will continue to gain market share at the expense of the local grocer for a long time to come.

Can local chains fight back? What is the role of deep discounters? How does the Internet play into all this? These are the questions that future editions of the "PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report" will study. **pb**





# CLASS OF 2015 Young And Smart Leaders On The Rise



Produce Business is accepting nominations for its Eleventh Annual 40-Under-Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of June 1, 2016 (People born after June 1, 1976).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 15, 2016, and fax back to 561-994-1610 or go to our website at [producebusiness.com](http://producebusiness.com) and look for the 40 Under Forty icon to link to the online application.

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

**ABOUT THE NOMINEE:**

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Approximate Age \_\_\_\_\_  
 Company \_\_\_\_\_  
 Position \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Country \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:  
 (You can use a separate sheet for this)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:**

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Company \_\_\_\_\_  
 Position \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Country \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
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Nominator information is for our use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.

For more information email: [info@producebusiness.com](mailto:info@producebusiness.com)





PHOTOS COURTESY OF MELISSA'S PRODUCE

# Defining Specialty Produce

New items continue to flock to the shelves, but what exactly is “specialty produce”?

BY KEITH LORIA

There was a time when a retailer offering a specialty produce item was considered a novelty and something truly different, but with the average supermarket carrying more than 600 produce SKU's today, the word “specialty” is losing its marketing muscle.

“With seed companies and farmers working closely together on the common goal for better-tasting, new varieties, it has led to an explosion of varieties,” says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda's Inc., headquartered in Los Alamitos, CA. “Just look at the tomato or the grape categories. It wasn't too long ago when there were two to three varieties of tomatoes, and now some stores offer 15 to 20 at one time. And with grapes, it used to be two (green and red), and now many stores will offer four to eight different ones at the peak of the season.”

Every retailer and produce company has their own definition of specialty. At Frieda's, Caplan says they define it with two categories: First, the lower volume, super unique, seasonal or truly unusual items, such as Passion Fruit, Lady Apples or Baby Purple Artichokes. Second, the specialty commodities, which move in higher volume but are not yet mainstream, such as mixed melons, Strawberry Papayas and Star Spangled Spuds.

Mary Ostlund director of marketing for Brooks Tropicals, LLC, based in Homestead, FL, says Americans know they need to eat more produce, and it's no stretch for that desire to turn into a reach for something new. That's why she believes consumers and grocery stores are open to new items.

“It's an explosion of adventure. The North American consumer is willing to explore new tastes,” she says. “Changing demographics and the blending of ethnicities within fami-



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lies contributed to the growing demand for a more varied retail assortment. The American melting-pot is consistently adding new flavors to the recipe.”

Ostlund says the company characterizes specialty produce as a crop that is not available year-round and has certain characteristics that make it especially challenging to grow — such as extreme sensitivity to weather and sporadic production peaks.

“The most progressive retailers recognize that specialty is different regionally, locally, and from store-to-store,” she says. “Successful marketers listen to their customers.”

John Vena, owner of John Vena, Inc., located in the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market in Pennsylvania, believes that the term “specialty produce” is a bit blurred, as shoppers now have up to 10 varieties of many items from which to choose when shopping, and not everything should be classified as such.

For example, many supermarkets no longer consider a kiwifruit as a specialty item.

“I believe that the bulk of our independent customers decide on what is or isn’t ‘specialty’ based on their demographics and neighborhood culture,” he says. “Wherever produce managers are given the freedom to react to their customers’ demands, more specialty items can be sold. Some regional and national chains allow that, but most don’t seem to do so.”

One trip to most retailers’ produce departments and it’s easy to notice a wide variety of new fruits and vegetables on the shelves — even in traditional produce.

“I think there are two reasons for this,”

## “Wherever produce managers are given the freedom to react to their customers’ demands, more specialty items can be sold.”

— John Vena, John Vena, Inc.

says Vena. “One, growers really do want to provide better tasting product and to vary the flavor profile to suit consumer demand. My father referred to this rationale as ‘the reason ice cream companies make vanilla and chocolate.’ Two, consumers want choices of sizes, colors, flavors and providing those options will encourage multiple purchases within a category.”

### GETTING COVERAGE

David Sasuga, owner of Fresh Origins LLC, based in San Marcos, CA, says stores actually welcome new items that can keep their selection interesting and up on new trends.

“There is a great deal of interest in unique specialty items that are able to attract and inspire the new foodie consumer,” he says. “Having supplied top chefs with our microgreens for 20 years, we now see a surge of interest among consumers for our BrightFresh microgreens. We see that specialty items often trickle down from fine dining restaurants to specialty produce at retail.”

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s Produce, based in Los Angeles says the increasing rise of ethnic populations is a major factor in specialty produce

becoming more popular and more common in the produce aisles.

“Specialty is non-commodity. It is an item not found in every supermarket or store,” he says. “For those who still consider something like kiwi a specialty item, then that store is very much behind on offering commodity items that are typically demanded by the consumer every day. Not all supermarkets are necessarily on the same page.”

Schueller doesn’t believe getting specialty items on the shelf is all that difficult, saying it’s a matter of offering the right kind of produce to the customers who demand that type of produce in store.

Vena notes that often, larger regional and national chains are difficult to penetrate due to the large number of items the buyers manage and the relatively small number of staff buyers.

“We see this kind of customer lumping specialties into a category and giving the whole category to one vendor to manage for them,” he says. “However, our strength is in smaller, independent chains and groups. We can usually work with those buyers to sample and test products we offer. Also, in many cases, our customers will react to the demand in their stores and approach us to supply certain items.”



Frieda's Caplan says that if the retailer's philosophy is to offer everything "that's new" and be first to market, then it is not hard to get a new item on the shelves. However, she notices a trend of retailers eliminating many of the "non-fresh" items from produce departments and really focusing efforts on the selling of fresh fruits and vegetables.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPORTING

Imported specialties open up a world of possibilities by offering incredible choices to everyone. Many times, the only source of supply of a product is from outside the U.S., such as Tamarillos from New Zealand or Jicama from Mexico, which is why the international market is so important.

Imported specialties play a huge role in this equation for several reasons. In many cases, domestic growers haven't figured an item out, or the climate isn't right, or the item is too labor intensive to cultivate or harvest in the U.S. For those reasons, Vena says the company looks for the best growers in the best growing areas depending on their expertise to select and pack the right product.

Peter Leifermann, director of sales for Brooks Tropicals, LLC, says that while imports play a strong role in ensuring year-round availability of specialties that demand year-round supply, peak flavor only comes once or twice a year with specialty crops, and managing the domestic versus the imported supply is crucial to the item's and retailer's success.

### THE PAST FIVE YEARS

Things change quickly in the produce industry. For example, five years ago, Dragon Fruit was a true rarity, but it has now become a staple item for many.

"In general, we always had access to supplies of what we call 'specialty,' but the interest in global cuisines and the growth of the 'foodie' culture created explosive demand for many items," says Vena. "This process is much longer than five years, however. We started with ethnic specific products in the mid '80s, two to three mixed pallets per week. All of those early items blossomed into volume items for us, but it hasn't been an overnight success. Items like Chinese eggplant, bitter melon, flat persimmons, cilantro, and methi are growing, and we no longer have the field to ourselves."

As for new items making headway, Caplan says many of the heirloom tomato varieties were not available in large volume five years ago, and the company's entire "purple program," which includes Sangria and Fiore Viola Artichokes, Stokes Purple Sweet Potatoes and Baby

Purple Brussels sprouts are all new.

Leifermann says that while Starfruit, Red Guava, Fresh Coconut, Passion Fruit and Dragon Fruit were hard to find in mainstream stores five years ago, all have double-digit sales increases over the past year.

Sasuga says that specialty produce items that have gone from obscure to well known include specialty mushrooms, snap pea, figs, blackberry, raspberry, pluot, Purple Sweet Potato and microgreens.

Other new items include finger limes,

kale sprouts, Mangosteen, Indian mangoes, Australian mangoes, baby parsnips, Shishito peppers, Padron peppers, jackfruit, baby Brussels sprouts, Purple Brussels sprouts and Belgian-style leeks.

### MONEY MATTERS

Specialty produce is ever-evolving and as old specialties become commonplace, newer items replace them. Sasuga believes new varieties create excitement and drive sales.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SHENANDOAH GROWERS

# Deliver On Customer Demand For Fresh Herbs

How to boost sales with tips from produce executives and industry experts.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

**S**ince recipes often call for small amounts of fresh herbs, people sometimes think they can leave them out. But ignoring this essential ingredient means missing the opportunity to create a dish that's even more packed with flavor and color.

Produce managers should take this lesson to heart. While fresh herbs may not take up a large amount of space, they're one of the fastest growing categories, and an increasing number of consumers consider them an essential produce item. "Fresh herbs have been growing at double digit rates for about 10 years," says Chick Goodman, vice president of sales and marketing with Herbs Unlimited, a division of Coosemans Worldwide, based in Miami, FL.

The American fresh herb market is still very underdeveloped compared to Europe, says Michele Henning, vice president, key account sales with Shenandoah Growers in Harrisonburg, VA. But, she notes, "I certainly think fresh herb use in the U.S. is evolving. It was very unusual to see people buying fresh herbs 10 years ago." Now it's much more common to see them in people's shopping baskets.

The popularity of fresh herbs can be attributed to several things. "TV chefs use fresh herbs exclusively," says Goodman. As people started

watching their favorite celebrity cooks throw handfuls of cilantro into salsa or sprinkle chives over the top of mashed potatoes, they got excited about experimenting with those herbs themselves.

"Many people are cooking for the first time," says Henning. One of the key reasons is that healthy eating has become more important to everyone from Millennials to Baby Boomers. "People are very wired into what they're putting in their bodies."

The taste and aroma of fresh herbs is tough to beat, which is exciting to a new generation of foodies. "Fresh herbs provide instantaneous flavor," says Goodman. "You typically add them in during the last few minutes of cooking, so they're good for moms who want quick and easy-to-fix dinners."

Strange as it seems, the economic downturn also played a role in the increasing popularity of fresh herbs. "The reason is that people cut out their restaurant meals," says Goodman. "They ate more at home and after a while they wanted restaurant flavors. Well, the easy way to get restaurant flavors is fresh herbs."

## BASIL REIGNS SUPREME

Basil accounts for about one-third of all fresh herb sales. People buy



it in large quantities for pesto, but there is also something about its potent scent that inspires impulse buys. “When it’s not refrigerated, the smell just comes at you, and it can be hard to resist,” says Paul Kneeland, vice president of fresh merchandising for Fresh Formats, which is a division of Carlisle, PA and Quincy, MA-based Ahold USA that manages niche market stores.

Jed James, brand consultant with North Shore Living Herbs in Thermal, CA, says mint is the company’s second highest seller. He attributes this to the fact it can be marketed as a food and beverage ingredient.

After that, the most popular herbs are still the classics: rosemary, sage, thyme, oregano, chives, dill and Italian parsley. James notes they’re seeing an increased interest in herbs used in Pho and other Asian dishes, such as Thai basil and lemongrass.

Fresh herbs tend to do best when stores carry an assortment of different kinds. “We like to have at least 12 feet of them,” says Jim Weber, produce director for Tadych’s Econofoods, a six-store chain headquartered in Iron Mountain, MI. “We also like to have lots of facing for them. We like to have the basil at least four wide. Everything else should be two wide.”

## ORGANIC POPULARITY

“Herbs generally converted from conventional to organic between 2005 and 2010,” says Goodman. Most stores don’t have an herb department large enough to carry both. “People looked at that and felt the conventional

## ■ HERBS IN FOODSERVICE

Most of the herbs that are popular with home cooks still appeal to the palates of professional chefs. The main differences between what home cooks and foodservice professionals are seeking are the size and color of herbs.

Chick Goodman with Miami, FL-based Herbs Unlimited, a division of Coosemans Worldwide, says that microherbs are very popular with chefs. Like microgreens, microherbs are tender and flavorful stems picked while they are still very small. “Five-star chefs know how to do flavor profiling,” says Goodman. “They can take microgreens and pair them with lamb chops, steaks or seafood.” Most consumers are not that sophisticated yet, but watch for microherbs in restaurants around the country.

Jed James with Thermal, CA-based North

**“When you cut herbs, the oils in the leaves deteriorate rapidly. Local products may last longer and provide better flavor. They will also appeal to customers’ increasing interest in seasonal products grown by regional farms.”**

— Michele Henning, Shenandoah Growers

buyer would still buy organic herbs as long as they weren’t overpriced. On the other hand, people who wanted to buy organic wouldn’t buy regular.”

The move toward organic herbs is tied into the trend toward people being more aware of what they’re eating. “On an apple, you have skin,” says Weber. “On an herb, there’s no other protection there. People think organic is much healthier.”

The decision to offer organic or conventional herbs depends somewhat on the market. Dwayne Smallwood, produce manager at Okie’s Thriftway Market in the small town of Ocean Park, WA, says its customer base is largely tourists and senior citizens. They won’t buy organic herbs because they view them as too expensive.

As the organic market continues to grow, Henning of Shenandoah Growers believes it will become harder to find herbs because there are not that many certified organic growers in the country. The solution, she believes, is for stores to turn to smaller local growers. Not

Shore Living Herbs reports that chefs are enjoying herbs with unusual colors or color combinations. “Something that will add a visual appeal to their meal,” he says. Thai basil, purple basil and variegated thyme are a few examples.

“Chefs I know, and know about, are always looking for cross-varieties, like lavender mint and lemon thyme,” says Michele Henning with Harrisonburg, VA-based Shenandoah Growers.

To keep a pulse on what’s up-and-coming in the world of fresh herbs, Henning reads food magazines to see what chefs are incorporating into dishes. “They have to produce these recipes that entice people that want to come back and buy the magazine again,” she says, so they need to include content that is new, interesting and different. **pb**

only will it help ease supply challenges, it will provide customers with a quality product.

“Herbs are not like picking an apple,” she says. “When you cut herbs, the oils in the leaves deteriorate rapidly. Local products may last longer and provide better flavor. They will also appeal to customers’ increasing interest in seasonal products grown by regional farms.”

## TRENDS IN FRESH HERBS

Live basil plants continue to interest some customers. They can be packaged in floral sleeves or small pots. Kneeland says floral departments can do well with basil in 2-inch and 6-inch plastic planters.

North Shore Living Herbs is taking things a step further, says James. They grow a wide variety of herbs indoors and package them with the roots and even some potting soil. “This is a plant grown and shipped at its culinary prime,” he says. So while people can continue to grow things such as tiny rosemary plants in a kitchen window, the real purpose is to keep the plant alive until the moment the home cook is ready to use it.

Nearly all produce items taste best when they’re picked fresh, says James, and herbs are no exception. “If you put cut herbs next to live herbs, the live herbs look better and smell stronger. They always outsell the cut herbs.”

That’s why their product works so well, especially with consumers tuned into nutrition and flavor. “We see ourselves as part of the healthy food movement,” he says.

Goodman believes the future of fresh herbs is incorporating them into meal solutions. Stores are already doing well by overwrapping baby potatoes with a sprig of rosemary or sliced zucchini with a couple of dill fronds, for example. However, Herbs Unlimited is taking things to the next level by combining spices and fresh herbs to create very targeted flavor profiles in meal solutions.

“We want to be the Hamburger Helper of the produce aisle,” he says. “We think it will be a revolutionary leap forward in the way herbs are marketed in the United States.” Watch for



this new product from Herbs Unlimited, as well as new products from North Shore Living Herbs, in the coming months.

Microherbs are a trend among chefs (see “Herbs In Foodservice”), but Goodman doesn’t see a lot of demand for them in grocery stores. “We look at those as an up-and-coming category,” he says. “Microgreens are now where fresh herbs were about 10 years ago.”

### PACKAGING PRESENTATION IS KEY

“Herbs are one of the most perishable items

in a highly perishable category,” says Henning of Shenandoah Growers. “As consumers we try to reduce packaging, but the unfortunate part is that when you keep touching an herb, you are destroying it.”

That’s the main reason so many fresh herbs continue to come in clamshells. “The package protects the herbs,” says Kneeland of Fresh Formats. “They are very susceptible to wilting and quality issues when they’re not in a package.”

Not only do clamshells prevent damage,

they can help herbs maintain their freshness. “It provides a little mini greenhouse to a living plant,” says James of North Shore Living Herbs.

Another advantage to packaging is that it gives buyers information. “I think most customers don’t know the difference between sage and tarragon, for example,” says Kneeland. Recipes typically don’t show people what various herbs look like, so people have a hard time identifying them in stores.

Herbs Unlimited now offers herbs in a pouch with 75 percent less plastic than a regular clamshell. The pouches are resealable, which extends the shelf life of the herbs by 20 percent after they are placed in the refrigerator.

Because of its popularity, basil is merchandised in clamshells ranging from one-quarter ounce to 4 ounces. It shouldn’t be refrigerated, so Kneeland says he often places it on a table next to the tomatoes to get customers thinking about the natural tie-in. “You’re going to sell 10 times more basil sets with tomatoes than you will under refrigeration,” he says.

The most popular packaging size for other herbs is three-quarters of an ounce. However, Henning of Shenandoah Growers is a big fan of the one-quarter ounce or “recipe size” clamshell, especially for stores looking to expand their assortment. “I don’t think consumers really want to buy three-quarters of an ounce of bay leaves,” she says. “Generally a recipe will only call for one or two leaves. At the holidays, people want to make herb breads, but most recipes call for at least four different herbs.” With these smaller packages, it’s easier to do 10 for \$10 sales to get people to try new things.

Weber with Tadych’s Econofoods recently switched to one-half ounce packages and believes the smaller size is beneficial. “People don’t use the whole thing and they don’t want to throw it away.”

To make things even easier for customers, Kneeland recommends repackaging herbs into convenient mixes, such as a poultry herb mix to cook with turkeys around Thanksgiving and a ham mix for other holidays.

Parsley and cilantro are the only herbs routinely sold in bulk. Henning sees advantages and disadvantages to this system. “The good thing about bunched herbs is that they’re less expensive, there’s less packaging, and it gives you a feel that you’re in a marketplace buying fresh,” she says.

But overall, “bunches can be very high maintenance. They get picked over and can get mushy. A consumer can have some pretty bad shrink with bunches.” When possible, packaged fresh herbs are still the way to go. **pb**

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEW JERSEY PEACH PROMOTION COUNCIL

## NEW JERSEY PEACHES AND NECTARINES OFFER LOCAL APPEAL TO 45 MILLION CONSUMERS

Marketers explore strategies to expand sales.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNNY VALLEY INTERNATIONAL

**P**eaches might not rank as New Jersey's official state fruit. This honor belongs to the blueberry. Yet peaches, and to a lesser extent nectarines, are a major crop in the Garden State. Of the 18,100 acres devoted to fruit production in New Jersey, 49 percent of this land is devoted to blueberries, with peaches No. 2 at 25 percent or some 4,600 acres (approximately 400 of these acres are nectarines), according to the 2014 New Jersey Fruit and Vegetable Crops Statistics &

National Rankings report, released January 29, 2015 by the USDA NASS New Jersey Field Office, in Trenton, NJ.

In addition, New Jersey farmers harvested 41.2 million pounds of peaches with a value of \$27.3 million in 2014. This production ranked New Jersey fourth in the U.S. for peach production behind California, South Carolina and Georgia.

"Blueberries get more attention, because of the sheer tonnage," says Victor Savanello, director of produce and floral at Allegiance



Retail Services, LLC, a retailer owned co-op headquartered in Iselin, NJ, that supports more than 85 stores with banners such as Foodtown, D'Agostino and Market Fresh. "But I wouldn't call peaches a stepchild. They are an important staple for us. We buy Jersey-grown yellow- and white-fleshed peaches and nectarines throughout the season for our customers."

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Sales window, fruit size and availability of fresh-picked fruit into the fall can be diffi-

culties for growers that offer sales prospects for retailers.

"One challenge is if East Coast states like South Carolina, as well as California, all come into the market with fruit at the same time. This means a huge supply and lower prices," explains Al Murray, assistant secretary of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), in Trenton, NJ.

New Jersey peach growers need to see at least \$2.99 per pound at retail, with occasional specials at 99-cents to \$1.29 per pound, to

**"Rutgers has a lot of new things in their germ plasm base like red-fleshed and creamy-fleshed varieties. But to get these to retail requires enough supply to last through the season and marketing to promote."**

— Jerome Frecon,  
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remain in operation, according to Al Caggiano, Jr., president and co-owner of Sunny Slope Farms in Bridgeton, NJ. "If we get less, we have to grow less," he says.

On the upside, New Jersey's peaches are grown and packed within 250 miles of more than 45 million consumers.

"Because most New Jersey peach orchards are close to major markets in the U.S., fruit can be picked well-matured when color, flavor and sugar is high. We can pick at a higher maturity level since it's same day or next day delivery to our customers in the Mid-Atlantic and East Coast areas," says Bob Von Rohr, director of customer relations for Glassboro, NJ-headquartered Sunny Valley International.

The opportunity to have readily available fresh-picked peaches and nectarines "in our own backyard" is definitely a plus, according to Jay Schneider, produce and floral director at Acme Markets, a 107-store chain headquartered in Philadelphia with stores throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland.

"The idea of getting something that tastes so good locally from the Garden State is a big draw to our customers. Jersey peaches help bring more awareness to locally grown and are very popular. We bring them in via a combination of store-door deliveries from local farms, coupled with deliveries to our Distribution Center for the rest of our network of stores," explains Schneider.

Early season small fruit, though sweet to eat, can be more problematic to market at retail due to its size.

"Peaches will size 2 to 2.25-inch diameters in early July. Retailers often want to wait until the fruit reaches 2.75-diameter," says the



NJPPC's Frecon.

Acme Markets offer customers Jersey-grown peaches throughout the entire season.

"We will size up when the 2.75- to 3-inch diameter fruit becomes more available. This makes the display and the fruit more appealing to the customer," says Schneider.

The New Jersey peach harvest typically finishes up in mid-September with fruit in the distribution pipeline through early October.

"The problem is retailers don't want to sell peaches after Labor Day. It's when they re-set and switch over to apples and pears while drastically cutting down on stone fruit displays. However, late season peaches are some of the most flavorful. It's a beautiful crop, and it's a shame there's no market except for the farm stands," says the NJPPC's Frecon.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNNY VALLEY INTERNATIONAL

## ■ INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

Peaches first grew in New Jersey in the early 1600s when colonists imported European varieties and found they thrived in the state's temperate coastal climate. By 1683, the fruit received commercial attention when it was shipped by the wagonloads to New York, according to the *History of the Peach in New Jersey*, written by Jerome Frecon and Ernest Christ in 2012, for the Glassboro, NJ-based New Jersey Peach Promotion Council (NJPPC).

Today, there are 92 peach orchards where 100-plus varieties grow, according to *The New Jersey Peach Industry Today*, published in the NJPPC's 2014 Peach Buyers Guide. Seventeen New Jersey peach shippers operate packinghouses equipped with food-safe, hydro-cooling and storage facilities, which enables them to distribute fruit from late June to early October. Most of the state's stone fruit is packed in 25-pound volume-fill boxes. Some packers also offer two-layer Panta-Pak tote bags and clamshells. Packers primarily market through wholesalers, marketing cooperatives and brokers, while some sell fruit directly to retailers. All of New Jersey's peach and nectarine crops are sold to the fresh market.

Peach production in New Jersey is concentrated in the southern part of the state in Gloucester, Cumberland, Camden, Atlantic and Salem counties.

"The sandy loam soil, abundant water, and temperate climate produce a reliable high-quality crop of juicy, nice-sized and high-sugar peaches and nectarines," says Santo John Maccherone, third generation

owner of Circle M Farms, LLC, in Salem, NJ, a 150-acre orchard.

New Jersey growers expect an abundant crop this season.

"We had plenty of chill hours and moisture over the winter months to ensure good yielding production," explains Bob Von Rohr, director of customer relations for Glassboro, NJ-headquartered Sunny Valley International, the largest stone fruit shipper in the state and the exclusive marketing and sales agent for the 'Jersey Fruit' and 'Just Picked' labels.

"Due to new plantings and excellent weather conditions, we are projecting a 10 percent increase in production of yellow- and white-fleshed peaches and yellow nectarines this season. Yellow-fleshed peaches start the first week in July with light volume and will ramp up to good volume by mid-July. White-fleshed peaches and nectarines will be available from the last week in July through mid-September."

Ninety percent of New Jersey's crop is yellow-fleshed peaches, with 4 percent white-fleshed peaches, 6 percent yellow- and white-fleshed nectarines and less than 1 percent flat peaches, according to the NJPPC.

"The main varieties of yellow-fleshed peaches are Flamin Fury, Redhaven, John Boy, Loring, August Prince and Big Red. White-fleshed peach varieties include Lady Kim, White Lady, Klondike, Lady Nancy and Snow Giant. Nectarine varieties such as Eastern Glo and Sunglo have outstanding color and flavor. Our growers work closely with Rutgers University Agricultural Extension to ensure the last best

varieties are in place to ensure the highest quality peaches and nectarines," says Sunny Valley's Von Rohr.

### DIVERSITY WINS THE GAME

Sunny Slope Farms in Bridgeton, NJ, is a third generation operation that grows 20-plus varieties of peaches and nectarines on 600 of its 1,000 acres. This includes flat peaches. Several varieties of flat peaches were developed and patented by Rutgers starting with the Saturn in 1983. Rutgers peach-breeding program was established in 1907.

"Retailers are really asking for these. We have both yellow- and white-fleshed varieties and hand-pack them into trays. We haven't dipped our toe into the wholesale market for these yet, because they are so fragile," says Al Caggiano, Jr., president and co-owner.

Industry professionals believe diversity is the way to grow New Jersey's stone fruit business. "Since peaches and nectarines aren't sold by variety names, the only way to get more shelf space is with something new and novel rather than another yellow or white fleshed variety," says Frecon, professor emeritus at Rutgers University as well as the Clayton, NJ-based horticultural consultant for the NJPPC. "Rutgers has a lot of new things in their germ plasm base like red-fleshed and creamy-fleshed varieties. But to get these to retail requires enough supply to last through the season and marketing to promote."

Beyond peaches, Maccherone at Circle M Farms tested plots in the ground for plums and cherries. He sold his first commercial purple plum crop last year with success. **pb**



## MARKETING AND MERCHANDISING HELPS

Consumer interest in “locally-grown” is a hot marketing tool for retailers to showcase New Jersey stone fruit. To this end, the NJDA supports customer awareness of its “Jersey Fresh” marketing program, which has proven to be an extremely successful and well-recognized brand.

“A few of our stores will set up farmers-market-type promotions with Jersey-grown

produce outside during the summer. Jersey peaches will be a part of this initiative,” says Allegiance Retail Services’ Savanello.

The NJPPC help supports supermarkets with promotional materials and programs.

“In the past, we had events in our stores with the New Jersey Peach Queen to promote the fruit. It creates excitement and more awareness,” explains Acme Market’s Schneider.

The NJPPC offers retailers and distributors its free annual Buyer’s Guide. This year,

**“A few of our stores will set up farmers-market-type promotions with Jersey-grown produce outside during the summer. Jersey peaches will be a part of this initiative.”**

— Vic Savanello, Allegiance Retail Services



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the Council released two new videos. The first is a trade-oriented four-minute DVD titled, *Marketing & Handling of Jersey Peaches: A Helpful Video for Sellers*. The second is a three-minute kid-video with a talking and dancing cartoon peach called, Jersey-Fresh Peaches Talk...

“These two videos, in addition to our five-minute long *Peach Perfect Peach* consumer video we released two years ago, are available for free. Retailers can play if they have a closed-circuit TV feed in store,” explains NJPPC spokesperson, Pegi Adams.

The NJPPC will especially target supermarket retailers with promotional assistance this season. This comes on the heels of results of a statewide poll conducted in 2014 of 700 registered voters, “Who Buys New Jersey Peaches & Where,” conducted by professionals at Fairleigh Dickinson University and Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ. Results revealed that 50 percent of respondents who lived in the northern part of the state, especially urban areas, purchased their peaches in supermarkets while 23 percent of those living in southern New Jersey bought peaches at a retail grocer.

To this end, the NJPPC has set up an in-store sampling demo at the Brookdale ShopRite in Bloomfield, NJ, and a demo station in the Keasbey, NJ-headquartered Wakefern Food Corp.’s. The chain’s registered dietitian, Jessica Serdikoff, will be leading this event. Shoppers will learn about the health and nutritional qualities of the state’s stone fruit. They will also receive free copies of the NJPPC’s new tri-fold brochure, “Eat Healthy, Eat Jersey Fresh Peaches... Juicy... Nutritious... Delicious... the Best.”

“If any other retailers with nutritionists would like to do something like this, we’ll be happy to work with them to set this up,” says the NJPPC’s Adams. **pb**





## Smartphones And Tablets Drive Changes In

# DISTRIBUTION Software

Software for smartphones and netbooks opens horizons.

BY BOB JOHNSON

**T**he demand for food safety traceability ushered in the age of computer-based distribution software that can monitor produce from field to fork, and pay for itself through superior inventory management.

The next step looks to be the emergence of distribution software that makes the information available at all spots in the supply chain — software that can be used in the produce field, the distribution center, the store, and everywhere in-between.

“Our modern way of life and access to smartphones and tablet devices fueled demand to access information on-the-go and in remote locations,” says Ron Myers, executive vice president at LinkFresh in Ventura, CA. “The upgrade to the latest modern-enterprise, resource-planning-software systems gives producers the flexibility to access critical information in real time wherever they are, and the ability to speedily respond to issues.”

The charm of smartphones and the cloud is you do not have to leave the warehouse

floor, your car, or even your tractor, to access the information.

“Everyone wants the information right now,” says Charles Shafae, president of dProduce Man Software in Half Moon Bay, CA. “They don’t want to have to go back to the office; they want to be able to get the information on their smartphones. But in the produce industry, there are people still using faxes.”

### FROM FAXES AND PAPER TO SMARTPHONES AND CLOUDS

The latest development in produce distribution software is the shift from personal computers and laptops to the more portable smartphones and netbooks.

“Everything is moving toward mobile technology,” says Shafae. “The sales of PCs and laptops are down; the sales of smartphones and tablets are up. Everything is moving toward mobile technology, like cloud-based accounting.”

Produce software developers are already feeling the consequence of this shift, as more of their customers are asking for programs that can be used on smartphones.

“We are seeing a significant increase in requests for our software to be used on mobile phones and tablets,” says Charles Waud, president of WaudWare, Brampton, ON. “This makes sense given how popular these devices



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SOFTWARE**“More demand is being put on the supply chain between growers, packers and shippers from retailers for both produce traceability, field to fork and food safety, quality control and audit trail.”**

— Ron Myers, LinkFresh

have become.”

Software developers are responding to this demand with new products, or upgrades of older ones, specifically designed for use on smartphones and tablets.

“Modern smartphones and tablets are really driving the development of new upgrades across the board, for us and for other software suppliers as well,” says Gene Reynolds, national sales and marketing manager at Edible Software in Houston. “Many companies are realizing smartphones are substantially cheaper than the heavy duty handheld computers you used to see in any warehouse. Plus, software development for the phones is cheaper and faster.”

There remains wide variation in the adoption of these new technologies, as the produce industry is not far removed from the days when paper, pencils, telephones and faxes were the only communication tools.

Other technology providers are also offering cloud-based services that include a full range of inventory and distribution information.

“Our latest product is an online order entry web page that retailers can log into and enter the store’s own orders,” says Reynolds of Edible Software. “They can schedule deliveries, enter orders 24/7, and review orders in process to ensure their product is being supplied as needed. The orders immediately sync to Edible Software for the warehouse to start picking and making any needed edits right away. This helps retailers control their inventory, and helps the warehouse fulfill orders.”

**HUMAN ERROR VERSUS  
COMPUTER ERROR**

“We see the full gamut of companies running their business on pen and paper, to spreadsheets and unspecialized accounting software,” says Reynolds. “Traceability is near impossible with pen and paper systems, because there isn’t any confidence in accuracy. Many of these companies are meticulous in keeping proper records, but in the end, they are still human. Spreadsheet software like Excel, was the obvious next step, but these are prone to just as many, or even more, errors. It takes skill to program calculations and add the needed levels

of security to spreadsheets, so data isn’t being left out. It also takes a lot of time that high inventory turnover companies like produce distributors, don’t really have.”

The decision by most major produce retailers to require labels that can be used to trace produce back to the field brought most shippers into the computer age.

“They’re just starting to get into it a little more with the case labels,” says Steve Dean, general manager at ProWare Services LLC in Plant City, FL. “A lot of shippers and retailers don’t see the need to do anything differently. Produce could have been harvested days before it was packed, and then packed with different product.”

Food safety initiatives are giving growers and shippers no choice but to adopt computer technologies.

“More demand is being put on the supply chain between growers, packers and shippers from retailers for both produce traceability, field to fork and food safety, quality control and audit trail,” says Myers of LinkFresh. “Typically these processes have been managed through a paper trail, especially within the smaller to medium-sized producers, but as demand increases these producers must look to modern integrated systems to meet this need.”

The savings from modern information technology is enticing the industry to the next level. “Tablets are being used in offices and warehouses,” says Courtney Heim, marketing professional at Produce Pro Software in Woodridge, IL. “Companies are trying to cut down on paper costs. They are looking for solutions for data entry onto tablets rather than paper. Produce Pro customers have a mobile way to log food safety and quality control. With the Driver App, drivers can capture customer signatures and email them a copy of their signature on the invoice automatically.”

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all of retailer demands,” says Reynolds. “It allows them to enter orders from anywhere, and on any device, like tablets. This is also helpful for salespeople making onsite visits to go through orders, show item pictures, and build an order on the spot. The ability to review order history is a huge feature that we published with a live reflection of any changes made to the order in the warehouse. This also makes it easy for the users to review an order; for example, take an order from last year around Mother’s Day, the user can plan if they should order more or less, or at a different time.”

Mobile technology is the next step, because if there is a point in the chain where it makes sense to focus attention, it is the warehouse floor.

“The greatest bottleneck is at the inventory level,” says Shafae. “Picking up the box and bringing it in is a smooth transition. The bottleneck is sending it from the warehouse to the retailer. Country-of-origin labeling and traceability make it even more complicated. The answer is simple: warehouse management. You speed up the process of letting warehouse workers know where to go, and what box to select.”

The trick is to use the barcode already on

most produce cases as the starting point for inventory management.

“Warehouse Management Solutions for RF scanning barcodes throughout the warehouse can improve inventory accuracy,” says Heim from Produce Pro Software. “With a WMS solution, products can be tracked to the cooler, row, or slot location.”

Growers, packers and shippers tend to be ahead of the curve in being able to keep stock of their relatively simple inventories. “In our experience, implementing proper one-up, one-down traceability seems to be getting done in companies where they have less than a couple hundred stock items,” says Waud. “For example, growers and packing houses deal in higher volumes, and usually have fewer sources for the product. The demand from customers, retailers and other large customers, to have traceability systems in place is common.”

Traceability systems are even more complex and demanding when distributors have more products to track.

“For wholesalers and distributors, implementing traceability isn’t as easy, because they tend to have a lot more items,” says Waud of WaudWare. “Furthermore, many of these items are handled in smaller quantities and

come from several vendors. We also see less demand from the customers of wholesalers and distributors (often restaurants, hotels, small retailers, etc.) for traceability systems.”

### THIS STUFF PAYS FOR ITSELF

The produce industry operates on razor-thin margins, and the demand for precise traceability can be seen as another burdensome expense.

“While there is ever increasing demand for traceability in the produce sector, there is also continued pressure to lower prices,” says Waud. “So many people in the industry are wondering how the additional cost to run traceability systems will be covered.”

The technology that traces produce back to the field, however, can more than pay for itself by reducing shrink and making for fresher produce on the retail shelves.

“When properly implemented, there are many benefits to be gained from having accurate inventory,” says Waud. “Some of these include knowing when you are running out, preventing overselling, reducing spoilage/waste, more accurate cost/profit information, and speed of dealing with recalls.”

Shippers and retailers are moving past the learning curve to see traceability technology can save money.

“More people are solving this,” says Shafae of dProduce Man. “They are paying much more attention to traceability. People in the business are actively interested in food safety. When they see the smallest thing, they are very quick to act on it. The better you manage your inventory, the more profitable your business is.”

The bottomline to the economics of the technology is making sure the traceability, distribution and inventory management software helps reduce shrink enough to at least pay for the system.

“The correct software can help reduce shrink, improve order fulfillment, increase efficiency (decrease overhead costs), increase gross profits, and so much more,” says Reynolds of Edible Software.

In the interests of better inventory control, it may be worth investing in higher levels of scanning technology than are required for food safety traceability alone.

“Barcode scanning is another big area that companies need to upgrade in their business workflow,” says Reynolds. “Edible Software uses the barcodes for receiving; picking and order validation; physical counts; and adding items to a sale. Our software uses the GS1 barcode to link orders and product for full traceability backwards and forwards.” **pb**

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# New York VEGETABLES Gain Sales From Local Emphasis

The Department of Ag looks to promote locally grown within the state.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

**T**o people who live in the rural countryside of Upstate New York, the metropolitan congestion of New York City often seems like another planet. But to the vegetable growers on those farmlands beyond the city, the 8.5 million inhabitants of the Big Apple comprise one juicy market.

The state's Department of Agriculture is seeking to help bring these two disparate worlds closer together than ever in an effort to promote consumption of locally grown crops, and at the same time, fill the needs of underserved communities in the city.

"We have undertaken an effort to make an Upstate-Downstate connection, and the Governor asked us to put together a summit," says Richard Ball, commissioner of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. "We did that last December, where we brought growers and shippers together with buyers in the New York City marketplace specifically."

The summit included panels on procurement opportunities, market opportunities and on areas that are underserved in terms of fresh produce.

"That sparked a range of activity, including a regional task force that is comprised of half upstate representatives and half New York City representatives to look at where the needs are, what the needs





**“New York has some very good soils, and we have access to water, which is a pretty critical component today.”**

— Richard Ball,  
New York State Department of Agriculture  
and Markets

are, where the growers and the production are upstate, and how do we connect that,” says Ball. “In some cases, it could simply be a matter of introducing the buyers and sellers to each other.”

Similarly, the state is actively seeking to make sure that the various New York state institutions are buying as much New York-grown vegetables as possible.

“Virtually since Day 1, the Governor charged us with ensuring that New York state is New York’s customer,” says Ball. “That means the institutions in the state — the Office of Government Services, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Mental Health, our schools, etc. — make sure that when they buy food, they are preferring food that is grown in New York State, or products made in New York state. We made a big effort to do that, and it is already yielding some pretty great results.”

Several growers and the grower associations were brought into meetings with some of the state institutions to discuss how and what they buy.

The Department of Agriculture and Markets is now seeking to expand that effort to additional agencies and schools, including the State University of New York (SUNY) network of colleges and universities around the state.

“An awful lot of that is just building relationships,” says Ball. “We have growers who have the capacity, can meet the price points, and can deliver, but in many cases, the institutions don’t know what’s available and when it’s available. Some growers don’t know how to go through the agencies’ procurement processes.”

New York is one of the country’s top producers of vegetables, with strong outputs of cabbage, sweet corn, onions, snap beans, tomatoes, pumpkins, cucumbers, squash and cauliflower.

“We have some of the best land in the country,” says Ball. “New York has some very



**(Top to Bottom) Bushwick Potato Commission’s Ken Gray showing Pride of New York merchandising; local food display at Shop Rite.**

good soils, and we have access to water, which is a pretty critical component today.”

### LOCAL EFFORTS

The state’s push to buy its own produce dovetails with other efforts that have been in place to promote local consumption of produce, including the “Pride of New York” and “Taste NY” initiatives. Both tap into consumers’ increasing desire to eat locally made products.

“I think local is here to stay,” says Ball. “I don’t think people will want to go back to the way it used to be. People want to know what their grandmothers used to know, about what’s in season, and how to prepare it in the best way, and how to preserve it for the winter to get the best nutrient benefits.”

New York state farmers and shippers agree the local movement is important to their busi-

nesses, especially with a market as big as New York City.

Ken Gray, vice president of sales and marketing, Bushwick Potato Commission, Farmingdale, NY, says Bushwick has been working with the New York Department of Agriculture & Markets to promote locally grown product with signs in retail stores and through other means.

“Our main thrust is to work with the local farmers and the farms on Long Island, which are run by some of the same families that have been there for 100 years,” he says. “We specifically focus on local product — Reds, Whites, Yellows and Russet potatoes — grown close to our customers and direct from the farm with less cost, less freight, and it’s better for the environment.”

The recent drought in California could



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**Richard Ball, commissioner of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets**

increase demand for local product this year, says Gray.

“There will be restrictions on produce from California, so there might be more of a focus on produce from the East,” he says.

Others agree there could be increased demand for New York crops this year because of the situation in California.

“Unfortunately, it always takes some area to have bad luck for another area to have good luck, to put it bluntly,” says Paul Reeve, president, Bayview Market & Farms, a 200-acre grower in Aquebogue, NY.

Bayview grows a variety of crops, including sweet corn, tomatoes and strawberries, but Reeve says some of the typically California-grown crops — such as Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and broccoli — are in higher demand.

“It seems like we cannot grow enough of them at this point,” he says.

He agrees the local movement, and with it consumer awareness about what crops are in season, has been important to growers in the state.

“People are understanding what’s in season and what’s not, and it does make a difference with the majority of our sales,” says Reeve.

Likewise Andrew Gurda, co-owner of A. Gurda Produce in Pine Island, NY, agrees consumers are driving the local movement, and it’s been a boon to growers. “We’ve been local for four generations, so it’s nothing new to us,” he says. “But it has caught on somehow.

“Customers have gotten more savvy about what they want, and they demanded these local products in the chain retail stores. With social media and everything, that ‘local’ word spread like wildfire.”

**“Customers have gotten more savvy about what they want, and they demanded these local products in the chain retail stores. With social media and everything, that ‘local’ word spread like wildfire.”**

— Andrew Gurda, Gurda Produce



He notes growers need to be cautious when it comes to jumping on the local bandwagon, however. “You have to make sure the stores aren’t misrepresenting your product,” he says. “If they are putting your name and product out there and labeling it as local, you just want to make sure it’s being presented properly and not being misrepresented in any way.”

He says A. Gurda Produce has been using the Pride of New York labeling on some of its products, including onions and some potatoes, “to make sure people know where it’s coming from.”

Gurda grows a variety of vegetables, including leafy greens, salad greens, root vegetables, parsleys, cilantro, sweet corn and cabbage.

#### **KALE DEMAND INCREASES**

In addition to local, the popularity of kale is another trend that impacted growers.

“We used to just offer green kale, and we got involved with red kale and black kale,” says Gurda, although he notes sometimes it’s better to focus on doing a few crops well rather than expanding into too many different varieties.

“We are really just trying to do a better job with what we have,” he says. “More isn’t necessarily better. Sometimes more volume just

means more problems, so sometimes it is best to focus on what you are doing to do it well.”

Philip Schmitt, owner of Schmitt’s Family Farms, Riverhead, NY, also has seen increased demand for kale.

“That’s been an expanding market, although I think it’s definitely leveling off,” he says. “My trade has remained fairly steady the last two years. The trend now seems to be baby kale, and I grow full-sized kale.”

While he used to plant about three times as much acreage with collard greens as kale, “now it is almost the opposite.”

Schmitt also grows sweet corn, lettuce, cabbage, spinach, and a few other crops, including horseradish and sorrel, as well as dill, cilantro and parsley.

For corn and sunflower, we zone till rather than till all the soil. Just a narrow strip to plant the corn or sunflower helps build soil health.

Although Schmitt says he dabbles in organics, he adopted some organic practices, such as composting, and has been working with Cornell University on practices to improve the health of his soil.

He also uses zone tilling for corn and sunflowers, for example, and is experimenting with an alternative to soil fumigation that uses ground-up mustard plants instead. **pb**



# NEW YORK REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE

## New York Produce Distributors Poised For

# growth

**68** The Evolution Of The  
Hunts Point Produce Market

**78** Buying On The Market

**84** A Sound Partnership

**90** Reflection Of Consumption

**98** An International Flavor

**110** Through The Generations

**116** Innovation Helps Produce  
Wholesalers and Distributors  
Thrive

**127** As New York's Distributors  
Expand Reach, Transportation  
Becomes Crucial

**136** FOODSERVICE PROFILE:  
La Palapa 'Flare'

**138** FOODSERVICE PROFILE:  
Tertulia Evokes The Spirit Of Spain

**140** RETAIL PROFILE:  
Mrs. Green's Shifts  
Focus To Local Produce

**142** RETAIL PROFILE:  
Gastronomie 491: A Mediterranean  
Oasis in Manhattan



# The Evolution Of The Hunts Point Produce Market

SUCCESS AT THIS WHOLESALE COOPERATIVE REQUIRES CHANGING WITH THE TIMES AND UPDATING BOTH PRODUCTS AND FACILITIES. **By Keith Loria**



PHOTO BY NATHAN FITCH

**F**OR THOSE WHO KNOW THE HISTORY and remember the origins of the Hunts Point Produce Market — the 113-acre South Bronx distribution center that revolutionized the East Coast produce industry when it first opened in 1967 — you have seen some incredible changes during the past 48 years.

What started as 102 produce wholesalers offering produce to a clientele barely reaching 1,000 retailers in the Tri-State area has grown into a bustling, international business, with produce arriving from 49 states and 57 different countries each day. Over the course of a year, more than 2,200 railcars, 130,000 tractor-trailers and countless overnight buyers with vans and small trucks will stop by Hunts Point to find the best produce money can buy.

Overall, the Hunts Point Produce Market generates \$2.4 billion in sales annually, employs more than 10,000 workers and helps to feed more than 25 million in the bustling Tri-State area, thanks to more than 210 million crates of fruits and vegetables heading out the doors each year.

Using the latest revolutionary technology, transportation and business practices — not to mention a myriad of new produce being sold and new blood coming into the companies — Hunts Point continues to grow each year, and the 37 wholesalers operating in the Market are not resting on laurels or slowing down.

“I love the people who work here. To me, this place without the people wouldn’t have any meaning. It is the people who draw me, not the physical facility,” says Myra Gordon, executive director for the Hunts Point Produce Market. “It’s the people who make the Market what it is today, aside from the fact that we sell fresh fruits and vegetables. The other thing I love about the Market is the energy that flows through here.”

The winds of change continue to be upon the Hunts Point Produce Market, and that will only mean bigger and better things in the years ahead. Thanks to \$12 million from the federal government and another \$10 million from the City of New York, the Market is in the process of rehabilitation, all with the focus of getting produce in and out of the





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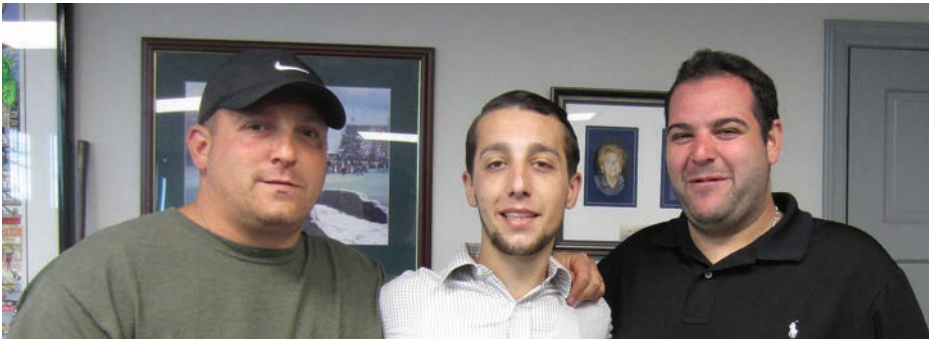




(L-R) Steve Katzman and Stefanie Katzman of S. Katzman Produce Company



Myra Gordon of Hunts Point Produce Market



(L-R) James Tramutola, Thomas Tramutola, Jr and John Tramutola of A&J Produce



Sheldon Nathel of Nathel and Nathel

Market in record time.

“Over the years, with the weight of railcars and trucks — plus the fact that we are built on landfill — the Market [physically] sunk considerably, anywhere from 8 inches to a foot, which means unloading a railcar into a warehouse becomes very difficult,” says Gordon. “When you open the doors of a railcar, the floor of the railcar should be equal to the floor of the warehouse, and up until this rehabilitation, that was no longer the case.”

**MEET THE PLAYERS**

Sheldon Nathel, a partner in Nathel & Nathel (along with brother Ira), says a lot is going on at the company in 2015.

“We are reconfiguring all our space,” says Nathel. “We just purchased more units and finished doing our trucking department, and we are in the midst of building a seven-unit cooler for our fruit. We are going to reconfigure our sales booths. We are also working to be certified in different areas to make it more conducive for the retailers to buy from us.”

The focus of the company during the past five years has been about growth, and there’s a lot more delivery business with new trailers and delivery trucks available.

“My brother and I are very fussy about how we operate,” says Nathel. “We want to have the best trucks, the best equipment, and the best facility. We are all about building the business

and making it stronger.”

Chris Armata, president of E. Armata Fruit & Produce, notes the company is constantly looking toward the future, building on and protecting the strong relationships it established over four generations, and that starts with creating partnerships with shippers and growing the customer base.

“New technologies are continually researched and tested to enhance the quality and scope of our existing operations,” he says. “This year we are happy to announce several new and expanded programs. We are excited about our new potato and onion department, as well as a new eastern peach program from South Carolina.”

Thomas Tramutola Jr., a sales manager and buyer for A&J Produce, says the biggest news out of the family-owned business is it recently purchased a new warehouse that sits directly between its fruit and vegetable aisles.

“This new warehouse connects our fruit house and our vegetable house, so it’s pretty exciting,” he says. “It was a tropical house, and we were trying to get it for a couple of years. Finally, it all worked out, and now we’re operating as one big facility. It helps in keeping everything organized.”

The company also increased its delivery service over the past couple of years, with pickups only at about 30 percent and delivery accounting for 70 percent of business.

Charlie DiMaggio, owner of FresCo LLC, says in the last year, the company built its delivery business and expanded into a lot more East Coast vegetable items, such as leafy greens, spinach and eggplants.

“It came about organically because of the people working here and their shippers and customers who were brought to the table,” he says. “It just grew on its own in that direction, and when something works, you let it take on a life of its own and see where it heads. For us, it’s been successful.”

Stefanie Katzman, a manager and fourth-generation merchant for S. Katzman Produce Company, says the company increased its dedication to customer service.

“People can no longer afford to be out of their stores or maintain trucking equipment, so we increased our delivery business,” she says. “Customers don’t mind paying a little extra for top-notch quality and personal service.”

S. Katzman was able to purchase some additional units in the Market in the past 12 months, which allows the company to better support its shippers and service its customers.

“We are also doing a re-launch of our Bloom Fresh brand and have some real exciting retail packs coming out this summer,” says Katzman. “We increased our current product line, and introduced new products. Our import programs on mangos and melons are growing every year. Our tomato department expanded into sorting

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(L-R) Lenore Rios, Neil Mahadeo, Paul Manfre, Jimmy Corn, Jeff Steinberg, Jason Gelbaum of Top Katz LLC



(L-R) Cary Rubin and Marc Rubin of Rubin Bros.

color, and all other commodities are growing steadily as well."

Cary Rubin, vice president of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., says the company has focused its efforts the past year on improving customer service, offering a better selection of products and staying competitive with pricing.

"There's no rhyme or reason from one month to the next in this business, and business fluctuates all the time. The key to success is in having products available for your customer base at all times to keep them coming back; that's our goal from a buying standpoint," he says. "As far as growth is concerned, whether we are doing that efficiently is going to decide our success."

Gabriela D'Arrigo, marketing director for D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, says the company has grown the past few years in the types of items being added to the company's roster.

"We always try to be a one-stop shop for everything produce related," she says. "We're also looking to diversify our business as a whole. New blood [staff-wise] has helped change things up a bit and creates a different dynamic."

Paul Manfre, general manager of buying and sales at Top Katz LLC, says the company recently added a lime program to the business, increased its red pepper shippers and welcomed industry veteran Jeff Steinberg to the fold.

"You constantly have to try and reinvent yourself, because it's a business that's constantly changing. We're handling items in huge volumes we never had before. Look at



(L-R) Gabriela D'Arrigo and Kenny Jacobson of D'Arrigo Bros. New York

the growth in avocados, mangos and all the tropical products," he says. "My next focus is to get more involved with organics, because that's where the consumers are going. You want to lead the consumers, but sometimes you have to follow."

Ciro Porricelli, vice president of Jerry Porricelli Produce, says the company recently welcomed a new employee to help inventory control.

**CHANGE IN PRODUCE LINEUP**

Nick Pacia, president and chief executive of A.J. Trucco, Inc., says the company has good consistent growth over the past five years. Lately, its focus changed from being strictly a distributor to building some stronger consumer brands, such as its KiwiStar and TruStar brands.

"We are currently finishing out our Chilean fresh fig season, and we're happy to report that this was a strong season. We will be switching over to our fresh figs from Arizona in May and California in June. We are excited to announce

that our California fresh figs will be branded under our new TruStar line," he says. "We launched this line back in December with the arrival of our Italian Organic Clementines, with great success. So, we decided to expand the brand across our other commodities."

The company also finished its Chilean blueberry season. It is now offering blueberries from Florida and will eventually offer blueberries from New Jersey.

M&R Tomato Distributors, Inc. is a family-owned business that began in the 1950s by selling only tomatoes.

"There is a sense of legacy that has been passed down generationally," says Denise Goodman, co-owner of the company. "The business evolved since and expanded so that we sell a full line of produce. The basics did not change. We were taught to work respectfully, with integrity and honesty, and to work hard."

She says the company's focus has been on trying to meet the needs of the customers by providing them with the produce they tradition-





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Denise Goodman of M&R Tomato Distributors, Inc.



Jim Renella of J. Renella Produce



Michael Tambor of M&R Tomato Distributors, Inc.



Joel Fierman of Fierman Produce Exchange



(L-R) Nick Pacia, Sal Vacca and Claudio D'Alimonte of A.J. Trucco, Inc.

ally use, as well as introducing new produce products.

"Our product line grew and diversified," says Goodman. "We had the opportunity to introduce some new products to our customers. One new product we helped launch is Organic BroccoLeaf from Foxy. Organic BroccoLeaf is the new 'superfood' and the winner of the 2014 Joe Nucci Award for Product Innovation."

Jim Renella, owner of J. Renella Produce, Inc., has been specializing in watermelon at the

Market since first opening in 2001, and while he is known for his traditional, stripped-down stance in business, he's not one to sit idly back when it comes to his business.

Renella started offering his own brand of watermelon and has been thriving in the category since the change.

"My customers expect the best, and that's what I offer, nothing but the best," he says. "There's never been a need for me to look at other product. We sell what we sell, which is

the best watermelon in the area, and there's no need for anything else."

E. Armata's expansion into a full-service, year-round potato and onion department includes a full line of white, red, Yukon Gold, and Idaho potatoes, as well as a complete line of onions in all sizes and packages for retail and foodservice.

"Potatoes up and down the East Coast will be handled as the season progresses. We are shipping now from Florida and will continue

## Technology Enhancements Keep Wholesalers On Cutting Edge

Rene Gosselin, operations manager for Coosemans New York Inc., says the company added a new computer system and is currently training its employees to ensure it gets the most out of the new technology system.

At Fierman Produce Exchange, all records are now hosted on the cloud, with nothing kept in-house anymore.

"We're very comfortable with this, and we have access to everything no matter where we are," says Joel Fierman, president of Fierman Produce Exchange. "We also use fiber optics for all our communications now."

Thomas Tramutola Jr., a sales manager and buyer for A&J Produce, says has seen the benefits of switching its computer system over to Produce Pro.

"Previously, just our vegetable department was using a computer program for sales, and inventory, and the fruit house was making hand-written tickets," says Tramutola Jr. "But

now the whole company has been unified through a new computer program. Inventory, billing, customer info, accounts receivable, accounts payable, and logistics are all operated through a central computer system built around our needs."

FresCo recently launched a website for the company, and the staff has been tweaking it throughout the spring and focusing some energy on making it one of the best representing the Market.

"For a company like ours, when you are dealing with so many people so far away, be it vendors or customers, this gives them a chance to do some research before they come into the place and also gives them a starting point to learn about our company," says Charlie DiMaggio, owner of FresCo LLC. "We made it very interactive, giving people access to reports that can help them do their jobs better. We wanted to make it easy for our customers to

place orders and view inventories. In the long run, we see it as a future salesman."

The fourth-generation of the D'Arrigo family helped to introduce technical innovations to the company and it also added a bolt of energy to the business.

"We added new computer systems, updated software, brought in LED lighting; we gave the company a facelift that I think was definitely needed," says Gabriela D'Arrigo, marketing director for D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York. "Everyone around here is excited. It's new, fresh, not the same old thing, and it's a lot more fun for the family members."

Stefanie Katzman, a manager and fourth-generation merchant for S. Katzman Produce Company, says to keep up with the changing times, the company is in the process of redesigning its website and expanding its social media.

pb



Billy Fierman of Fierman Produce Exchange



Dana Taback of Fierman Produce Exchange



Joe Randone of Fierman Produce Exchange



Bob Ferla of Fierman Produce Exchange



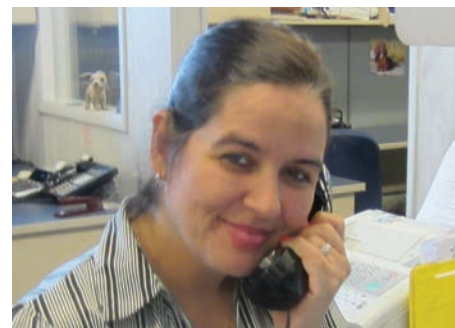
Harris Mercier of Fierman Produce Exchange



Leo Fernandez of Fierman Produce Exchange



(L-R) Joe Fierman and Anthony Alfano of Fierman Produce Exchange



Yvonne Calzadilla of Coosemans New York, Inc.

through the Carolinas, Virginia, locally with New Jersey and New York, and then into Maine," says Armata. "Idaho potatoes will be carried year-round. We will also handle potatoes from the West Coast: California, Arizona, and Washington as well as Minnesota."

Onions will be carried all year long with a full line of reds, whites, and yellows thanks to the company signing a California deal that will run through late August, followed by a contract to bring in the eastern Oregon crop through next spring. Local New York onions are available all year-round.

Nathel & Nathel, meanwhile, is dabbling in the packaged salad business, getting the company's feet wet in a growing segment.

**AROUND THE INDUSTRY**

Changes in the industry itself also necessitated some business practices at many of the Hunts Point wholesalers. For example, traceability and food safety is playing a big role in the industry, and companies are looking to

stay ahead of the curve when it comes to the looming rules and regulations.

Joel Fierman, president of Fierman Produce Exchange, says the company recently made strides toward achieving certification on its back-end division.

"Some of our customers were asking for it," he says. "It's an in-your-face issue, and we thought it was important to stay ahead with the times. It's a food safety issue, and we are packers, and we believe in providing customers with a quality product."

E. Armata Fruit & Produce also maintains the best quality control and safest produce possible through its recent GMP and HACCP certifications.

At Coosemans, Gosselin says the company continues to focus on food safety issues.

"You have to ensure the facilities are maintained in a certain way to protect and preserve the product. It's important," he says. "I'm glad we started with this in 2007, and we have maintained and kept everything updated. Having

that [advantage] tells our customers we are responsible, and we want to ensure the safety of the product before they are getting it."

**LOOKING AHEAD**

Trying to keep up with all the changes and additions at the Hunts Point Produce Market is a challenge the houses are working together to tackle. With savvy people at the helm and trusted family members working hard to make the businesses grow and everyone doing his or her part to keep the Market at the top of its game, there's sure to be plenty of innovations and additions in the years ahead.

"From the start of E. Armata more than 100 years ago to our fourth generation now, we grew with a vision for the future," says Paul Armata, E. Armata Fruit & Produce's vice president. "Family is a very important part of this business, which includes our team of employees: the buyers, sellers, warehouse personnel and staff who are a key part of our family team."

**pb**





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# Buying On The Market

INSIGHT TO A PURCHASING STRATEGY, GOALS AND LOGISTICS AT HUNTS POINT. **By Keith Loria**



**C**OUNTLESS BUYERS WILL DEAL WITH THE VENDORS at the Hunts Point Produce Market in 2015, and each will have his or her own unique experience. That's what makes this market so special.

Denise Goodman, co-owner of M&R Tomato Distributors, Inc., notes that several different types of buyers make their way to the Market each day. There are buyers who purchase for groups of merchants — this can be done via telephone, Internet, fax or simply by walking the Market; and then there are the individual buyers who fill in for retailers or wholesalers.

"Traditional buyers are those who shop the Market to see the variety of produce and prices," she says. "Some buyers may shop the places they have bought from for many years, while others may stay on a certain platform to buy."

For new buyers, it can be intimidating at first, so Goodman suggests taking a walk around once to get a feel for it all.

"Many times we get phone calls or emails from potential new customers and we advise them of how to come through the gate, park, etc.," she says. "There are also tours available of the Market."

Nick Pacia, president and chief executive of A.J. Trucco, Inc., says

a customer has to actively seek out partners around the Market by visiting different companies and getting a feel for the place and a sense of the trends.

Stefanie Katzman, a manager and fourth-generation worker for S. Katzman Produce Company, suggests customers go everywhere in search for saving a dollar. Then they find a house with consistent supply and quality and begin to develop a relationship.

"The customers in our market develop good relationships with salesmen they can count on, so they don't feel the need to shop the Market," she says. "Our buyers are on the phone with growers and shippers non-stop gathering information and giving feedback. They buy based on the market, current inventory levels, future projections, and the needs of our suppliers and customers."

Ciro Porricelli, vice president of Jerry Porricelli Produce, says most of the time, customers don't even want to look at a product, trusting in him to get him the produce they desire.

"They give me the order, and that's it," he says. "They know what I sell; they know my inventory. They give me the order and pick it up. A lot of firms make big shows, and they need to, but my customers know my products will be strong."

Thomas Tramutola Jr., a sales manager and buyer for A&J Produce, says a lot of relationships are oriented based off of who gets along with whom, who trusts who, and who has previously done business with each other.

"My two uncles are not only owners here but salesmen at night, and because they are owners, they have the accessibility and capability to better forecast markets and to change pricing to give our customers a competitive advantage over some of their competition," says Tramutola Jr. "This is something that some other salesmen are not typically allowed to do. For us, it's about treating the customer right. We want our retention rate to be as high as possible, so they come back knowing we will have the same high quality produce, for the lowest possible prices for them the next night."

Gabriela D'Arrigo, marketing director for D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, says everyone is looking for quality and for a deal.

"A buyer will shop a few times a week, some every day," she says. "We take them through the coolers that way they are selecting the product themselves."

#### TYPES OF BUYERS

Charlie DiMaggio, owner of FresCo LLC, says those buying at night have a much different process than those purchasing in the daytime. The nightshift is all about quality, price, and then procuring. Dayshift is completely price driven.

"For the night shift, buyers come in and take their time to see who has what. They look at the quality and availability. After they walk the Market and make their first round, price will be the issue. Once they find one [a price] they are happy with, their truck will come pick it up or we'll deliver it," he says. "For those in the day who come off the street, price will be their first concern. Quality will be second."

Cary Rubin, vice president of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., says there are not as many buyers walking the street as there used to be, and he classifies them into two groups.

"One type of customer walks the rows and buys for multiple stores and customers. He has obviously been here for a long time. His process is to come in, walk around, get a feel for pricing, and place orders," he says. "He could have 50 stores that he needs to buy lettuce for, and each store needs five boxes, so he has to buy 250 boxes, which is a lot more weight than buying five. He's going to get a better price buying that kind of volume."

"Then there are the buyers who come in

and just buy for individual stores, businesses, or truck routes. These customers typically shop the Market as well, but they tend to focus on a certain section of the Market — maybe shop Rows A and B, because they have to park their truck over there, and it's easier to manage. Others get comfortable in one or two houses and don't spread themselves out. Some might have unique credit scenarios, so they shop at merchants that will give them credit."

#### LOGISTICS BEHIND BUYING ON THE MARKET

"Buyers coming to the Market need to understand that in order to come in here, you need to have a credit approval unless you're going to pay cash. Many companies have their own credit system. Many use the New York Produce Trade Association for credit approval," says Myra Gordon, executive director for the Hunts Point Produce Market.

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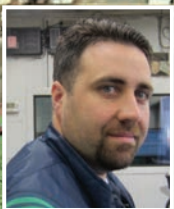
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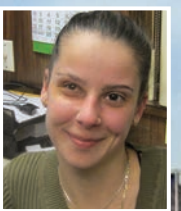
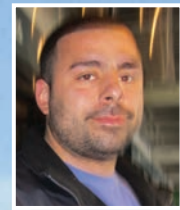
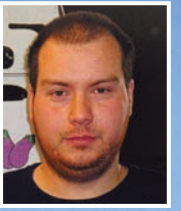
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(L-R) Stefanie Katzman of S. Katzman Produce Company and Global Bloom; Claire Sahko of Global Bloom



Joe Pellicone of D'Arrigo Bros. New York



(L-R) Stu Rice, Gary Trabucco, Charlie DiMaggio and Albert Pagan of FresCo, LLC



Sal Biondo of Market Basket



(L-R) Lori Hirsch DeMarco and Edith Rosado of LBD

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Gordon explains that buying is not the same as it used to be. An increasingly high number of buyers now place their orders on the phone, and the warehousemen downstairs will collect the order, put the order together, and the customer will have a driver and an assistant pick it up.

"There are still walk-in customers here every single day, but not as many as there used to be. Out of need, we have become a delivery service, if you will," she says. "Most of our larger merchants have a fleet of trucks where they will do the delivery. We now deliver as far north as Canada, as far south as Florida, as far west as Chicago. We also ship into Western Europe and the Caribbean Basin everyday, and hopefully — at some point in the near future — even Cuba."

Buyers who are on the Market over the years developed a rapport with certain sales people that work for specific companies.

"There's a comfort level there, which is why they consistently go back," says Gordon. **pb**





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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. Look for screenings in your area [www.screenacrossamerica.org](http://www.screenacrossamerica.org)

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.

Along with increased accessible AEDs, implementing Emergency Action planning protocols, preparedness will be greatly improved. [www.anyonecansavealife.org](http://www.anyonecansavealife.org)

In June of 2002, Governor George Pataki of New York signed Louis' Law, which requires AEDs in all New York public schools. To date 87 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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# A Sound Partnership

AN EXAMINATION OF THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN WHOLESALERS AND THEIR RETAIL CUSTOMERS. **By Keith Loria**



**W**ITH 37 WHOLESALERS MOVING MILLIONS OF BOXES of produce each year at the Hunts Point Produce Market, retailers have a lot to consider when choosing a company to work with. Price obviously comes into play often, but there are a number of other factors that can lead to a successful relationship between the two parties.

Sheldon Nathel, a partner in Nathel & Nathel, says the best way to grow a relationship with a retailer is by giving them product they clearly are not receiving now.

"You have to do what you say you're going to do," says Nathel. "That means guaranteeing delivery times, taking care of the customer, and producing the best product. I'm very confident in what we can do for a retail store."

Charlie DiMaggio, owner of FresCo LLC, notes the key to establishing a strong, healthy relationship with a retail customer is good communication.

"You need to be able to take time out to talk with each of your customers to give them information about the product, how it's trending in quality and price, what sales opportunities exist, and help them with sales in the coming week," he says. "You also need to listen to them about what they are seeing on their end and possibly making adjustments."

Vendors on the Market agree, it's not just about making a sale that day. A wholesaler needs to think about the future, and nurture the relationship so it stays solid for years.

Cary Rubin, vice president of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp. notes while direct interaction with the customer base is important, the company's staff members also have a lot of indirect interactions.

"A lot of our customers are smaller wholesalers, and they are the ones who deal directly with the retailers," he says. "We tend to try and support their efforts any way we can, whether we're doing it through advertising to help them compete with larger chains or other things like that."



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Tony Biondo of A.J. Trucco, Inc.



Richard Cochran of Robert T Cochran & Co.



(L-R) Valerie Denardo and Cathy Moeller of A.J. Trucco, Inc.



(L-R) Louie Langone and Mike Cochran of Robert T Cochran & Co.

Gabriela D'Arrigo, marketing director for D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, says the company tries to be all things to all people.

"Retail customers want to get good deals, and they want to get it in volume and have consistency in volume," she says. "We have a core group of shippers, but we'll go to all different shippers to ensure we have consistent volume for them. We aim to make life easier for retailers by hitting delivery times and by making sure the product arrives properly. We bend over backwards for any customer."

Denise Goodman, co-owner of M&R Tomato Distributors, Inc., says establishing relationships with all customers is essential.

"Walking them through the product and providing competitive prices will yield a long-term relationship built on mutual trust and respect," she says. "Like any relationship, it

takes time to develop."

Loyalty is the most important thing to Ciro Porricelli, vice president of Jerry Porricelli Produce, who says he always covers his customers with the products they want.

### A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP

Paul Manfre, general manager of buying and sales at Top Katz LLC, says one of the biggest problems in the industry is that there's a major disconnect between what the growers have to sell and what the retailers sell. For example, when something was cheap in the market, everyone bought that item, and there was a constant demand for the item — it kept the supply going. Today, chain stores do a majority of the business, and they don't get behind their products.

"People want to eat healthy, and I believe that to get consumers back eating fruits and vegetables, you have to do that by competing with mac and cheese that costs 49 cents when you're trying to sell squash for \$2.49 a pound," says Manfre. "That doesn't compute with consumers, so I think they should be selling it for \$1.15 a pound with deals if you buy three or more."

Joel Fierman, president of Fierman Produce Exchange, says it's important to work in harmony with retailers. "It's so easy in today's world, because of the Internet and the posting sheets, people really know the price points of all the products. They are as informed as the merchants used to be and can tell me if I am in line with the market," he says. "You build a relationship on service and making their life easy. They don't want a product that will get



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Fierman notes it’s a delicate balancing act to ensure a return on investment, the retailers make money, and the shippers are satisfied with their returns.

Chris Armata, president of E. Armata Fruit & Produce, says to improve organization during daily operations, the company installed location markers where doors and aisles are numbered to better service customers. In addition, E.

Armata’s state-of-the-art tomato repacking capabilities assist customers in meeting the needs of the end user with the ability to pick the size and specific color of tomato desired, from pink to red.

**NICE TO MEET YOU**

The key to growing in this business is finding new clients. When it comes to establishing a new relationship with a customer, DiMaggio says there’s lots of courtship that

goes on, followed by some back-and-forth dialogue and negotiating.

Beginning a new relationship, says Rubin, can be few and far between in the produce business, which is why he makes it a point to cultivate any relationship with fair deals and open communication.

“If I’m lucky enough to come across a new relationship, the only real ways to put yourself above someone else is the product you carry, the pricing that you offer, and most importantly, the customer service,” he says. “The fact of the matter is it’s proven that customers will pay a little more for product if they know they are going to get quality product and labels and not have to worry when deliveries come in.”

Stefanie Katzman, of S. Katzman Produce Company, says sometimes everything begins with a handshake. “It’s simple really; we both need to make a living, so as long as we are fair and have consistent supply, we’re good,” she says. “Our customers understand that we need their consistent business to make us stronger with our shippers so that we get product in tight markets and we can take care of them.”

According to Goodman, customers must know their suppliers can offer them the quality and price they need for them to be successful. “We must adapt to the ever-changing demands to supply customers with the variety they need. The population here is diverse, and we need to accommodate a variety of ethnicities,” she says. “Many people are not aware that the Hunts Point Produce Market is a public market and anyone can come here to shop. The market offers the largest selection and competitive pricing that cannot be duplicated anywhere.”

Rubin believes Hunts Point as an entity needs to reach out to new customers who never shopped the Market, to let them know they can be comfortable in shopping there and they can negotiate a price and find great deals.

**RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALL**

The relationship with the grower is also of utmost importance, advises Nathel. “If you have a grower you have been doing business with all year, it’s the end of the season, and his quality isn’t as good, you still have to take his stuff because he’s your guy and he’s been giving you beautiful stuff all year,” he says. “You still should have a second or third guy who has the best quality so you can offer it. When you build relationships, you can’t turn your back on these guys. He gave us product for 14 weeks that was beautiful and helped us make money, and now you have to help him out.”

**pb**

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# Reflection Of Consumption

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES, MILLENNIALS AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY ADD TO A TRANSFORMATION OF WHOLESALE PURCHASING. **By Keith Loria**



PHOTO BY NATHAN FITCH

**A**T THE 2015 UNITED FRESH CONVENTION, Anne-Marie Roerink, principal at 210 Analytics LLC in San Antonio, spoke to an audience at FMI Connect regarding research from the FMI's inaugural report on produce sales, *Power of Produce 2015*.

Roerink emphasized Millennials with children should be a focus for produce departments. "Age is huge when it comes to produce," she said. "I think the biggest opportunity — I see it again and again — is that group 29 to 39 years old with young children. That seems to be the point of entry to increase the produce purchase, to start buying organic, to get into snacking and juicing."

"We are seeing the generation of the parent who may have elementary school children, as well as the Millennial who is just going into the workforce, and I think their produce shopping is going to be healthier," says Myra Gordon, executive director for the Hunts Point Produce Market. "It is going to be more salads. It's probably going to be less protein, and

that will be good for the Market, because they are eating more fresh fruits and vegetables — and that is what we are about."

Cary Rubin, vice president of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., says it's important to pay attention to the Millennial generation and their buying habits because they are the future of sales.

"That generation is looking for an easier way to make meals, and with our long-standing relationship with Dole, we've been successful over the years in selling value-added products," says Rubin. "Over the last generation, this segment has grown substantially, because people are more interested in opening a clam shell or a bag rather than preparing a salad for themselves."

Charlie DiMaggio, owner of FresCo LLC, notes for certain items like kale, the healthy kick of the younger generation certainly made a difference, but he's not sure if the Millennial generation has too much of an affect on what he's selling.

However, when it comes to ethnic offerings, the rise in certain ethnic





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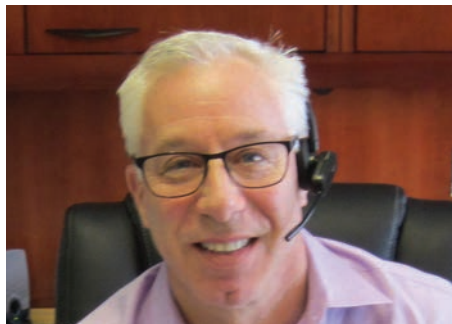
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Lisa Vogl of M&R Tomato Distributors, Inc.



Ira Nathel of Nathel & Nathel



Angela DiMaggio and Liz Vega of Fresco LLC

populations has certainly resulted in a change in what the company has sold over time.

"A diverse ethnic clientele is really driving up the sales of certain items," he says. "You need to stay on top of what people are interested in and bring in the products that caters to their lifestyle and background."

As a Millennial herself, Gabriela D'Arrigo, marketing director for D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, understands the shopping habits of her generation are different than those from years past.

"By 2017, Millennials will be out purchasing Baby Boomers by millions of dollars, which will have an effect on the market. Trends have



Officer Poole of Hunts Point Produce Market Security

already started with retailers looking for more value-added items and all things organic.

D'Arrigo also agrees Millennials are bringing

the health craze back, and it's something she and the company expect to have a profound effect on the industry in the decades ahead.

"They are on the go a lot so their buying habits are going to be much more value-added," she says. "They are self-proclaimed foodies."

**THINK LOCAL**

"Local" has been a big buzzword in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it hasn't gone unnoticed by the Hunts Point wholesalers. Many of them expanded efforts to work with local growers, so retail customers can promote the produce as being locally grown for a generation of

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customers who care.

Matthew D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo Bros. of New York, Inc., says anyone who wants to do business with him at the Market is welcome, and holds out the welcome flag for local growers.

"The 'local' phenomenon definitely influenced our business, but there's only so far that can go," says D'Arrigo. "There's a natural ceiling based on weather and seasonality."

Ira Nathel, co-owner of Nathel & Nathel,

notes this is something Millennial buyers are keenly interested in.

"We are wholesalers, and we need to sell what the customers want to buy. That means if they want to buy local Romaine, we have to source local Romaine," he says. "If you go back 25 years, no one really cared. Now everyone cares. It's not always easy. For some of the local stuff, we will pick it up from the farmers ourselves, because they don't have a lot of transportation options or the volume to make

it worth coming here."

Denise Goodman, co-owner of M&R Tomato Distributors, Inc., says as a wholesaler, the company must stay ahead of the trend by purchasing and supplying what the customers currently use, as well as introducing new healthy options.

"Healthy eating and consuming more fresh fruits and vegetables are important and a significantly growing trend," she says. "Millennials are often more willing to try new items."

Goodman says certain ethnic groups do in fact have very specific products they will or won't buy.

"It is important to find out exactly which products these customer sub-sets prefer in order to carry the product for them," she says. "However, some groups began to diversify in terms of which products they will use."

Nick Pacia, president and chief executive of A.J. Trucco, Inc., says his company has seen a surge in demand for organic products and for locally grown products as consumers view these products as healthier and they are demanding these products in higher quantities.

"The Millennial generation is much more interested not only in the product they are purchasing, but the story behind it," he says. "This is a trend that maybe we'll see reflected in the future in the way that produce is marketed."

**RISE IN ORGANICS**

People have been talking about the possibilities of organics becoming strong for decades, but according to Paul Manfre, general manager of buying and sales at Top Katz LLC, now is the time it is actually becoming a reality. He cites a recent report he read saying the produce industry as a whole was up 3 percent, but organics was up 11 percent.

"I think the next big push in organics is going to be when we get more growers involved and we can have the product in line with more of how we sell conventional produce," he says. "Green squash for example is \$5 FOB, organic squash should be a few dollars more, but we're seeing it at double or triple the price. It's a completely different category but once there are more players and more volume for the growers, there will be a better price point for consumers."

Gordon says she consistently receives phone calls asking if the Market sells organic product.

"I find the younger people who come in here, whether they are parents escorting a tour, or coming in here to ask if we sell organics, parents are looking to give their children the best produce that they think is available," she

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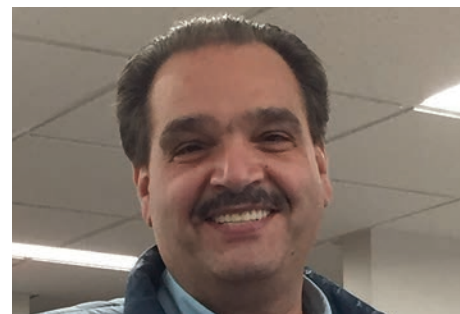
(L-R) Jimmy Chacko, Chevonne Sindoni, Larry Schembri and Tom Linaris of S. Katzman Produce Company



Peter Pelosi of A&J Produce



Jeff Young of A&J Produce



Mario Andreani of S. Katzman Produce Company

says. "We do sell some organic items, but not a lot. Organic has lost some of its panache. It has been replaced by 'local.'"

Ciro Porricelli, vice president of Jerry Porricelli Produce, says while everyone is talking about this rise in organics, there's not one company in the whole market that specializes in organic, so he's not so sure it's as big as people say.

"Once someone sees something on 'Dr. Oz' or one of these types of TV shows, it becomes the next big thing; that's how kale became so big," he says. "We'll have to see how this plays out."

**ETHNIC CHOICES**

According to Gordon, if you were to walk through the Market 25 years ago, there would have been a lot of ethnic produce being offered that most people had never seen, heard of or tasted before.

"We now sell things for all ethnicities, be it Asian or Indian, which represent huge numbers of customers. They also request to buy certain items that, until recent years, we never brought in, and we never sold," she says. "So there are many companies that have the ability to expand if they choose to by now, selling items that are primarily catering to various ethnicities."



Danny Imwalle and Joe Palumbo of Top Banana

"The ethnic buyers on the Market used to be primarily Jewish and Italian," says Matthew D'Arrigo. "There was an influx of Korean buyers and retailers on the Market and in the New York area starting in the '70s, which still plays a vital role today. However, the buying public, the customers and the neighborhoods serve people from all over the world."

Pacia also says an increase in ethnic groups created a demand for a more diverse line of

produce items. This provides opportunities for wholesalers to grow commodities that are completely new to the Market.

"I like that I see a very diverse group of people with different ethnic backgrounds at the Market," he says. "I also like the fast-paced feel of the Market, and the ability to interact with customers. It's great to be able to get immediate feedback."

**STAYING ABREAST**

Gabriela D'Arrigo notes it's important to stay up on the latest trends by talking to growers, retailers, and people in the food industry.

"Word of mouth in this industry travels very quickly," she says. "We get a lot from inside the industry and television shows. Now that a lot of the next generation is entering this business, we get a lot of information. The company does a good job of listening to what we have to say."

Finding that next "kale" is a challenge, says Sheldon Nathel, a partner in Nathel & Nathel. "You have to grow on the new items," he says. "You find the next big thing by travelling, going to trade shows, looking at what the stores are featuring, and seeing different things. As far as new items, you won't know what works until you bring them in. That's the produce game in a nutshell."





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# An International Flavor

THE EBBS AND FLOWS OF GLOBAL BUSINESS ON THE MARKET. **By Keith Loria**



PHOTO BY NATHAN FITCH

**H**UNTS POINT PRODUCE MARKET HAS A RICH HISTORY with its international founders immigrating to New York, and the legacy of these global travelers can now be felt throughout the market. Of the 37 wholesalers operating at Hunts Point, more than 90 percent conduct international business to supplement year-round supply and meet consumer demands.

"International business greatly influences what happens at the Market," says Nick Pacia, president and chief executive of A.J. Trucco, Inc. "Because it is so easy to conduct business internationally and ship produce from around the world, nowadays if there is a shortage of a commodity from one growing area, we can easily cover it from another location. Another example is we can now offer certain commodities year-round, which wasn't as easy in the past."

Back in 1999, Nathel & Nathel was one of the first wholesalers in the country to open an office in Chile. By 2007, it opened an office in Peru, and now sources regularly from both. "We also import from South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Uruguay," says Sheldon Nathel, a

partner in the company. "The response has been great."

Charlie DiMaggio, owner of FresCo LLC, estimates half of its business is done on the international level. "International business for us as a receiver has been very good," he says. "It's something that grew over time, and we are constantly on the lookout to see what the best deals are and what we can bring in to make our customers happy."

FresCo found great success with its Haitian mango program, where it imports several different varieties from Haiti for up to four months each year. It also does well with imports from Costa Rica and Mexico.

Chris Armata, president of E. Armata Fruit & Produce, says the company recently expanded its carrot program with imports from Israel, which now joins a full line of retail and foodservice carrots.

"These programs included commitments to new grower/shippers and an increased staff of buyers, salesman and warehousemen to service our customers," he says. "Handling products from around the world allows us to fill-in with year-round supplies and try new items for our customers."

Cary Rubin, vice president of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., says the





(L-R) Nicholas Armata, Paul Armata, Michael Armata, Chelsea Armata, Chris Armata and John Acompora of E. Armata Fruit & Produce



Todd Rubin of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp.



Anthony Andreani and Ralph Stark of S. Katzman Produce Company

company gets product from outside the United States whenever possible — if it makes sense from a business perspective.

“We follow the map of where the stuff is coming from. Now that we’re in summer, we’ll start heading back to those areas that give us good product, whether that be up to Canada, down to Mexico or other areas in South America or Central America where you get certain fruits that you can’t get anywhere else,” he says. “There are certain things that come from Europe, Israel, Spain, Belgium — it all goes with the territory.”

Gabriela D’Arrigo, marketing director for D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, says the company brings mostly fruit in from other countries. “We started with that [importing] decades ago, and it’s been successful for us,” she says. “It’s just about reaching out and getting in touch with us. It’s not complicated,”

says D’Arrigo. “We want to help not only our company, but the industry to become more diverse and to become more fruitful. It’s all about trial and error.”

According to Paul Manfre, general manager of buying and sales at Top Katz LLC, more people are expecting an uninterrupted supply chain, which is why every wholesaler must look to the international markets.

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(L-R) Pablo Lugo, Big Mike, Eli Echevarria and Louis Augone III of S. Katzman Produce Company



(L-R) Craig DeMarco, Lori Hirsch DeMarco, Dennis Scanlon, Jamie Sanchez, Helene Traeger, Eddie Claudio, Danielle Pandofelli and Randy Berger of LBD Produce

from Israel, Spain, Holland, or wherever they may be," he says. "It's a small world now, and markets react quickly. You have to have partners everywhere to maintain a constant supply."

Top Katz also continues to grow its import program from South America with items such as kaboucha and butternut, and the company has a complete year-round mango program

helping with an uninterrupted quality of supplies throughout the season.

"There are always challenges with bringing in things, but you can have challenges bringing in something from New Jersey. That's the produce business," says Manfre. "There could be weather issues, something in customs, a strike somewhere, but we know how to get through it."

**IN SEASON**

Pacia says A.J. Trucco, Inc. is currently in the process of transitioning to its Chilean kiwifruit season. "We are thrilled to announce this year we will be offering gold kiwifruit from Chile in addition to conventional green," he says. "We recently hired a nutritionist to come up with some fun, healthy recipes for our kiwifruit, and we look forward to incorporating those



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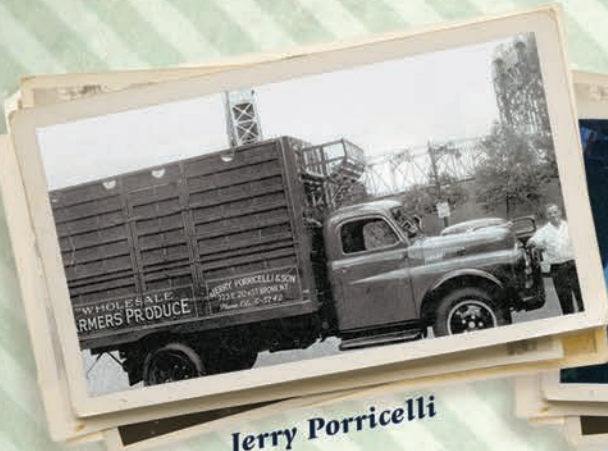
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into some demos and events this summer.”

The company also imports blueberries from Argentina and Chile, and the company recently expanded its blueberry program to include Canada and Peru.”

Last year, A.J. Trucco, Inc. introduced a pineapple program, importing delicious pineapples from Costa Rica, and the company hopes to expand the program in the future with opportunities to add organic pineapples to the line.

**SOMETHING NEW**

Those in the produce industry know that new types of produce are being offered all the time from different international outlets, but not everything will be a big seller, so often things from other countries have to be tested to gauge if there’s interest.

At FresCo, DiMaggio says for anything to be tested, he enters into partnerships for mutually beneficial relationships.



Amin Panjwani of S. Katzman Produce Company



Felix LaManna of S. Katzman Produce Company



Jason Semetis and Dena Solis of S. Katzman Produce Company

“We both need to invest time, energy and money into this product to make it work, because it will take all three for it to work,” he says. “It can’t just be a one-way street. They can’t expect us to take a product, get their price, and take all the risk. You both need to believe in the product to push it through.”

The last time FresCo did this successfully was with a few tropical items out of Costa Rica in 2014.

Joel Fierman, president of Fierman Produce Exchange, says the company imports approximately 20 percent of what it sells from other countries.

“They [buyers] come in, talk to whoever

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is in charge of that product line, and sometimes we test it here," he says. "We learn what ethnicity it applies to, and we can bring it in based on that. At the end of the day, there has to be a demand for it."

D'Arrigo Bros., tested a number of products throughout the years and found success with many of the Chilean items. The company is always open to trying something new.

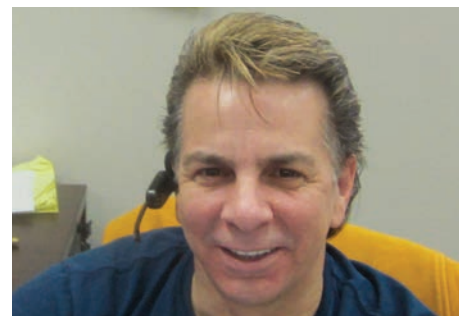
"It's just about reaching out and getting in touch with us. It's not super complicated,"

says D'Arrigo. "We want to help not only our company, but the industry become more diverse and fruitful. It's all about trial and error."

A few years back, Nathel tested a yellow peach that was extremely popular in Chile. "In this country, yellow peaches didn't sell well, but I thought it was very interesting, so we labeled it as a golden peach and put it in a box and sold it," he says. "The fruit eventually would lose its flavor, and we lost momentum on the item. That's a case where it didn't work."



Osman Ozkan of S. Katzman Produce Company



Rick Romano of S. Katzman Produce Company



Sal Vacca of A.J. Trucco, Inc.



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When testing something new, a company must consider the time and energy of its employees to sell the product and the financial responsibility to return the money to the shipper on the product.

Space is another consideration when dealing with a new produce item from outside the U.S. Many of the companies at Hunts Point are already fighting for every inch of space at the Market, so to devote a great deal of space to a new item, it has to pay off.

Manfre says it's not always easy to find a new product that sells. "First, you have to find what ethnicity uses the product and then market to that group," he says. "There was a time when avocados and mangos were first being tested, and now everyone eats them. You start with a niche market and expand on that market as people taste it and get familiar





# IN MEMORIAM

Alvin Nathel

May 25, 1932–May 31, 2015



**I**n 1922, Daniel Nathel (Alvin's father) and Gashen Wishnatzki opened a wholesale business on the Washington Street Market, which operated as Wishnatzki & Nathel.

In 1932, Gashen Wishnatzki went to Florida to expand operations by growing produce while Daniel Nathel managed operations in New York.

In 1967, the New York operation moved from Washington Street to the Hunts Point Terminal Market. Upon the retirement of Daniel Nathel in 1971, Alvin Nathel took over the business and Wishnatzki & Nathel incorporated. The principals were Lester and Joseph Wishnatzki (Gashen's sons) and Alvin Nathel.

From there, as they say, "the rest is history."

Countless buyers on the Market have said, "I am where I am today because of Alvin Nathel; he extended credit, so the businesses could grow."

Ron DeSena of Yola Produce said, "I built trust and loyalty with Alvin Nathel, and then other companies on the Market extended credit to me too."

Alvin was loved and respected by the staff, and many of them still work there today.

Alvin Nathel always honored his word. He had relationships with shippers and buyers with only a handshake.

Alvin took pride in building his business and helping others build their companies as well. He was an influential mentor to many in the produce industry, especially to his sons, Ira and Sheldon. Alvin taught his sons everything he knew about the produce business.

He instilled a strong work ethic and taught his sons how to earn respect.

In 1992, Alvin retired and turned his part of the business over to his sons.

In 2001, Ira and Sheldon bought out the Wishnatzki's, and the business became Nathel & Nathel.

Alvin's sons were paying attention to what their father taught them. Alvin called his sons every day (after he retired) and always wanted to know how the lettuce and strawberries were doing on the Market.

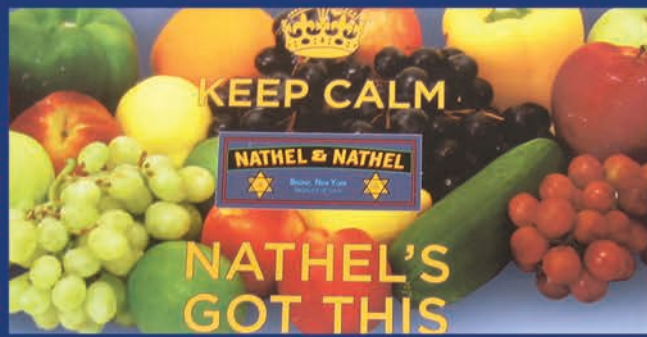
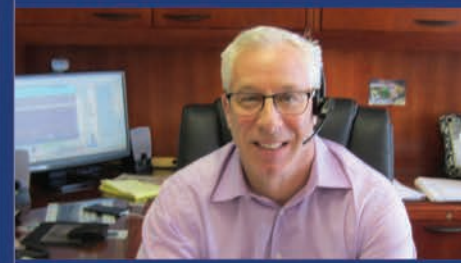
Alvin's advice to Ira & Sheldon, remains the foundation of their continued success.

Alvin is survived by his eldest daughter, Deborah Kazan, her husband, Paul, and their two children; his daughter, Sharon Mirles, her two children, and her three grandchildren; his son Ira, his wife Claire, and their five children; and his son Sheldon, his wife Hiromi, and their three children.

Alvin Nathel was blessed by family, and he will live in their hearts forever.



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## HUNTS POINT BY THE NUMBERS

BY KEITH LORIA

**THE HUNTS POINT PRODUCE MARKET**, which sits on 113 acres and each of its four rows measuring about a third of a mile, generates \$2.4 billion in sales annually, employs 3,500 union members, another 6,500-plus jobs are supported because of the Market, and it helps to feed more than 25 million in the bustling Tri-State area — thanks to more than 210 million crates of fruits and vegetables going out the doors each year.

For 24 hours a day, five days a week, the hubbub of the market is one of the most fascinating places in all of New York City. Produce arrives from 49 states and 55 countries almost on a daily basis and over the course of a year, a million overnight buyers with small trucks and vans will pay a visit.

Here are some other interesting facts and figures about the market.

**Total Number of Wholesalers in 2015:** 37

**Number of Employees Working the Market:** 10,000+

**Total Number of Boxes Moved in a Year:** 93,927,000

**Number of Trucks/Trailers Entering Each Year:** 130,000

**Population within 50 miles of the Market:** 22 million people or about 9 percent of the total U.S. population.

**Miles of Railroad Tracks:** 18

**Number of Boxcars at the Market:** Between 2,500 and 3,000 a year.

**Number of States Exporting Goods to Hunts Point Produce Market:** 49

**Number of Countries Importing Goods to Hunts Point Produce Market:** 55



Ralph Communale of E. Armata Fruit & Produce



Lou Pecora of S. Katzman Produce Company

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with it.”

A big focus this year for S. Katzman has been cultural change. “In order to improve on the customer experience, our customer service had to change on a company level. The only way to make that happen is to work together as a team, and find a way to get “it” done no matter what the “it” is.”

The company is doing a lot of leadership training and employee development. A Spanish-language teacher was hired this year, and S. Katzman implemented a full training program for all positions. “We made a lot of acquisitions in the past two years, which has been helpful. It’s bringing in a different culture, with different produce ideas and initiatives.”

One of the new initiatives will be conditioning fruit, which includes sorting, coloring and ripening. The company is also rebranding its Bloom Fresh private label line with retail packaging. The new line will start with pomegranate arils, grown in India. The product will be hand-packed, which causes less bruising and year-round availability.

“The reason we picked pomegranate first was because of the health aspects; it’s loaded with antioxidants,” says Katzman. **pb**





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# Through The Generations

MANY MARKET COMPANIES MAKE BUSINESS A 'FAMILY' AFFAIR. **By Keith Loria**



*Gabriela D'Arigo of  
D'Arigo Bros. Co. New York*

**ONE OF THE THINGS THAT MAKES THE HUNTS POINT PRODUCE MARKET SPECIAL** is that many of the companies operating there employ second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-generational family members. Sons, fathers, daughters, cousins, uncles, and even grandfathers work side by side in the offices while other family members and friends of family work everywhere from the warehouse to the sales floor to the management office.

S. Katzman Produce Company has several fourth-generation family members working for the company right now, including two cousins Joey and Anthony Andreani, who grew up in the business.

Joey was in fourth grade when he first came to the Market to “work” alongside his dad, and he loved watching the hustle and bustle of the nightshift.

“I started working here for real during the summer of my sophomore year in high school,” says the 24-year-old. “The first day was like all

these Energizer bunnies running around; it never stopped. It was quite an environment to be a part of.”

He studied sports management in college and after graduating in 2012, thought he would be entering that field, but when he couldn't find a job by Sept. 1, his dad asked him to join the Market.

“I knew right away that I wanted to stay,” he says. “The thing I love is that it's challenging, but you never know what to expect. You have to be prepared for anything. I get to deal with people from all over the world.”

By the time he reaches 30, Joey hopes to have his name recognized within the mango industry and help grow Katzman's mango business even bigger than it is now.

Anthony has been working for the company for 10 years, yet he too thought that he was going into a different career. “Right after college, I came for two weeks just to try it out, but I never left. I love it,” he says. “My uncle Mario told me I had to sell 1,000 packages a day, and



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**“Honestly, I love the family history. I never get tired of hearing stories about my family. Each one of them put their blood, sweat, and tears into this industry, and if that’s not enough to make you want to continue the legacy, I don’t know what will.”**

— Gabriela D’Arrigo,  
D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York

no matter if I sold that many or not, it was never enough. This whole business is built on relationships and trust and no one’s better for that than family.”

Another company that has its share of family members working for it is the D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York.

Gabriela D’Arrigo, marketing director, is a fourth-generation family employee, although growing up, she wasn’t exposed to the wholesale side of the industry, because she lived in Arizona.

“I had no clue of the scope and just how prominent the D’Arrigo family was in the industry. I went to school for marketing, advertising and public relations with my goal being to work at a firm in New York someday,” she says. “Honestly, I love the family history. I never get tired of hearing stories about my family. Each one of them put their blood, sweat, and tears into this industry, and if that’s not enough to make you want to continue the legacy, I don’t know what will.”

Fellow fourth-generation workers Peter, Brian and Kevin D’Arrigo work as night salesmen in a rotational program designed by their fathers and uncles. The older generation decided it would be best for the future of the company if they understood every phase of the wholesale business and how it relates to the produce business as a whole.

Kevin has always known that at some point, he wanted to be a part of the family business. “At a young age, I could grasp the notion that Dad worked for the family company — and not some corporation I might see on the news — and certainly saw first-hand the long hours

## ★ ALL-STARS IN TRAINING ★



### DILLON D’ARRIGO

*D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York*

**Age:** 20  
**College:** University of Tampa  
**College Major:** Finance and Economics  
**Goal for Produce Career:** Expansion of D’Arrigo Bros. New York  
**Vision for next five years:** Gain vast knowledge of the wholesale industry  
**Reason to work at Hunts Point:** Continue family legacy



### NICHOLAS D’ARRIGO

*D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York*

**Age:** 18  
**College:** Springfield College, MA  
**College Major:** Criminal Justice  
**Goal for Produce Career:** Grow D’Arrigo Bros. of New York  
**Vision for next five years:** Working in the various departments of the company and understanding the foundation.  
**Reason to work at Hunts Point:** Carry on the tradition



### CRAIG DEMARCO

*LBD Produce*

**Age:** 21  
**College:** Manhattan College in Riverdale, NY  
**Goal for Produce Career:** Work full time at LBD Produce  
**Vision for next five years:** Graduate from college and possibly get a Masters degree; get familiar with shippers, product and customers; learn ins and outs of the office  
**Reason to work at Hunts Point:** The business has been around for more than 60 years, and I am the fourth generation working in the business. It is a very interesting business as well as lucrative.



### THOMAS PALUMBO

*Top Banana*

**Age:** 23  
**College:** Quinnipiac University  
**College Major:** Business  
**Goal for Produce Career:** Be a part of the great foundation my dad built and continue to help the business grow.  
**Vision for next five years:** Work on obtaining an MBA at Quinnipiac; establish trust with people on the Market, so I can learn from them and eventually share my vision to help keep moving the company forward.  
**Reason to work at Hunts Point:** I love working with my family and appreciate that I’m fortunate to do so.



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Anthony and Joey Andreani of S. Katzman Produce Company



Nicole Palumbo of Top Banana

he worked," he says. "But only gradually did I start to realize that the company was indeed a successful one. Between visiting the Market on Sundays, reading articles in the produce magazines, or just listening to old-Market guys speak so highly of my grandfather, father and uncles, I developed a sense of pride in what they had built, and started to look forward to contributing down the road."

Brian says he oscillated between working for the family business, but always thought it nice to have fresh produce in the house. From the age of 17 until 22, he worked every summer as a porter in the Western Veg Department.

"After a few years working in a different field, I decided this is definitely where I want to be," he says. "It is a very complex industry that has a lot of moving parts. Since starting in November, my focus has been on learning and understanding wholesale selling that is particular to the Hunts Point Produce Market."

Peter was 18 when he first worked as a porter during the day in the Western Department, and he's excited to be following in his father's footsteps.

"I really enjoy working in an actual terminal

**"The thing I love is that it's challenging, but you never know what to expect. You have to be prepared for anything. I get to deal with people from all over the world."**

— Joey Andreani,

S. Katzman Produce Company

market. No item has a set price, and bargaining/selling skills can make or break a sale," he says. "I would like to be learning the buying sector of the business. However, there is so much to learn within these walls, and the majority of the people down at Hunts Point have been here more than 20 years. I have a lot to learn. My job is to bring a positive attitude to work and grasp as much as possible every day."

Nicole Palumbo, business development executive for Top Banana LLC, graduated from

the University of Miami in 2013 with a double major in public relations and sports administration, and planned to pursue a career in public relations.

"Within my previous employment experience, I have served in leadership roles on event management efforts, as well as in promotion capacities. Within these roles I have developed a breadth of understanding of the interrelations of operational departments," she says. "Moving back to New York in early June of 2013, I was curious about my family business."

Palumbo started working for the company a year later and now has career aspirations of excelling in a management position at the company.

"My long-term aspiration is to be part of the corporate management team at Top Banana LLC, hopefully expanding in importing and exporting, and to make a substantive contribution to Top Banana's overall success," she says. "I have a hunger for continually learning and applying the most cutting-edge marketing and sales techniques, and continually use what I learn to push revenue targets and the customer relations experience."

**pb**



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# Innovation Helps Regional Wholesalers and Distributors Thrive

COMPANIES AROUND THE NEW YORK METRO AREA EVOLVED INTO INTRICATE BUSINESSES AIMED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE CUSTOMER BASE. **By Jodean Robbins**



**W**HOLESALERS AND DISTRIBUTORS in the New York area continue to thrive through their innovative approaches to the business. “You cannot stay stuck in what you’re doing,” says Arq Hernandez, director of operations at Eli & Ali Organic Specialty Produce in Brooklyn, NY. “We must stay ahead of the curve and always look for what sets us apart from the pack.”

“We changed, because the industry changed,” says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for Vision Import Group LLC in River Edge, NJ. “You must look to the future, determine where the trends are, and evolve. If you don’t, you’re going to be left behind.”

Successful influencers in the New York area took their businesses from an initial focus and uniquely grew it to fill particular needs in the marketplace. Baldor Specialty Foods in Bronx, NY, is a prime example of a business known for its innate ability to be out in front of profitable trends. “Our success is based on our ability to look around the corner,” explains Michael Muzyk, president. “Not just to look ahead, but around the corner and anticipate the unknown. We saw this years ago when we started fresh-cut, and people said we were crazy.”

After experiencing success in fresh-cut, Baldor took another leap by adding specialty non-produce items to its offering. “Our non-produce items have achieved millions of dollars in sales,” says Muzyk.

Baldor’s ability to look around the corner is further evidenced by its new website. “This site will help the farmer showcase his or her abilities,” explains Muzyk. “It will allow chefs to go online and define local for themselves. Chefs can also go online (in real time), check on an item, and apply a purchase toward their order. We may not see a return on investment for this site for several years; but by that time, we’ll be poised and ahead of the pack.”

RLB Food Distributors in West Caldwell, NJ, evolved from owning its own stores many years ago to serving as a retail store warehouse to now functioning as a true wholesaler. “We transformed to serve a wider client base,” says Jeff Shilling, vice president of procurement.

Pat Mele III, executive vice president and chief financial officer of RLB says, “We are really a custom-house. We tailor to the customer’s needs. Service is a big piece of our business, and we do a lot our competitors won’t — for example bringing in private label water or importing olive oil for specific customers.”

“We distinguish our business with our fresh-cut and unique offerings,” says Joey Granata, director of produce sales for RLB. “Our business has become much more diversified both in terms of what we offer and whom we supply.”

RLB looks to foodservice as its new horizon. Floyd Avillo, president and chief operating officer of RLB, explains, “Our expansion in food-





(L-R) Viraj Puri and Nicole Baum of Gotham Greens



TJ Murphy of Baldor Specialty Foods



Michael Muzyk of Baldor Specialty Foods



(L-R) Ronnie Cohen and Raul Millan of Vision Import Group LLC



(Top to Bottom) Pat Mele III and Floyd Avillo of RLB



(L-R) Arq Hernandez, Marc Ross, Cristal Tineo, Lucy Lemus, Jeff Ornstein and Elijah Booth Ornstein of Eli & Ali

service makes sense, because of our product line and distribution system. We already offer fresh-cut, deli and produce, which is a perfect fit for foodservice."

Growing popularity for organic items in the New York area provides ample opportunity for RLB and other forward-looking companies. "Organics has probably been our biggest evolution in the past five to 10 years," reports Avillo.

"Our geographic area is prime for organics," agrees Mele. "It gives us an opportunity with this segment. We are even processing fresh-cut organics now; something we weren't doing just a few years ago."

"RBest is dedicated to offering variety," says Jasmine Hines, director of marketing and advertising, RBest Produce Inc., Port Washington, NY. "We have a full supply of conventional, organics, tropicals, locally grown, ethnic specialties, and complementary items such as fruit juices and salad dressings."

Hines says RBest's buying process heavily focuses on supplying customers' demands. "Our buying department consists of some of the most produce-knowledgeable people in the industry that have decade-long relationships with our farmers and vendors."

Eli & Ali in Brooklyn, NY, built a significant business from the organic category. "In recent years, we really built and focused on our organic line," says Jeff Ornstein, co-owner. "Though people over [the age of] 50 are traditionally

considered the national organic consumers, in our area, the Millennial consumer is really driving organics."

"Though we anticipated the organic trend for several years, it has really come to fruition," says Hernandez. "It's now about 75 percent of our business. What's really remarkable is how we're seeing it beyond retail; for example, more high-end restaurants and country clubs are looking for organic, because their clientele demands it."

Eli & Ali prides itself on outside-the-box thinking in both organic and conventional items. Ornstein explains, "We created a niche by developing the right kind of packaging for our products. Packaging is important to ensure retail gets the proper ring. Also, this season, we have an interesting deal with a cooperative of 10 to 15 Amish growers. Last winter, we gave them a wish list of products we wanted, and they planted specifically for our needs."

The company's newest move is to harness the input and energy of the younger generation. "Our younger employees contribute new insight as far as packaging and new item development," explains Ornstein. "They see things some of us industry veterans don't."

Ornstein's son, Elijah Booth Ornstein, is one of those new idea generators. "The future is very bright, and we have big plans on the horizon," says Ornstein, chief operating officer at Eli & Ali. "Social media has become a signif-

icant tool, and we are developing ways to better utilize it."

**INNOVATING SUPPLY**

Unique developments in infrastructure and logistics give other companies a distinct advantage. Lucky's Real Tomatoes started working in Florida with small family farmers then migrated to New York. "The business grew and evolved in many ways over the decades, yet we stayed true to our foundation," says Alan Marcelli, president of Lucky's Real Tomatoes, headquartered in Brooklyn, NY. "I'm still in Florida working with our partner growers."

"Our philosophy has always been to give the customer flavorful, great tasting products, take great care of them, and always do the right thing," says Linda Marcelli, a principal at Lucky's Real Tomatoes. "This is fundamental to our success, and we anticipate a bright future by continuing to fulfill this commitment."

Lucky's accomplishments are built on a two-fold approach to product quality: production of great products and emphasis on logistics. "One of our advantages is our closed-loop system, transporting our tomatoes from Florida to our state-of-the-art packing house in North Carolina at the right temperature," explains Josh Wanless, vice-president of business development for Lucky's in Brooklyn. "This ensures not only extended shelf life but also flavor and freshness. We've been a farm-to-fork company





Joe Granata of RLB



Bruce Klein of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.



Ian Zimmerman of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.



Raphael Goldberg of Interruption Fair Trade Trade



Josh Auerbach of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.



(L-R) Paul and Randy Auerbach of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.



Evan and Paul Kazan of Target Interstate Systems



Omar Durate of Vision Import Group



Jeff Schilling of RLB

for more than 35 years.”

Lucky’s recognizes the value of a good model and is using it to expand product line at the request of its customers. “We are proud to be a licensed grower, packer and shipper of the famous Tasti-Lee Tomato,” says Lee. “We are also developing additional products — all based on superior flavor — including Mexican Hass avocados.”

Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc. in Secaucus, NJ, set new standards for its products with its new facility three and a half years ago. “Since we moved into our new facility, business has grown tremendously,” reports Bruce Klein, director of marketing. “We attribute our enormous growth to the facility itself since it meets the strictest standards for food safety and cold chain management.”

Though known famously for its garlic, Auerbach expanded product lines. “For many years our claim to fame was garlic, but we grew beyond just one product,” says Paul Auerbach, president. “We have major customers now who buy much more than just garlic from us. We are constantly growing our specialty business, and our numbers are way up for our snow pea, sugar snap, English peas and French beans.”

“The new facility allowed us to expand product offerings,” agrees Josh Auerbach, sales and procurement. “We strengthened and expanded traditional lines including garlic, shallots, and ginger while bringing on other items such as leeks, hand-peeled baby carrots, Asian tropicals and root specialties. We move large volumes of fresh Washington rhubarb during the season of April through September.”



(L-R) Josh Wanless, Tina Knott, Lucky Lee, Linda Marcelli and Alan Marcelli of Lucky’s Real Tomatoes

Expanded sourcing is an added dimension. “We’re importing containers of carrots from Israel, and we’re direct importers of Peruvian asparagus,” says Josh Auerbach. “We have a robust asparagus program from all producing regions as well as peeled, bulk, packaged and organic garlic from all producing regions.”

Auerbach’s evolution includes customer reach as well. “We’re better geared to handle perishables for a broader customer base,” says Paul Auerbach. “We sell retail, foodservice, manufacturers, wholesalers and terminal markets, but our biggest increase has been with foodservice because of the items we carry.”

“In our old facility, we were running at maximum output. We don’t have that limitation here,” says Ian Zimmerman, sales and procurement. “The new facility gives us the ability to streamline our operation. We bring more product through with proper refrigeration and outstanding food safety and quality control aspects.”

In October 2014, RBest Produce’s warehouse received PrimusGFS (Global Food Safety) certification. “To differentiate ourselves within the

North East, RBest relocated our warehouse facility to Port Washington NY,” says Hines. “Our new Long Island-based facility is state of the art, constructed with the latest technologies, spans approximately 70,000 sq. ft. and is built with the focus of being environmentally friendly.”

**PUSHING THE MARKETPLACE**

Marketing and branding are other areas where New York companies differentiate themselves. Eight-year-old Vision Import Group made significant progress during the past five years by branding product with its Mr. Squeeze Limes and Van Gogh mango. “We blazed the way with our branding and expanded from being a Northeast-based company to a national label,” says Cohen.

“We took what began previously and morphed into what we do now,” says Cohen. “Branding enabled us to differentiate ourselves from others marketing our same items. We make efforts to only allow the finest growers and packers to pack in our exclusive labels.”

Vision’s self-definition as a grower representative is key to its endeavors. “We abso-



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(L-R) Ben Fiedman and John Messina of Riviera



(L-R) Brandon Rankin, Abigail Woughter, Rafael Goldberg and Mike Iannacci of Interruption Fair Trade



(L-R) Rinat Ben-Dror, Ami Ben-Dror and Samantha Esposito of BDA Marketing and Produce and Dorot Farm



(L-R) Colin Sharpe, Michela Calabrese, Rob Behnke and Dennis Moleta of Interruption Fair Trade

lutely see our business as a growers' agent," explains Cohen. "This ties in our ability not only to understand the business but to understand different cultures, and thus communicate and deliver what is needed. Our marketing efforts furthered that communication with our customers and with theirs."

Interruption Fair Trade in Brooklyn, NY, evolved on two different fronts. "We uniquely developed both our supply side and our marketing side," reports Rafael Goldberg, chief executive. "From the supply side, we worked in development of product as well as social development of the communities we're sourcing in. Given where we were when we started the company, the number of products we handle vastly increased, our volume greatly expanded, and the number of rural workers affected by our business grew significantly. Our business has been growing about 100 percent every year."

The company spent the past five years creating and solidifying an innovative business model. "This model incorporates product nutritional quality and integrates it with better social and environmental outcomes," says Goldberg. "Once we had the model developed, we expanded it to other areas and scaled it exponentially. For example, our first blueberry deal (about seven years ago) was a six- to seven-week deal from Argentina. Now, we have year-round availability from all growing regions."

On the market education side, Interruption was one of the first companies over five years ago to bring the values of fair trade and social responsibility to consumers. "Over the years, we've seen how important this information is to the new class of consumers," says Goldberg.

"We watched as many of our customers are now celebrating the items we offer. Media outlets and other innovative companies like Blue Apron are also supporting our messages."

BDA Marketing and Produce in Melville, NY, built a unique niche handling particular produce items from Israel. The company is the No. 1 exporter of fresh carrots to North America from Israel, and it represents Israeli Dorot Farm in North America and Europe. "We focus on special varieties known for sweetness," says Ami Ben-Dror, owner and chief executive. "Our fresh supply is sweeter and higher quality than storage carrots."

Ben-Dror continues, "We are unique, because we built a business based on exporting fresh and sweet carrots from Israel. We developed a lot of marketing tools and excellent logistics to back up the business. It is challenging to bring this product from overseas, and we strive for excellence to always meet our customers' needs."

BDA started with a vision and one container to North America nine years ago. "We started with a niche market, built it little by little, and it's now become a big business," recounts Ben-Dror. "I am a representative for the grower. Being on this side of the business is interesting and every day is different. At the end of the day, it's about how you work to satisfy the customer and give them high quality production, on time and with consistency."

Over-the-top customer service is a specialty of Englewood, NJ-based Riviera Produce, which primarily distributes produce to foodservice clientele. "Our innovation is our ability to always go the extra mile for the customer," says Ben Friedman, president. "Our motto is to never

say 'no' to the customer. If it means sending them 2 pounds of something they forgot to order or sourcing from a farmer far away, we do it. This allows us to serve their needs as they evolve and change."

Riviera's customer-centric mission drives them to handle a unique and even odd product line. "We evolved to handle more interesting items," says Friedman. "These are items driven by the chefs such as lollipop kale. Sometimes it pushes us outside our comfort zone."

Friedman adds, "In this age of expansion, we are still a produce-only company. We are our customers' produce specialist. There are a lot of distributors out there, but none do exactly what we do."

Companies dedicated to supply-side innovation also significantly influenced the marketplace. Rockhedge Herb Farms in Pleasant Valley, NY, has grown to about 20 times the size from when John Alva, chief executive, took over the company. "We went from seven employees to almost 80 employees due primarily to our focus on and delivery of quality," says Alva.

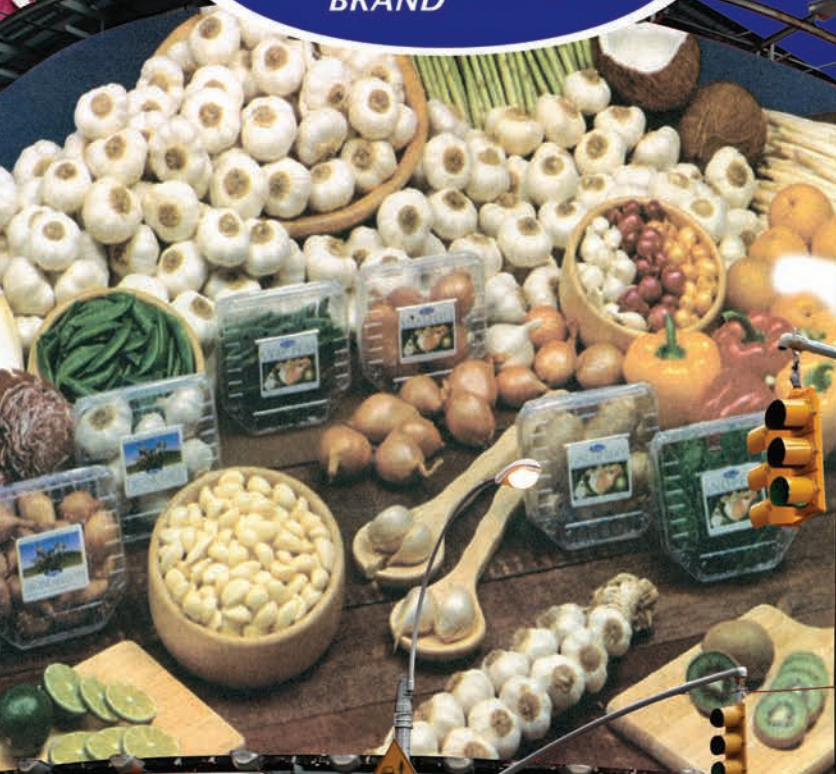
Rockhedge credits its control at farm-level for its success. "Our differentiation is because we are actually growers in nine different countries," explains Alva. "We're not just brokering product. We own some farms and rent out and run others. We can cut it and have it delivered to our customer within 24 to 36 hours from anywhere in the world. This translates not only into speed but quality."

Brooklyn's Gotham Greens quickly became a worldwide pioneer in the urban agriculture industry and one of New York's leading greenhouse growers. Founded in 2009 with the mission of growing premium quality, local and pesticide-free produce in cities, the company built its first greenhouse in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, NY, in 2011. In early 2014, it opened its second greenhouse on the rooftop of Whole Foods Market's flagship Gowanus, Brooklyn store, which became the first example of a commercial scale greenhouse integrated into a supermarket. It currently operates more than 35,000 square feet of greenhouse and grows more than 300 tons of fresh, salad greens and herbs annually for the New York City market.





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(L-R) Guy Montalbano, PJ Montalbano, Peter Montalbano Sr, Lenny Montalbano, Angelo Montalbano and Frank Montalbano of Peter's Fruit Company

Viraj Puri, co-founder and chief executive, explains, "We are seeking to change the way things are done in the greenhouse industry. Greenhouse technology is not new, but bringing it to an urban area in close proximity to the end customer and utilizing significantly more sustainable techniques is game changing. With our model, the consumer is often getting a product harvested the same day or the day before."

Gotham Greens posts exponential growth. "We've been growing year over year — with this year posting an almost 400 percent increase," says Puri. "We're continuing to expand and our third and fourth greenhouse farms will open this summer in Queens, NY, and Chicago, measuring 60,000 square feet, and 75,000 square feet respectively. The operation currently focuses on leafy greens and herbs; we will increase product offering and variety as new operations open."

The company promotes a variety of benefits about its production method to consumers. "Other benefits (in addition to freshness) include a reduction in trucking costs as well as less shrink and spoilage," explains Puri. "Food waste may very well be the next big food issue in the mainstream, and we're trying to address it now."

### A CHANGING RELATIONSHIP

As the produce industry evolved and innovated, so have relationships between distributors and customers. Joey Granata, director of produce sales for RLB, says, "We have many customers where we strengthened our partnership with them. But we also have customers where so many people are involved, it's hard to maintain any type of relationship. Our customers face a tough retail environment, and everyone is fighting for a piece of the same pie. Everybody's selling produce — from Target to CVS to the Dollar Store."

"The industry has changed, and many

buyers look at numbers more than product. However, it's better to have a dialogue than a deal," says Vision Import Group's Cohen.

"Some chefs are being driven to a price-only purchase system where they buy from multiple companies to save a dollar," reports Riviera's Friedman. "Yet, that creates chaos for them in the long run."

Distributors strongly encourage flexibility for best results. "More retailing is changing to a system-driven process," reports RLB's Mele. "This factor changed the dynamic, because these customers don't have as much flexibility. Customers with a more flexible relationship take advantage of a lot of opportunity. They can work more closely with us to capitalize on last minute deals or great offers."

"One of the greatest advantages Auerbach provides customers is giving them the ability to make decisions later in their buy process," says Zimmerman. "We fill a need for guys who can be flexible and want to keep inventory tight."

"Some customers pigeonhole themselves because of stringent requirements for appearance and portion size," says Vision's Cohen. "Produce is not made on a machine, so sometimes customers sell themselves short by not being more flexible."

Technology both positively and negatively affects the buying relationship. "Social media absolutely transformed our relationship," says Baldor's Muzyk. "Many customers want to place their order online or do their research without talking directly to us. If you want to talk to us, we still pick up the phone, but we had to respond to many customers who are technology-savvy."

"Some customers are still old school and want phone calls or faxes," offers Auerbach's Zimmerman. "But many others are technologically advanced and doing everything by EDI. Even texting has become a way to communicate in business. Technology has taken away some of the personal contact. For each

customer, you need to tailor your service to the way they need to be serviced."

However, produce will always require a personal touch. "Despite the impersonal side of technology and consolidated buying, more of our customer relationships are partnership-oriented," says Auerbach's Klein. "A lot of our customers call to ask us to find items for them, and sometimes we find something the customer is interested in they didn't even know about."

"Our wholesale operation is predominantly built on relationships," says Hines of RBest. "Our service representatives are equipped to offer the most up-to-date market information and deals to keep our retail customers competitive with a profitable edge. Our retail customers are our main focus. It is important to us that RBest services are a convenience for our retail customers in order to increase their profits."

"The development of our own food show was a turning point in our personal customer relations," reports Baldor's Muzyk. "It allows our customers to come and meet our shippers. It's rare these days for the grower to actually talk to a chef using their product. This has been a powerful move in nurturing our customer base."

"I really push my staff to make visits to customers," says Paul Auerbach. "Personally visiting accounts is the major way to foster relationships and business. You learn a lot about their business and it demonstrates you care about them."

Customers and distributors increasingly rely on trusted relationships to help them stay competitive. "It's been our responsibility to our customers to explore what tomato works best for them in any given month or season," explains Lucky's Lee. "When tomato prices get high, we reach out to customers to suggest options in tomato variety to help them keep the same quality but stay within their needed price points."

"We usually meet with customers a few weeks before their new menu comes out," says Riviera's Friedman. "We'll discuss what's going on it and help them cost it out. It's important to be sure we can get the product if it's on their menu."

"We place great emphasis on building trust with our customers to help guide them in terms of quality and new items," says Jeff Ornstein of Eli & Ali. "If you don't have trust, you're not worth anything. We always give the best product we can find, handle and pack, and are as fair and competitive as possible with pricing."

Strong relationships on the shipper side also facilitate business. "Our 30-year relationships



with our partner growers results in always having good quality products for our customers and helps ensure consistent supply in times of shortages," says Wanless of Lucky's.

Distributors take nurturing and mentoring customers seriously. "The more customers ask questions and tell us what their needs are, the better we can serve them," says Mele. "With a prospect, our guys go into the store and advise them what we're seeing in their marketplace. We'll help with their set up, talk about the demographics in their area and suggest product lines for that specific store. When they're successful, we are successful."

"Because retailers increasingly want something different than what their competition is selling, they come to us more," says RLB's Avillo. "The customer can spec out what they want, and we'll carry it for them. We're not trying to sell what we have, we're helping them get what they want."

"Everything we do is aimed at helping our customers manage their business," says RLB's Granata. "Some customers don't realize the benefit of this, but those who do constantly take advantage and see success from partnering with us."

Meeting to plan for future innovation is imperative. "We are always conversing with customers about current and future needs," says Rockhedge's Alva. "For example, we package in 150 different packages for our customers, adapting to the needs of different areas, ethnicities and demographics. We work with our customers to plan for these diverse needs in packaging and product."

"We meet with customers to help plan for the future every year," advises Ben-Dror of Dorot Farm and BDA Marketing. "We must plan long-term, because we actually plant the seeds based on our customers' needs. Sometimes we're working six or eight months ahead."

Often, mentoring transcends generational lines. "I love the longevity of our relationships," says Marcelli of Lucky's. "We're doing business now with the sons and daughters of people we worked with years ago, who have since become great American farmers themselves."

## EFFECTS OF CONSUMPTION

Changing consumer demographics and attitudes effecting the produce business fit the unique business of many New York area companies. "We're providing a field-grown, sun-ripened, flavorful tomato," says Lucky Lee, vice president of sales for Lucky's Real Tomatoes. "You don't get much healthier than providing tomatoes grown in rich soil and



(L-R) Henry Kreices, Donald Souther, George Uribe, Allan Napolitano, Kleber Suarez and Ronnie Cohen of Vision Import Group

ripened by natural sunlight. This fits perfectly with desires expressed by both Millennials and health conscious consumers."

"Mango consumption is growing and will continue to grow partly as a result of the health consciousness of consumers," states Vision Import's Cohen.

The response of retailers and restaurants to health-conscious consumer demands bodes well for produce.

"Produce is getting a bigger part of the plate every day," says Friedman. "Before it may have only been 10 to 15 percent of the plate, now it's 20 to 25 percent. People are more conscious about health and restaurants are responding."

"Many chains are now catering to a healthy lifestyle," says Klein. "This benefits Auerbach, because many of the items we carry have great health benefits including garlic, ginger, asparagus and horseradish."

"The increasing number of juice bars or companies that are putting a juice or smoothie bar in their establishment is evidence of how businesses are trying to capture some of the exploding health market share," says Muzyk.

Continuing ethnic diversity of the marketplace is another plus for produce. "Increased ethnic diversity helps increase demand for produce and expands our business," says Granata of RLB.

"The ethnic consumer drives creativity," offers Friedman. "Ethnic cuisine gets people out of their comfort zone. This gives us the opportunity to play with new flavor profiles."

"We see a lot of our prime products like limes, mangos and pineapples growing as our melting pot incorporates even more Latinos and Asians," reports Cohen. "We will be expanding our business in new ways and looking for new opportunities as our country's ethnic diversity grows."

Catering to multicultural consumers allows for increasing niche opportunity. "Some of the ethnic independents are really growing," says Cohen. "Many are even taking over out-of-business chain store locations."

"Different ethnic groups give us a variety

of demand," says Hines of RBest. "We expand with the needs of our customers. International sourcing allows us to maintain a consistent flow of most products 12 months a year. Our buyers have vast produce knowledge gained through many years of experience procuring product from all over the world. Along with our industry-stringent quality program, our goal is to consistently supply the right product at the right time of year to ensure premium quality fruits and vegetables."

"There are a lot of niche retailers in the New York area," says RLB's Avillo. "They are growing and that's good business for us. We garnered a nice market in kosher products as well as some ethnic items."

"The increasing and diverse ethnic population has a positive effect on our business," says Hernandez of Eli & Ali. "Ethnic consumers drive diversity and volume in produce items and also buy organic. We are seeing an increase in organic interest in the ethnic communities."

## A NEW AGE OF CONSUMERS

The newest consumers on the scene are set to dramatically impact the industry. "Millennials are affecting the produce industry in a major way," says Jeff Ornstein of Eli & Ali. "More than any generation before them, they are very health-conscious, more media-savvy, and better informed. They also seem to be more socially conscious, driving organic and social responsibility programs."

"Millennials are looking for health and freshness but also value," reports Elijah Booth Ornstein. "Price point is a big issue with this group. They want healthy, but they want inexpensive. Also, most Millennials can't afford to eat out every night, so they're cooking. We anticipate the growing popularity of educational media (such as the Food Network) among Millennials as they seek more information on cooking and eating well."

"There has been a drastic increase in fresh herb consumption over the past 10 years, because Millennials want fresher and healthier," says Alva of Rockhedge Herb Farms. "They



shop the perimeter of the supermarkets, not canned goods. The younger generations also want a fresher concept when eating out. They want to see their food and see that it's fresh."

Millennial focus on social responsibility and the environment syncs with produce companies pursuing that same goal. "Consumers increasingly care about the larger environmental and social impacts of our food system," says Gotham Greens' Puri. "Producing food locally and sustainably provides many societal and economic benefits including spending our dollars closer to home. Consumers, especially millennials, value these aspects and enjoy disrupting the status quo."

"The values held by the Millennial generation align perfectly with what we do," says Interrupcion's Goldberg. "They are interested in purpose, impact, and being able to participate and feel part of something larger than themselves. The Millennial set of values is the



(L-R) Carrissa Montalbano, Lauren Montalbano, Jake Hermanns, Gabe Sikora and Rose Sikora of Peter's Fruit

driving force behind many of the trends we see in the marketplace."

New retail and foodservice formats are developing to meet Millennial needs. "Countless Millennials shop online, opening the door for new retail formats," reports RLB's Granata. "For example, a new business called Max

Delivery in New York City is fulfilling grocery orders in a very short timeframe but only within a block or two. Of course in NYC, a block or two can still be thousands of people. All their delivery is by foot or bike. This is a revolutionary concept, but one that could really take off in the future."

"Companies offering a meal solution to the consumer, such as Blue Apron, are a huge part of the new Millennial marketing," says Baldor's Muzyk. "They send different components for a meal directly to the consumer. The business of home component kit meals is erupting. We supply the parent company for the kits so it's a growing business for us too."

"As a distributor, we are focusing more on the Millennial consumer," says Elijah Booth Ornstein. "I love working to meet the new needs of the Millennials both in communication as well as developing new packs and product presentations." **pb**

## Global Entry Point For New Items

Founded by the Dutch as a trading post, New York has a long and rich history in international trade. In the 21st Century, international trade in produce is as important as exporting fur was in the 17th Century. "You can't live without international sourcing now," says Jeff Shilling, vice president procurement at RLB Food Distributors in West Caldwell, NJ. "There is no beginning or end to any season. We're a global industry."

"International sourcing is essential to procuring product to meet market needs," concurs Rafael Goldberg, chief executive of Interrupcion Fair Trade in Brooklyn, NY. "Our platforms give us the ability to provide product with continuity to our customers."

"Many of the items we handle are not available domestically or not available at the volume or price requirements of some customers," reports Paul Auerbach, president at Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc. in Secaucus, NJ. "Almost the entire snow pea deal has gone off shore. The majority of the asparagus is imported into the U.S. and most melons being marketed in this area are now off-shore. The industry could not have grown to where it is now in volume, variety and affordability without international sourcing."

Increasing emphasis on internationally sourced product is due to a variety of factors including consumer demand and climate. "With increasing changes in global climate, the industry needs various sources to fulfill

windows for product supply," says Arq Hernandez, director of operations at Eli & Ali in Brooklyn, NY. "More businesses need supply from all over to continually meet customer needs."

"The changes in weather patterns made it increasingly more important to have a variety of sources from many different regions," concurs John Alva, chief executive, Rockhedge Herb Farms in Pleasant Valley, NY. "If it's rainy, snowy or cold here and it's not in Italy or Spain, then we get product from there. We need to supply our customers the quality they expect from wherever that quality is the best."

Josh Auerbach, sales and procurement at Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc., agrees, "One of the biggest changes in our business is the year-round availability of almost every item. Decades ago, 'out of season' meant unavailable. Now, we deal with 'local seasons' and 'changing seasons' instead of out of season."

For overseas producers looking to market a product, the process is no simple task. "First, make sure there are no limitations or restrictions on the product," advises Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for Vision Import Group LLC in River Edge, NJ. "Then, go to both a retailer and an importer, depending on the item. You must pick the right people fitting your needs and your product's needs. It's all about partnerships and choosing the right partner for success."

"Make sure the item can be imported into

the U.S. by checking various U.S. government regulations," offers Hernandez. "Then, ensure the product meets specs for similar products in the U.S. market. The next step is to analyze the cost of getting it in the market and check on the competition. Then, contact a distributor to ask an opinion about the product and get some market feedback."

"Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet to get your product in the market," cautions Michael Muzyk, president of Baldor Specialty Foods Inc. in Bronx, NY. "Perishable products present a whole series of challenges including looking to see if it's already in the market, how it competes with other products, the window for getting it in and many other considerations. You must do that research first and then look for partners in the market."

Identifying the right partner for the product is crucial. "Anyone wanting to get into the U.S. market must first identify the right place for the product in the market," advises Goldberg. "It's important to find the right partner with a passion for that particular item."

"We do some market testing for our suppliers," reports Muzyk. "For example, Driscoll's asked us to test market new packaging for blueberries. We put it out to our customers and came back with constructive feedback for them. It's powerful when you team up with the right distributor to get the right feedback." **pb**





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# In Loving Memory

## John J. McAleavey

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John McAleavey was a dear friend, loving husband to Joann, a devoted father to Susie and John Jr, a proud and doting grandfather to Meghan and Charlie and a dedicated and passionate colleague. Many have called John the iconic New York Apple Ambassador, and I would say he was the Henry Kissinger of our industry.

The industry respected John because of his character and his demeanor and I loved John because of his passion and his optimism for all that he did. He valued all that is good and he cherished his relationships, as we cherished ours with John.

As my good friend Tom Krulder remarked, "You can often count your good friends on one hand." I agree and I would say that John was on many hands throughout the business. He was on mine for sure.

— *Jim Allen*  
President, New York Apple Association

I would describe John McAleavey as a gentleman's gentleman. In my mind, John was one of the true godfathers of the produce industry in the Northeast. John's tireless work effort, professionalism, sacrifice, spirit and love of the EPC will leave a never ending legacy that we have now been charged to maintain and bring to the next level.

The entire board of directors and I lost a comrade and a friend. We will miss him dearly, will always be inspired by him and will without any doubt be better people for knowing him!

He was absolutely one of a kind and truly loved by all of us! For many of us he helped us build our careers, provided us with an example of the utmost conduct, and was one of our best friends in the industry.

Above all else, he was an example to admire of a true family man. His love of his family, and their love of him, is something that cannot be explained by words. The touching way he cared for, spoke of, and endeared his family was incomparable. It truly touched us all! And once again, even after his passing, John McAleavey has inspired me to be better than I am. That's who John McAleavey was — an inspiration!

— *Vic Savanello*  
President, Eastern Produce Council  
Director, Produce & Floral  
Allegiance Retail Services



John was a very special guy. If you didn't know him, he was all business, sharp, tough and relentless in his beliefs. He was in charge. I was one of the privileged that was able to know him well.

He had such a kind heart, very giving but also very modest. He was a role model for how much love someone could give to family. It was always about his family. He was a friend for almost twenty years and a mentor for the last eight years. He taught me that family was most important and if all you do is for them, then you will always be successful.

I will miss him, but he will stay with me always in every decision I make.

— *Paul Kneeland*  
Vice President Fresh, Fresh-Formats



John McAleavey was a wonderful man, and I shall miss him. He loved his family, he loved his friends, and he loved his industry — and we all loved him.

I knew John for over 25 years through the Eastern Produce Council. They say the produce industry is a very personal industry that is built upon relationships. John epitomized all that, and more.

He was the consummate gentleman, a great wit, and always looked at life with boundless optimism. Even at an age when most people would be long retired, John

would be hard at work. If I ever needed information about a company or a person, John was the first person I would call. Not only did he know the person, but also the spouse, what school they graduated from, the name of their first born, favorite sports team, etc., etc. John served as an example for us all.

— *Alfred W. Murray*  
Assistant New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture,  
Director of the Division of Marketing  
and Development  
New Jersey Department of Agriculture



# As New York's Distributors Expand Reach, Transportation Becomes Crucial

PRODUCT INTEGRITY PRESENTS FUTURE CHALLENGES AS WELL AS OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATIVE TRANSPORTATION COMPANIES. **By Jodean Robbins**



**T**RANSPORTATION IS AN EVER MORE CRITICAL part of a successful produce deal and yet increasingly challenging for many produce distributors. "Overcoming obstacles in transportation can be some of the most challenging in the business right now," reports Ben Friedman, president and owner of Riviera Produce in Englewood, NJ.

As New York area companies grow, transportation plays an integral role. "We expanded our geographic reach into the Midwest, Southeast and Canada in addition to our traditional base in the New York Metro area, upstate New York and New England," says Paul Auerbach, president of Maurice A. Auerbach in Secaucus, NJ. "Transportation is an increasingly

important part of the business. Being able to distribute produce in a large geographic area with shorter lead times is key to our growth."

## PRO'S AND CON'S

Transportation in the New York Metro area exhibits definite weaknesses. Ian Zimmerman, director of operations with Auerbach says, "In-bound freight is a continuing challenge. Prices are high, trucks are difficult to get and hours of service rules are going to continue to put pressure on trucking."

One certain challenge is the need for multiple stops when picking up from growers. "Many truckers don't want to pick up at five or six different



stops so this decreases the pool of available drivers and trucks,” explains Friedman.

“The need for multiple pick-ups in produce can be challenging,” agrees Paul Kazan, president of Target Interstate Systems in Bronx, NY. “It’s not uncommon for us to start in Oxnard and end up in Salinas, about a 400-mile difference.”

Finding a sufficient number of qualified team drivers also haunts the industry. “Team drivers are in demand,” says Lance Dichter, president of LD Logistics LLC in Bronx, NY. “There



(L-R) Hiovinny Ferman, Enzo Correnti, Charles Choi, Dave Cohen, Lance Dichter, Daniel Ward and Bianca Maldonado of LD Logistics

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are trucks out there, but teams are premium. More people are requesting teams, because people want their product faster.”

The New York Metro area presents unique challenges due to the nature of its infrastructure. “In the New York area, we always have one weakness: there are truckers who don’t want to come into the city,” says Dichter. “Also we don’t produce much here, so from a back-haul standpoint, there isn’t a lot coming out.”

“The traffic congestion and nightmare of getting across the George Washington Bridge is always an issue,” concurs Kazan. “A large contingent of trucking companies will not cross that bridge and come here — it’s just a standing policy. Also, the lack of good facilities for drivers while they unload at Hunts Point is another detraction.”

However, New York has its strengths. “New York is a good lane and there are good receivers here,” offers Dichter. “Some people who don’t know our city may be hesitant but it is a really good place to bring a load.”

“New York can sell anything at anytime at any price point,” says Kazan. “This is a huge advantage. If you’re in the trucking business, you have to pay attention to Hunts Point, because sooner or later you’re going to need Hunts Point. They always have loads.”

### DIFFERENT MODES

Each transportation mode serves its own niche depending on the need and specific commodity. Kazan explains, “Use of modes is not too different from where it has traditionally been. You have most of the rail boxcar used by produce with a longer shelf life. Trucks end up taking higher priced produce. Most people have trouble putting a \$50 box of romaine lettuce on a train. Trucks provide greater hands-on attention.”

“Rail is a stable option for ‘hardware’ items — products with longer shelf life including apples, pears, potatoes and even sometimes peaches and plums,” says Dichter. “However, rail is limited, since you certainly won’t trans-





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port strawberries or other more sensitive items on it.”

Trucks are the go-to option for speed. “Trucks are still the optimum for fast delivery,” says Kazan. “A truck with a team can be in New York in three to four days. Rail or piggyback won’t get here any faster than six to seven days.”

Rail also is limited physically. “Rail works for those at Hunts Point who have rail sidings and bring in bulk items,” says Zimmerman. “But

a lot of what we do here are mixed loads, so rail is not efficient for us.”

Piggybacks (containers moving from rail to truck) are being used in some situations to allow for delivery beyond rail-service areas. “Use of piggybacks is increasing,” reports Kazan. “However, the problem with piggybacks is they generally make only one pick up and one delivery. They might make one or two other stops but they’re not really a multiple stop solution.”

**“Owning and operating our own logistics is crucial. Our average over-the-road drivers have been with us for years.”**

— Alan Marcelli, Lucky’s Real Tomatoes

**INDUSTRY INNOVATION**

Despite the many challenges, industry companies are adapting and evolving to perform this vital role. “We’ve evolved one customer at a time,” says Dichter. “We added systems and checkpoints to make us more effective for customers. The focus of what we do is produce. It’s a matter now of expanding our customer base and our truck fleet.”

Controlling transportation options gives some growers, such as Lucky’s Real Tomatoes, a definite advantage. “Owning and operating our own logistics is crucial,” reports Alan Marcelli, president of Lucky’s Real Tomatoes in Gulfport, FL. “Our average over-the-road drivers have been with us for years.”

Josh Wanless, vice president of business development for Lucky’s in Brooklyn, explains, “Our logistics division in our North Carolina facility allows us to use the relay system in transporting our tomatoes from Florida to North Carolina, then switching drivers to bring the load directly up to our Brooklyn distribution center. This benefits the freshness and quality of the product.”

Product tracking presents future challenges as well as opportunity for innovative transportation companies. “We’re diligently working on tracing and tracking,” says Kazan. “Most transportation in produce is done by owner/operators, so knowing the location of a truck has always been a challenge. Until a few years ago, we could only rely on the driver calling in. GPS made tracking easier, but only if the trucking company owns the equipment, which is not very common in produce transportation.”

“We’re trying to get a larger percentage of the trucks on the road satellite-tracked,” reports Dichter. “It would be less labor intensive than calling every truck every day. Once we get the truck’s location, we can have our system automatically send an email to the customer, so they know if the truck is running on schedule

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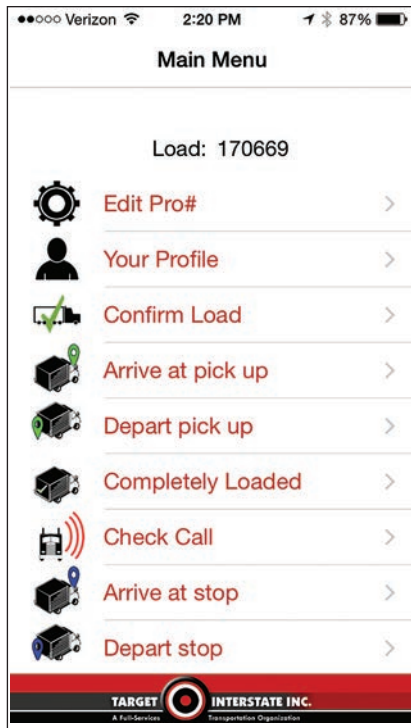
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“Smartphones now give us the technology to implement tracking with owner/operators and offer our customers real-time visibility.”

— Paul Kazan, Target Interstate Systems

or ahead or behind.”

Recent technological advances promise an effective solution. “Smartphones now give us the technology to implement tracking with owner/operators and offer our customers real-time visibility,” says Kazan. “We are implementing an App that with the driver’s permission will allow us to track the truck.”

This new app allows drivers and customers to easily follow loads. “Drivers can see what loads we have and with the press of one key report if they left the shipper or arrived at the destination,” explains Kazan. “They can take a picture and send it to us. My customers get email updates, and they can link to a map showing the truck’s location.”

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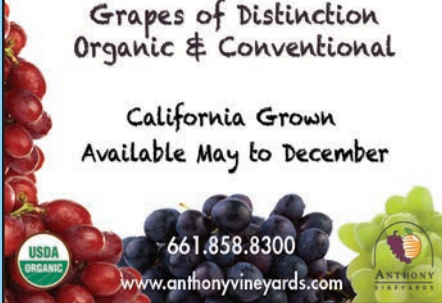
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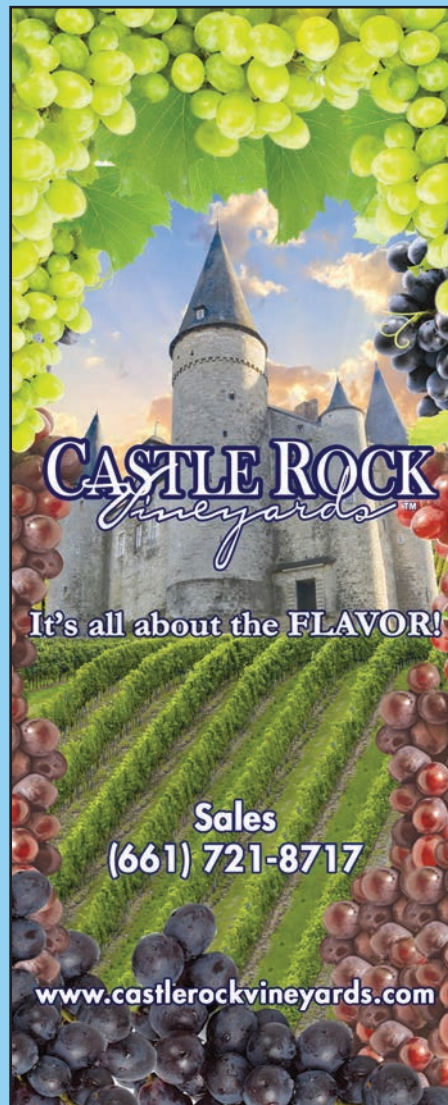
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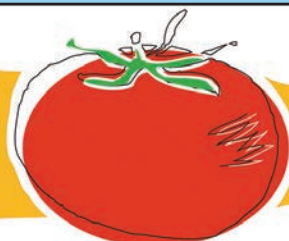


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# La Palapa 'Flare'

THE MEXICAN-THEMED CUISINE BRINGS SPICE TO EVERY DISH. **By Mindy Hermann, RD**



*Sopa de Aguacate is chilled avocado and tomatillo soup*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NOAH FECKS

## La Palapa Cocina Mexicana

77 St. Mark's Place, New York, NY  
(212) 777-2537  
lapalapa.com

LUNCH: Mon. – Fri., 12 p.m. - 5 p.m.  
DINNER: Daily 5 p.m. – 12 a.m.  
BRUNCH: Sat. – Sun. & Holidays,  
11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

**T**HE COLORFUL DÉCOR OF LA PALAPA COCINA MEXICANA, on the corner of St. Mark's Place and First Avenue, matches the colorful history of its building, once the home of British poet W.H. Auden and the location of Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky's printing press.

Owner and chef Barbara Sibley opened La Palapa in 2000 as a tribute to the types of authentic and traditional dishes she enjoyed during her childhood in Mexico City. Sibley's menu is inspired by numerous influences: her collection of ancient Mexican recipes, her love of traditional ingredients, and the Mexican cookbook author Diana Kennedy.

The restaurant's menu spans the regions of Mexico and includes Mexico City-style tacos and quesadillas, Mole Negro de Oaxaca, with its chili peppers, nuts, spices and chocolate; Chuleta Pibil from Yucatan; and seafood from

the Pacific and Gulf Coasts. Diners seeking vegetarian meals can choose from meatless interpretations of such familiar dishes as Chile Relleno, a batter-fried roasted, stuffed Poblano chili pepper; potato taquitos; and mushroom enchiladas.

Dishes on the menu abound with fresh vegetables and fruits. "Traditional Mexican cuisine is often centered around vegetables," says Sibley. "Most families traditionally had their own corn field or 'milpa,' on which they grew vegetables that might include corn, beans, squash and wild greens."

### DOMESTIC INGREDIENTS CREATE MEXICAN FLAVORS

When asked to name her favorite vegetable or fruit to work with, Sibley quickly named chili peppers, and lots of them! Sibley explains, "I don't just use them for heat. Chiles have a range of flavors depending on degree of ripe-





*Taquitos de Papa is crisped tortillas stuffed with potatoes and poblanos, chile de arbol salsa*

ness. When green, they add a fresh herbal note. Ripe or dried chiles contribute sweetness and warmth." Fresh jalapeño, poblano, serrano, and habanero, plus chilaca peppers (when available) are always on hand at La Palapa. Dry chili peppers include ancho, mulato, arbol, cascabel, pequin, guajillo, and pasilla, plus the smoked, dried pasilla de Oaxaca, chipotle, meco, and morita chiles. The black mole sauce served atop duck breast has 26 different ingredients, many of them chili peppers.

The La Palapa menu includes other traditional produce items. The husk cherry tomato, called "tomatillo de milpa" in Mexico, is related to the tomatillo. The more common pomegranates, mangos and guavas appear in both food and drink. Huitlacoche is a natural fungus that grows on corn; Sibley notes that it is important to Mexican cuisine but hard to find fresh. Among the Mexican vegetables on the menu are lita squash (calabasitas in Mexico), a variety that is slightly more bitter than zucchini and has a very specific taste. Going beyond cilantro, La Palapa recipes call for avocado leaf, epazote, papalo, hoja santa, and other Mexican herbs.

"I have three suppliers," says Sibley. "I use Baldor Specialty Foods for many items, as well as two independent buyers who deal with specific tropical and Mexican importers."

### CELEBRATING THE SEASONS

In the summer months, dishes on the menu incorporate the types of wild greens eaten in Mexico, including purslane, lambs quarters, and amaranth. La Palapa celebrates the season's bounty with a summer Festival del Quelite. In Mexico, quelites (or an edible green that can



*Ensalada de Nopales is grilled cactus and radish salad with mixed greens*

refer to any tender green leaf or shoot, vegetable, tree shoot, or even flower) are harvested in the wild along the edges of the cornfields. Sibley purchases her quelites from area farmers markets, where she asks helpers from Mexico which farmers carry the most tender products.

On the 2015 festival menu are Quintonil Quesadillas with lamb quarters and epazote, crepes stuffed with squash blossoms, and Esmeralda, a tequila cocktail infused with wild spearmint. Sibley notes that while these spring/summer ingredients are available from U.S. growers and area farmers markets in season, she imports them, as well as epazote, tomatillos and guavas, during the winter months.

The La Palapa menu changes with the seasons for both the U.S. and Mexico. "I am always looking at what is in season here, as well as what is in season in Mexico. I use these seasonal inspirations to create new menu items and special menus that reflect the fiestas of Mexico. For example: Dia de Los Muertos in late

October/early November; Dia de Guadalupe in December; Reyes Magos in January; Cinco de Mayo in May, and Quelite in late spring and early summer."

### SUPPLY LIMITATIONS AFFECT THE MENU

Sibley's choice of dishes for the La Palapa menu sometimes is limited by availability of traditional fruits and vegetables in the U.S. "Certain fruits and vegetables are not allowed to be imported, such as 'romeritos,' a delicious succulent served in early spring," notes Sibley. "I also can't bring in a type of delicate, thin-skinned avocado (zapote negro), which is a type of persimmon with dark flesh, and mamey. They have very special tastes that are hard to replicate."

Because her mission is to evoke Mexico in her cuisine, Sibley chooses fruits and vegetables that are very similar to those in her collection of recipes. She would rather omit recipes she cannot duplicate than use substitutes to create a dish that doesn't match its Mexican counterpart.

### EXTENDING A WELCOME TO VEGETARIANS AND VEGANS

Vegetarians and vegans, as well as those avoiding gluten, can feel at home at La Palapa, where the regular menu includes several vegetarian and vegan appetizers and at least four vegetarian or vegan entrées. Sibley explains that "many of our dishes are naturally vegan and gluten-free in their traditional forms. Wheat, cows, sheep or goats were introduced into Mexico by the Europeans, so the most ancient recipes did not include ingredients with gluten or dairy." La Palapa's vegan plate consists of guacamole made with the corn fungus (huitlacoche), guacamole, pico de gallo, sautéed swiss chard, grilled nopal cactus, and pinto beans. The most popular vegetable dish is the Chile Relleno, a vegetarian but not vegan entrée.

### DRINK UP!

"Our love of vegetables and fruits extends to our drink menu," says Sibley. "We press our own fruit purees to flavor margaritas, and I infuse wine or tea with verbena, avocado leaf, or chamomile." The restaurant is known for its sangrita, a traditional chaser for tequila made from tomato, pomegranate, citrus, and chili. La Palapa also serves a green sangrita that gets its green color from mint, cilantro, and jalapeño. With dozens of tequilas and mezcals, there's plenty to chase.

pb



# Tertulia Evokes The Spirit Of Spain

THE RESTAURANT'S ATMOSPHERE AND FOOD TRANSCENDS DINERS TO A SPANISH CULINARY INDULGENCE. **By Mindy Hermann, RD**



Radish Salad

PHOTO COURTESY OF COLIN CLARK

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## Tertulia

359 6th Avenue, New York  
(646) 559-9909  
tertulianyc.com

LUNCH: Mon.-Fri., 11:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

DINNER: Sun.-Thurs., 5:30 p.m. - 11 p.m.

Fri.-Sat., 5:30 p.m. - Midnight

BRUNCH: Sat.-Sun., 11:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

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**A**S A YOUNG MAN, CHEF SEAMUS MULLEN, owner of Tertulia, ventured far from his home in rural Vermont to the Spanish region of Asturias in northwest Spain, where he was introduced to local food and the local conviviality of dining, drinking, and chatting with friends in sidrerías (or Spanish cider houses). The Spanish describe such gatherings of friends as tertulias, after the literary salons that were held in private homes and later in cafés and clubs between the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Spain. Mullen was inspired.

After his return to the U.S. from his culinary journey in Spain, Chef Mullen held fond memories of his Spanish dining experiences.

He recalled the simple cuisine that allowed the region's fresh, high quality ingredients to shine, as well as the warm settings in which the food was served. In honor of the experience, he named his first solo restaurant Tertulia and created a space and menu inspired by his experience in Asturias. Mullen's Tertulia sits in a warm, brick-walled setting in the West Village. It welcomes diners with a long bar, both small and communal tables, and a large open kitchen and wood-fired oven at the back of the restaurant.

All dishes on the Tertulia menu bear Spanish names, followed by descriptions in English. Lunch and dinner menus begin with a dozen or so tapas (appetizer-size small dishes), followed by dishes to share, including the restaurant's



signature paella, and, on the lunch menu, sandwiches. Clearly the dishes are Spanish, but interpreted in Mullen's distinct way.

"I plan my menu and cook as though I was in Spain with access to Spanish ingredients," explains Mullen. "My traditional Spanish dishes include ingredients available in Spain. But as a chef-driven restaurant, Tertulia features a menu reflecting my vision and interpretation of Spanish cuisine using flavors and ingredients that are available here. Sometimes the entire dish will be Spanish; other times I'll use other ingredients, and then incorporate aspects of Spanish cuisine in the dish and garnish."

### VEGETABLES CO-STAR ON THE MENU

"At first glance, our menu appears to be protein-heavy, it actually is very vegetable-centric," says Mullen. "We serve a small protein portion accompanied by any of a number of vegetables. We use our wood-fired grill to prepare vegetables such as tomatoes and peppers in a way that is typically Spanish."

Flavor is king at Tertulia. Mullen and his team use various cooking methods to showcase the natural flavors of his ingredients.

Among the most enduring and popular vegetable-containing tapas on Tertulia's lunch and dinner menus are: Pan con Tomate, literally toasted bread rubbed with tomato; Tosta Matrimonio, anchovies, slow-roasted tomato, sheep's milk cheese, aged balsamic, and a flax and quinoa crisp; Nuestras Patatas, crispy potatoes; Pimentón de la Vera and garlic aioli, a traditional Catalan garlic and oil sauce that is served with vegetables or grilled meats; and Coles de Bruselas, made with crispy fried Brussels sprouts, mojo picón (spicy pepper sauce), pork belly, and sheep's milk yogurt.

On the spring menu, media raciones (good for splitting with two to three people) to share at dinner pair vegetables and protein in such dishes as: Nuestra Tortilla Caliente, a Spanish omelet with seasonal vegetables; grilled broccoli with a changing combination of bacon, egg, and Spanish cheese; and rice with seafood, ham or sausage, and either avocado or fennel, wild mushrooms and celery. The fall menu might include an autumn salad with red and Tuscan kale and roasted squash tossed in brown butter vinaigrette and garnished with hazelnuts and Leonora cheese.

For vegetarians, Tertulia typically includes several meatless salads and dishes in its daily specials, along with menu items that can be adapted to be meatless. Mullen also will custom create an all-vegetarian plate from vegetables and beans being used in other dishes.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTINE HAN

### SPANISH CUISINE DEDICATED TO LOCAL AND SEASONAL

Chef Mullen's culinary inspiration and his sourcing flow with the seasons. "I choose vegetables based on what's here and seasonal," says Mullen. "I change the dishes on my regular menu as vegetables come in and out of supply and season, and my daily specials reflect what's available right now."

"This year, we adapted our dishes and menu as soon as spring produce became available," notes Mullen. "We source seasonal items from the regions where they're growing until local crops come in. For example, this spring's April dishes included sugar snap peas from California and ramps and fiddleheads from North Carolina. But in July, nearly all of our vegetables (maybe up to 80 percent) came from the states closest to here — New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania."

"Depending on the season, we purchase a high percentage of our vegetables from the Union Square farmers market," notes Mullen. "Between April and October, I estimate about 60 percent of the vegetables on the menu come from that greenmarket."

Tertulia works closely with up to 10 distributors to pick the items that it can't get locally and relies heavily on those distributors at times when local produce is not available. A few menu items necessitate off-season sourcing. For example, the classic Pan con Tomate stays on the menu year-round and is made with high-quality tomatoes from wherever they're available.

Tertulia extends the vegetable season

with house-made pickles. "We create a lot of fermented foods, including pickled vegetables," says Mullen. "At any time, we have large jars of pickled carrots, beets, cabbage, beans, peppers and other vegetables." Tertulia's menu incorporates pickled vegetables as both garnishes and side dishes.

Fruit is less prominent than vegetables on the Tertulia menu. Mullen places fresh fruit and dishes with fruit on the menu only when it's in season locally. Menu items might incorporate fresh berries, stone fruit, or melon during the summer months. "We usually don't have fresh fruit dishes in the winter, because items such as berries have to travel from such a far distance and they are not as flavorful as summer fruit," says Mullen.

In the summer and fall, Tertulia grows some of its own herbs in planters that border the restaurant's sidewalk seating area. Staff members have to keep an eye on the planters to prevent passersby from throwing trash or cigarette butts into them. The staff also brings the planters into the restaurant at night to prevent them from being vandalized or stolen.

### LIVING AND COOKING WITH A HEALTH-DRIVEN PHILOSOPHY

In recent years, Mullen developed a reputation as a leading culinary authority for health and wellness. A series of illnesses and personal health setbacks motivated him to examine and change his lifestyle — including his diet. Mullen penned his first cookbook, *Hero Food: How Cooking with Delicious Things Can Make Us Feel Better*, to showcase 18 key ingredients that helped him return to health. Not surprisingly, the greens, berries, peas, parsley, carrots, corn, stone fruit, squash, and mushrooms named in the book also cycle through the Tertulia menu.

"I believe in food as a foundation for health," explains Mullen. "Some chefs are driven by sustainability, some by ecology, and some by the environment. My personal platform is health, and how to develop a relationship with food and health rather than making food and eating an obsession or a fetish."

Each year, *Edible Communities*, a family of local food magazines that includes *Edible Manhattan*, asks readers to acknowledge and recognize the dedication and work of local "food heroes," including restaurants. Tertulia received a nomination in 2015 for an Edible Manhattan "Local Hero Award."

Mullen doesn't wear his beliefs on his sleeve. "Although I advocate for health and I support local farms and farmers, I don't believe in loading my menus with health messages or farm names. My food speaks for itself." **pb**



# Mrs. Green's Shifts Focus To Local Produce

GOING BEYOND ITS NICHE, THE INDEPENDENT RETAILER STRIVES TO PROVIDE CUSTOMERS WITH WHOLESOME PRODUCTS ACROSS THE BOARD. **By Mark Hamstra**



**M**RS. GREEN'S NATURAL MARKET touts its 100 percent organic produce offering, but the Irvington, NY-based chain is adjusting its strategy to emphasize local sourcing as a key attribute that distinguishes its fresh fruits and vegetables.

"We are going to continue to focus on organic, but we are going to add in a layer of local," says Pat Brown, chief executive of Irvington, NY-based Natural Market Food Group, during a tour of the recently remodeled Mrs. Green's location in Tarrytown, NY.

Natural Market Food Group is the parent company of the retailer, and operates about 15 Mrs. Green's stores — mostly small, neighborhood markets with a strong emphasis on natural and organic products — in the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut area; plus an additional store in Chicago, as well as Calgary, Alberta, Canada. More locations are planned for New York City in Manhattan's West Village and a store outside Chicago in Winnetka, IL.

The evolving strategy around local sourcing calls for working with a network of small

farmers in the areas where the company operates. In the Northeast, Mrs. Green's will partner with Angello's Distributing in Germantown, NY, to deliver produce from local growers to stores in the Northeast.

Angello's "really acts as a consolidator, which is what these small growers need," says Brown. "They can all deliver product to one place, which is the best solution."

Jim Brinkley, produce category manager at Natural Market Food Group, says he gets out to visit these local growers every week to learn about their products and the challenges they face.

"The great thing is most of our customers shop the local farmers markets, so a lot of our customers already have relationships with those growers," says Brinkley. "To be able to get those products in our stores is a win for everybody."

Brinkley says working with local growers also gives these producers an opportunity to test new products and get feedback on their retail performance.

"If they want to test a new product, we'll take it, try it, and see how it goes," he says.

"We are small and nimble, so we are able to get it out there quickly and give them the feedback they are looking for."

Some growers also eventually might be able to grow products specifically for Mrs. Green's, says Brown.

"One of the great things about Jim [Brinkley] having these relationships with the farmers is that they will begin to grow the things we want them to grow," he says. "For example, let's say if they are growing four different kinds of leaf lettuce, and Jim tells them there's this fifth kind you could grow, then they can start growing that if we agree to take it. That way they are doing something nobody else is doing, and we are selling something nobody else is selling."

## LOCAL PRODUCE IS MAJORITY

Brinkley says he expects 70 to 80 percent of the produce offered at Mrs. Green's at the peak of the season this summer will be locally grown. Some exceptions will include apples early in the season and such items as citrus and tropical fruits.

Mrs. Green's works with Albert's Organics — a subsidiary of Providence, RI-based United



Natural Foods Inc. — and RLB Food Distributors, West Caldwell, NJ, to procure product that it does not get from the locally based Angello's Distributing in Germantown, NY.

The company expects that most of the local growers it will work with on its new local initiative will be certified organic. Of the two dozen or so local growers already supplying the company's stores in the Northeast, all are certified organic, says Brinkley.

Most of the growers it partners with that are not organic — such as some fruit orchards — adhere to sustainable practices in line with organic growers, if not even more stringent, says Brown.

"If the local customers know that farmer, and they know what the farmer is doing, it doesn't have to be certified organic," he says.

The company also anticipates local growers will visit Mrs. Green's stores to help promote their products.

"People are interested in local foods, but they also want to know who's growing it," says Brown.

## REVAMPED LAYOUT

The Tarrytown Mrs. Green's was recently remodeled with a completely revamped layout for the produce department.

While the department previously had angled tables and large signs hanging from the ceiling, the new look emphasizes lower tables, with smaller signs that allow customers to see the whole produce department spread out before them like an open field as soon as they enter the store.

The flat tables allow Mrs. Green's to stack product deep and create striking displays that appear to carry more products, Brinkley explains.

"We want these flat tables, with product built up, to look massive," he says of the new layout, which is being incorporated as much as possible in each of the company's locations. "We also took down the hanging signs, so now when you walk in, you can actually see a produce department, rather than just the one table that's in front of you."

Each of these low, flat, wooden tables carries a range of produce items. One carries mostly apples, for example, while another carries varieties of squash. Another with several tomato varieties also includes artichokes and asparagus spears.

The tables were designed with enough space around them so customers can easily walk around the entire table and peruse the displays, rather than being arranged in rows.

The section also includes an extensive



selection of fresh-cut and value-added produce items, all prepared on premises. Among them are bins of loose organic broccoli and cauliflower florets, at \$4.99 per pound. Other offerings include clamshells of sliced squash, five-packs of shucked corn on the cob, julienned mixed bell peppers, and clamshells of mixed berries.

The cooler holding the fresh-cut offerings also includes a range of name-brand packaged salads and some salads made by the company's contract commissary for Mrs. Green's deli, which are cross-merchandised in the produce department.

Overall, just under 20 percent of the 12,000-square-foot store's floor space is dedicated to produce. The offering includes about 250 to 300 SKUs of fresh produce and another 150 or more SKUs of packaged produce.

Produce items account for about 22 percent to 23 percent of the sales volume at the chain, an increase from about 20 percent just a few months ago.

"We're creating a market where a significant part of sales are in fresh produce," says Brown.

## PRODUCE IN THE JUICE BAR

At the front of the store, facing out to the produce department, is a juice bar that utilizes the store's produce, as well as a coffee bar.

"With the juice bar and the deli, we don't

have a lot of shrink, because most everything we cull off goes to one or the other," explains Brinkley.

Adjacent to the produce department, near the prepared-foods area, is a dedicated sampling station. On a recent visit by *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, the store was sampling organic watermelon chunks, which were cut from the organic whole watermelons available in front of the store for \$9.99.

"Sampling will be key, and having the right associates out here who are knowledgeable," says Brinkley.

Other items available for tasting were a rhubarb pie made by a local bakery and a strawberry and feta salad. A printed recipe for the salad, made entirely from ingredients available in the store, was also available at the sampling station.

"People are looking for a great fresh product that's easy to put together," says Brown.

He describes the sampling station as akin to an information kiosk — an area where customers can ask questions and learn about what products are in season, and about products that fit their dietary needs. The chain has several nutritionists on staff for that purpose as well.

The Tarrytown store also includes a lower-level floor dubbed the "Natural Living" section where it merchandises an extensive selection of organic and natural vitamins and supplements, along with frozen items, pet food and paper products.

The downstairs area includes a small display of produce to encourage customers to shop the upstairs fresh departments as well. On the occasion of *PRODUCE BUSINESS'* visit, the company was offering two, 1-pound clamshells of Driscoll's organic strawberries for \$6.

Brown says the goal moving forward will be for Mrs. Green's to truly become a one-stop shop for all local food products that are responsibly produced, from sustainable seafood to grass-fed beef to local, sustainably grown commodities. Even the bakeries and delis will feature product from local artisans.

"We believe the small, neighborhood market is not a niche that's been filled in areas where we operate," he says. **pb**

## Mrs. Green's

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# Gastronomie 491: A Mediterranean Oasis In Manhattan

NICOLE AHRONEE GIVES US A TOUR OF HER RETAIL AND CAFÉ SPACE. **By Mark Hamstra**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GASTRONOMIE 491



**N**ICOLE AHRONEE IS PASSIONATE about her produce. Spending her childhood in Italy and France gave the owner of Gastronomie 491, located on Manhattan's Upper West Side, an appreciation for high-quality fruits and vegetables. Now she's sharing her passion with the world through her hybrid retail-restaurant outlet.

"The quality is definitely important," says Ahronée of the fruit and vegetable offerings at Gastronomie 491, which blends a café with elements of a high-end delicatessen and neighborhood grocery store. "I grew up in Europe, so I am very fruit-oriented. I love fruits and vegetables. I love smelling them, touching them and squeezing them."

Gastronomie 491 maintains a limited retail display of a couple dozen fresh produce items, but features a bounty of freshly prepared vegetable dishes in the refrigerated cases

that greet customers near the entrance to the 2,200-square-foot shop.

"This isn't a place where people buy their groceries for the week," says Ahronée.

"I'd rather have my customer come in three times a day. This is the European way of shopping — you buy what you want to eat that day."

Gastronomie 491's prepared-foods cases include an array of artfully displayed dishes, which are predominantly produce-based. The influence of Ahronée's Mediterranean upbringing is evident.

On a recent visit by *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, prepared vegetable dishes on display included:

- Chickpea eggplant tagine with garlic, onions, tomatoes and parsley
- Ratatouille with peppers, eggplant, onion, tomato and garlic
- Kale salad with fennel, cranberries and Italian pine nuts
- Greek salad with cucumbers, tomato and feta

- An assortment of grilled, roasted, sautéed and steamed vegetables, including broccolini, haricot vert, asparagus, red beets, cauliflower, and multiple varieties of potatoes.

"People like vegetables here," says Ahronée. "That's the way I grew up, in the Mediterranean region, where a meal can be a tomato. I am very happy eating a tomato with a little olive oil and a little salt. I'd rather have that than go to a restaurant and eat a big meal covered in sauce."

In fact, she tells her chef — who is Italian — not to add sauces to any of the dishes, "except for the meatballs," she says.

"It's like home-cooking," says Ahronée. "We do what you would do with your vegetables when eating at home, and it's fresh as well."

Ahronée is seeking to serve the on-the-go consumers in the neighborhood who have a taste for quality food, and perhaps need a little help preparing dinner, or need a quick bite for



lunch or after yoga class. The neighborhood is also home to several schools, and the store draws strong after-school traffic from parents and their children.

Gastronomie 491 also gained a reputation for high-quality food that made it a destination for customers from outside the neighborhood, says Ahronee.

### POPULAR VEGETABLE DISHES

The vegetable-based salads and other prepared vegetable dishes are a top attraction for her customers. "These are the things my customers like," says Ahronee. "It's all about the salads."

The more limited meat offerings in the prepared-food cases tend to center around seafood and chicken dishes, plus the store's house-roasted turkey and occasional beef recipes.

As patrons venture in beyond the prepared-foods area, the store evolves into a specialty retail space, with a dairy case, a reach-in produce cooler and a grab-and-go refrigerated unit displaying sandwiches and salads. A small dry-grocery area offers a limited assortment of high-quality basics, and beyond that, at the rear of the store is a cozy, sit-down café, with table service and a menu of Mediterranean-influenced fare.

"I saw this space, and I visualized what it could be," she says of the café area at the back of the store, which includes seating for about 18 patrons. "It's a place where you can enjoy a quiet meal or a cappuccino."

The store had been a clothing boutique in its previous incarnation, and what is now the café area had once served as a row of changing rooms. Exposed brick archways set the café off from the rest of the space, and enhance the Mediterranean ambience.

### THE PROCUREMENT 'HUNT'

Ahronee tried working with a series of vendors for fruits and vegetables before she found success with Bronx-based A&J Produce Corp., which delivers to her store several times a week through a local delivery company.

"We went through a few different procurement strategies," says Ahronee. "Our first supplier had requirements about how much we had to buy, and what days it would be delivered. There were too many restrictions. We couldn't work like that, as a new business. We had to have a more collaborative relationship. They were very nice, but they were used to serving big, big places."

A few vendors later, and after a visit to the New York Produce Show and Conference, she



Nicole Ahronee

eventually decided to see what Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx had to offer. She contacted Myra Gordon, executive director of the Hunts Point Produce Terminal Cooperative Association.

Gordon introduced her to a few of the Hunts Point vendors who could meet her needs, and Ahronee settled on A&J Produce.

"Myra helped me find a supplier that fit like a new pair of shoes," says Ahronee. "If something is spoiled, or if something doesn't look right, they are so good about it — they just take it off the bill. They are very understanding. They treat me like I treat my customers."

She also says the comfort level she has with Mike Esposito, her delivery sales representative, has made her life a lot easier.

"The human element is so important," she says. "I'll ask him if I can get 10 limes instead of a whole case, and he says, 'Don't worry, I can get you 10 limes.'"

"That's the kind of service that's perfect for us, because we are not that big — yet.

"I always tell suppliers, we are not going to be your biggest customer, but we like to make everything look good, and we like to talk about our suppliers," says Ahronee.

"They want to work with us, because it is a high-profile shop, and it has a good reputation."

### CONSOLIDATED BUYING

One of the important changes Ahronee made in her procurement strategy was to

consolidate buying for both the retail space and the prepared-foods department with a single supplier.

"The kitchen was buying for the kitchen, and retail was buying for retail," she says. "We needed one vendor. I was paying for retail double what I was paying for the kitchen."

The two departments now sometimes share inventory back and forth as needed. A case of red peppers for the kitchen might yield a few leftovers for retail display, for example, and tomatoes that soften on the retail display might end up in a veggie sauté.

Altogether, the ingredients used to make prepared foods account for about 70 to 75 percent of the produce Ahronee buys for Gastronomie 491.

The retail produce display is relatively limited, with just a few of the most popular items, such as bananas, apples and tomatoes. "We just need a core retail offering," says Ahronee.

She tried offering more exotic produce, such as baby bananas, but her customers simply were not that interested, she says.

"We don't have the demand, and it's tough to be price-competitive on those exotics," says Ahronee. "I have had to become un-romantic about my produce. I try to do the basics, and I bring in organics when I can, because people really like organics."

Some of her discoveries about produce have been happy accidents.

The store at one point was merchandising 16-ounce clamshells of melon chunks as a grab-and-go item in the produce cooler, but one day, the prep cook who was dicing melons ran out of the clamshells.

The worker, who was from the Philippines, decided to improvise. He sliced the melons into long strips that fit perfectly in the 32-ounce clamshells the store had on hand.

"I came in and said, 'Oh my God, that looks great!'" says Ahronee. "It was gorgeous."

The 32-ounce clamshells of melon slices have become a staple of the produce cooler, which helps serve the store's grab-and-go clientele.

"This store suits the lifestyle of today's consumer," says Ahronee. "People want to eat healthy, but they don't have time." **pb**

### Gastronomie 491

491 Columbus Ave, New York, NY 10024  
(212) 974-7871  
gastronomie491.com

OPEN DAILY: 7 a.m. – 9 p.m.



**House.....Unit(s).....Phone**

A & J Produce Corp.	126-133, 137-144, 450-463	718-589-7877
	223-225	
Armata, E. Inc.	111-120, 123-125, 338-341	
	369-370, 372-376	718-991-5600
Best Tropical Produce	237	718-861-3131
Cochran Robert. T. Co., Inc.	408-412	718-991-2340
C and J Produce	238-241	718-991-5050
Coosemans New York, Inc.	242-244, 249	718-328-3060
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.	301-308, 310-320	
	323-330, 332-336	718-991-5900
Fierman Produce Exchange, Inc.	247-248, 250-257	718-893-1640
Food Barn	31B	718-617-3800
Fresco LLC	258-259	718-589-5000
Fruitco Corp.	200-204	718-893-4500
Georgallas Tomato & Produce	447-449	718-842-6317
Gold Medal Produce	163-168	718-893-5554
Henry Haas, Inc.	464	718-378-2550
Hothouse AFL	110	212-741-5117
Issam Kanawi	331	718-542-2217
Katzman Berry Corp.	260-265	718-589-1400
Katzman S. Produce, Inc.	153-157, 205-220, 423-428	718-991-4700
LBD	226-233, 403-407	718-991-2100
Luna Fresh Greenhouse Corp.	134-136	718-542-4115
Lee Loi Industries, Inc.	234-236	718-542-4115
Mabijo	271	718-893-1640
M & R Tomato Distributors, Inc.	149-151	718-589-8500
M & R Trading	309	718-589-8500
Mr. Sprout	266-268	718-893-1717
Margiotta, J. Company, Inc.	100-105	718-378-5800
Mendez Int'l. Tropical Fruit & Veg	152, 158-162	718-893-0100
Nathel & Nathel, Inc	347-350, 354-364,	
	367-368, 465-468	718-991-6050
National Farm Wholesale Corp.	434-437	718-617-6229
Pan Hellenic Food Corp.	440-444	718-328-8654
Porricelli, Ciro	342	718-893-6000
Renella, J. Produce, Inc.	351	718-991-4210
Rothman, D.M. Co., Inc.	106-109	718-991-4920
Rubin Bros. Produce Corp.	147-148, 269-270, 272-274	718-589-3200
Top Banana LLC	413-420, 438, 439	718-328-6700
A. J. Trucco, Inc.	337, 343-344	718-893-3060
Yola Produce	371	516-292-8821

# HUNTS POINT TERMINAL PRODUCE CO-OPERATIVE MARKET DIRECTORY

RUBIN BROS.	274	376	E. ARMATA, INC.
	275	375	
	273	374	
	272	373	
	271	372	YOLA
MABIJO	271	370	E. ARMATA, INC.
RUBIN BROS.	270	369	
	269		

168		268	MR SPROUT	368	NATHEL & NATHEL	468
167		267		367		467
166	GOLD MEDAL PROD.	266		366	RIGHT CHOICE	466
165		265		365		465
164		264		364		464
163		263	KATZMAN BERRY CORP.	363		463
162		262		362		462
161	MENDEZ INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL FRUIT & VEG	261		361		461
160		260		360	NATHEL & NATHEL	460
159		259	FRESCO LLC	359		459
158		258		358		458
157		257		357		457
156	S. KATZMAN PRODUCE INC.	256		356		456
155		255	FIERMAN PRODUCE EXCHANGE INC.	355		455
154		254		354		454
153		253		353		453
152	MENDEZ INT'L FRUIT & VEG	252		352		452
151	M & R TOMATO DISTRIBUTORS INC.	251		351	J. RENELLA	451
150		250		350		450
149		249	COOSEMANS	349		449
148	RUBIN BROS. PRODUCE CORP.	248		348	NATHEL & NATHEL	448
147		247	FIERMAN PRODUCE	347		447

144		244	COOSEMANS NEW YORK	344	A.J. TRUCCO, INC.	444
143		243		343	JERRY PORRICELLI PRODUCE	443
142	A&J PRODUCE CORP.	242		342		442
141		241		341		441
140		240	C AND J PRODUCE	340	E. ARMATA, INC.	440
139		239		339		439
138		238		338		438
137		237	BEST TROPICAL	337	A.J. TRUCCO, INC.	437
136	LUNA FRESH GREENHOUSE CORP	236		336		436
135		235	LEE LOI INDUSTRIES, INC.	335		435
134		234		334	D'ARRIGO BROS.	434
133		233		333		433
132		232		332		432
131	A&J PRODUCE CORP.	231		331	ISSAM KANAWI	431
130		230	LBD	330		430
129		229		329		429
128		228		328	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC	428
127		227		327		427
126		226		326		426
125	E. ARMATA	225		325		425
124		224		324		424
123		223		323		423

120		220		320		420
119		219		319		419
118	E. ARMATA INC.	218		318		418
117		217		317	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC.	417
116		216		316		416
115		215	S. KATZMAN PRODUCE	315		415
114		214		314		414
113		213		313		413
112		212		312		412
111		211		311		411
110	AFL HOTHOUSE	210		310		410
109		209		309	M&R TRADING	409
108	D.M. ROTHMAN CO. INC.	208		308		408
107		207		307		407
106		206		306	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC	406
105		205		305		405
104		204		304		404
103	J. MARGIOTTA	203	FRUITCO INC.	303		403
102		202		302		402
101		201		301		401
100		200		300	PT. TERM FOOD	400

268	MR SPROUT	368	NATHEL & NATHEL
267		367	
266		366	RIGHT CHOICE
265		365	
264		364	
263	KATZMAN BERRY CORP.	363	
262		362	
261		361	
260		360	NATHEL & NATHEL
259	FRESCO LLC	359	
258		358	
257		357	
256	FIERMAN PRODUCE EXCHANGE INC.	356	
255		355	
254		354	
253		353	
252		352	
251		351	J. RENELLA
250		350	
249	COOSEMANS	349	
248	FIERMAN PRODUCE	348	NATHEL & NATHEL
247		347	

244	COOSEMANS NEW YORK	344	A.J. TRUCCO, INC.
243		343	JERRY PORRICELLI PRODUCE
242		342	
241		341	
240	C AND J PRODUCE	340	E. ARMATA, INC.
239		339	
238		338	
237	BEST TROPICAL	337	A.J. TRUCCO, INC.
236		336	
235	LEE LOI INDUSTRIES, INC.	335	
234		334	D'ARRIGO BROS.
233		333	
232		332	
231		331	ISSAM KANAWI
230	LBD	330	
229		329	
228		328	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC
227		327	
226		326	
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224		324	
223		323	

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218		318	
217		317	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC.
216		316	
215	S. KATZMAN PRODUCE	315	
214		314	
213		313	
212		312	
211		311	
210	AFL HOTHOUSE	310	
209		309	M&R TRADING
208	D.M. ROTHMAN CO. INC.	308	
207		307	
206		306	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC
205		305	
204		304	
203	FRUITCO INC.	303	
202		302	
201		301	
200		300	PT. TERM FOOD

376	E. ARMATA, INC.	468	NATHEL & NATHEL
375		467	
374		466	
373		465	
372		464	HENRY HAAS, INC.
371	YOLA	463	
370	E. ARMATA, INC.	462	
369		461	
		460	
		459	
		458	A&J PRODUCE CORP.
		457	
		456	
		455	
		454	
		453	
		452	
		451	
		450	
		449	GEORGALLAS TOMATO & PRODUCE
		448	
		447	

344	A.J. TRUCCO, INC.	444	PAN HELLENIC
343	JERRY PORRICELLI PRODUCE	443	
342		442	
341		441	
340	E. ARMATA, INC.	440	
339		439	TOP BANANA
338		438	
337	A.J. TRUCCO, INC.	437	
336		436	NATIONAL FARM WHOLESALE CORP
335		435	
334	D'ARRIGO BROS.	434	
333		433	
332		432	
331	ISSAM KANAWI	431	
330		430	S. KATZMAN PRODUCE EAST
329		429	
328	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC	428	
327		427	
326		426	
325		425	
324		424	
323		423	

320		420	
319		419	
318		418	
317	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC.	417	TOP BANANA
316		416	
315		415	
314		414	
313		413	
312		412	
311		411	
310		410	COCHRAN ROBERT. T. CO., INC
309	M&R TRADING	409	
308		408	
307		407	
306	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC	406	
305		405	LBD
304		404	
303		403	
302		402	
301		401	CHAIN PRODUCE
300	PT. TERM FOOD	400	



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# 17<sup>th</sup> Annual PRODUCE BUSINESS FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO



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. For retailers, this information is ideal for your own prepared food operations. Restaurant operations will also find it perfectly on the mark for everyday use.

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



**DEL MONTE FRESH  
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**GRIMMWAY FARMS**



**HOLLANDIA PRODUCE, L.P.**



**MANN PACKING COMPANY, INC.**



**NATURIPE FARMS**







**Del Monte Fresh Produce Keeps it Simple with Pure Earth™ Juice**

Eighteen years after revolutionizing the fresh pineapple category with the introduction of the Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet pineapple, we are ready to do the same in the refrigerated juice category. Del Monte Fresh Produce is proud to introduce our newest product, Pure Earth™ juice.



**UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES**

To make Pure Earth™ juice, we keep it simple. We use succulent Del Monte Gold® pineapples, hand-picked at the peak of ripeness from our farms in Costa Rica, and juice them only with the finest fruit. We don't use fillers or concentrate. Pure Earth™ juices are flash pasteurized to maintain the optimal flavor, color, and nutritional benefits. Pure Earth™ is Mother Nature in its juiciest form, and all of its ingredients can be found right in the produce section.

The Del Monte Pure Earth™ is currently available in four flavors: 100% Pineapple Juice, 100% Pineapple/Banana/Coconut Juice, 100% Pineapple/Blueberry/Blackberry Juice, and 100% Pineapple/Lime Juice. All four flavors are available in our Grab-N-Go 12 oz. bottle and our Family size 32 oz. bottle.



**BUYING PRACTICES**

Retailers and restaurant operators should purchase the freshest product available. Buying Del Monte Pure Earth™ juices as frequently as possible throughout the week will help keep

**DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE**



**Pineapple Ginger Glazed Grilled Chicken with Zucchini and Peppers**

**SERVES: 4 | PREP TIME: 15 min. | COOK TIME: 30 min. | TOTAL TIME: 45 min.**

CALORIES PER SERVING (1/4 RECIPE): 323  
 FAT 7.5G CHOLESTEROL 65MG SODIUM 340MG CARBOHYDRATES 23G FIBER 2G SUGAR 7G PROTEIN 26G

*This easy glaze with Del Monte Pure Earth™ 100% Pineapple Juice adds bright and zingy flavors to everyday barbecued chicken.*

**Ingredients:**

- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breasts
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- ¼ tsp each salt and pepper
- 2 zucchini, trimmed and sliced ¼-inch thick
- 1 red pepper, quartered and seeded
- 1 orange pepper, quartered and seeded
- 8 Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet pineapple spears (about 30 g each) 2 ½ x 1 ¼ -inch
- 1 green onion, sliced

**Directions:**

Preheat grill to medium heat; grease grill well. Toss chicken breast with oil, salt and pepper. Pineapple Ginger Glaze: Combine pineapple juice, vinegar, brown sugar, soy sauce, ginger and mustard in a medium saucepan set over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil; boil for about 15 minutes or until reduced by half. Grill chicken, for 2 minutes per side or until grill-marked. Continue to grill, basting and turning with Pineapple Ginger Glaze, for 5 to 6 minutes or until cooked through. Grill zucchini, red pepper, orange pepper and pineapple spears, basting with Pineapple Ginger Glaze, for 3 to 5 minutes or until grill-marked and tender. Serve chicken with vegetables and pineapple. Garnish with green onions.

**Tip:**

Serve over steamed brown rice.

**Pineapple Ginger Glaze:**

- 1 bottle (12 fl oz) Del Monte Pure Earth™ 100% Pineapple Juice
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp minced ginger
- 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard

inventory fresh. It is also important to practice "first in first out" rotation of inventory. Planning ahead for any demand fluctuations based on seasonal availability, weather conditions, and other factors should also be noted.

**PRODUCT AVAILABILITY GUIDE**

Del Monte Pure Earth™ is available year-round and is found nationwide in select stores.



**DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE N.A., INC.**

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## UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES

Given the multitude of uses, it is no surprise Naturipe berries are making their way onto menus where the use of a fresh berry was previously uncommon. Quick-service and fast-casual dining are showing interest in berries to add freshness, great taste and health to menus.

- Fresh berries are now found as a colorful topping on top-selling entrée salads in quick-service restaurants.

- Ready-to-Eat (RTE) blueberries are also available as a nutritious mix-in for on-the-go oatmeal at national quick-service restaurants and coffee chains.

- The latest parent-pleasing trend in fast-casual restaurants is serving a kid-sized assortment of sweet fresh berries to children upon seating.

- Using berries is easier than ever with Naturipe's RTE extended shelf life blueberries and strawberries. This unique harvest-to-package system extends the shelf life of pre-washed fresh blueberries for up to three weeks and strawberries for up to two weeks (when properly refrigerated). This process ensures the berries are triple-inspected, washed and placed in modified-atmosphere packaging, producing a high-quality berry that is ready to serve. This FRESH line allows more restaurants to offer fresh, health favorable berries — previously thought impossible.

## PROMOTION

Restaurants and foodservice operators can capitalize on the health benefits of berries by promoting dishes to customers:

- Blueberries offer great taste and convenience along with disease-fighting health benefits.

- They are a top source of disease-fighting antioxidants.

- Berries, including blueberries, raspberries, blackberries and strawberries, give the biggest antioxidant bang for the buck compared with other fruits.

## NATURIBE FARMS



### Blueberry-Chipotle Barbecue Sauce

SERVES: 4 | PREP TIME: 10 mins. | COOK TIME: 5 mins. | TOTAL TIME: 15 mins.

Recipe Developed by Laura at Tide & Thyme

#### Ingredients

- 2 cups blueberries
- 3 Tbsp honey
- ½ cup water
- 1½ cups ketchup
- ½ cup molasses
- 2 Tbsp cider vinegar
- 3 Tbsp brown sugar
- ½ tsp liquid smoke
- salt and pepper
- hot sauce

#### Instructions

For the Blueberry Puree: combine the blue-

berries, honey, and water to a small saucepan.

Heat over medium-high heat until blueberries have softened and busted open – about 10 minutes.

Place into food processor or blender and puree until relatively smooth – a few one second pulses.

For the Sauce: whisk together ketchup, molasses, cider vinegar, brown sugar and liquid smoke together into a medium bowl.

Add the blueberry puree and mix until combined. Taste and season with additional salt, pepper, and/or hot sauce.

\*Can be stored in an air-tight container in the refrigerator for several weeks.

## TIPS

Fresh berries add color, flavor and texture to any menu item.

Fresh berries will help:

- Increase profits
- Lower food costs
- Simplify BOH operations
- Increase perceived value of menu items
- Offer healthy, desirable menu choices
- Stay current with new menu trends
- Satisfy customer demand



Add berries to the menu year-round. Blueberries are easy to use. There's no cutting, peeling or pitting. Just give them a quick rinse and they're ready.

The versatility of berries goes far beyond snacking as they can be incorporated into any meal. Berries can go sweet or savory — experiment to combine them with different flavor profiles.



**NATURIBE FARMS**

PO Box 4280, Salinas, CA 93912

831.443.2358

[naturipefarms.com](http://naturipefarms.com)

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### STORAGE AND HANDLING

- Always refrigerate immediately — never break the “cold chain”
- Ideal storage temperature/atmosphere: 32°F 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.



### ADD A LITTLE COLOR TO YOUR PLATE

- Grimmway’s NEW organic Rainbow shred offers bright ideas for your year-round menu
- Adds color, flavor and uniqueness to your recipes
- An excellent source of Vitamins A & C, providing dietary fiber



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 grimmway.com

## GRIMMWAY FARMS



GRIMMWAY FARMS

### Grimmway Farms Organic Rainbow Shred Carrot Zesty Slaw Pulled Pork Tostados

**SERVES: 6 - 8**

#### Grimmway Farms Organic Rainbow Shred Carrot Zesty Slaw:

- 4 Cups Grimmway Organic Rainbow Shred Carrots
- 1 Head of Napa Cabbage
- 1 Bunch of Scallions
- 3 Limes
- 1 Bunch of Cilantro
- 4 Tablespoons Apple Cider Vinegar
- 2 Tablespoons of Canola Oil
- ½ Teaspoon of Hot Sauce
- 1 Tablespoon Sugar
- Salt and Pepper

Whisk Apple Cider Vinegar, Juice of 3 Limes, Canola Oil, Sugar and Hot Sauce in a Bowl and add Salt and Pepper to taste. Wisk until dressing begins to emulsify.

Shred the Napa Cabbage finely, chop the Scallions thinly, chop a small handful of Cilantro very fine and mix all together with Grimmway Organic Rainbow Shred Carrots.

Add Dressing to Grimmway Organic Rainbow Slaw Mixture.

Mix Carefully using Dressing a little at a time so slaw does not wilt.

#### For The Pulled Pork:

- Dry Rub:
- 3 tablespoons paprika
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon dry mustard
- 3 tablespoons coarse sea salt
- 1 (5 to 7 pound) pork roast, preferably shoulder or Boston butt

#### Cider-Vinegar Barbecue Sauce:

- 1½ cups cider vinegar
- ½ cup yellow or brown mustard
- ½ cup ketchup
- ⅓ cup packed brown sugar
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Pan drippings from the pork

#### Directions

Mix the paprika, garlic power, brown sugar, dry mustard, and salt together in a small bowl. Rub the spice blend all over the pork. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees F. Put the pork in a roasting pan and roast it for about 6 hours. An instant-read thermometer stuck into the thickest part of the pork should register 170 degrees F, but basically, what you want to do is to roast it until it’s falling apart.

While pork is roasting, make the barbecue sauce. Combine the vinegar, mustard, ketchup, brown sugar, garlic, salt and black pepper in a saucepan over medium heat. Simmer gently, stirring, for 10 minutes until the sugar dissolves. Take it off the heat and let it sit until you’re ready for it.

When the pork is done, take it out of the oven and put it on a large platter. Allow the meat to rest for about 10 minutes. While it’s resting, deglaze the pan over medium heat with ¾ cup water, scraping with a wooden spoon to pick up all of the browned bits. Reduce by about half. Pour that into the saucepan with the sauce and cook 5 minutes.

While the pork is still warm, you want to “pull” the meat: Grab 2 forks. Using 1 fork to steady the meat, use the other to “pull” shreds of meat off the roast. Put the shredded pork in a bowl and pour half of the sauce over. Stir it all up well so that the pork is coated with the sauce.

#### To Assemble Tostadas:

Corn Tortillas warmed in oven until golden brown

- 3 Avocados sliced thinly
- Sour Cream

- 1 Tomato chopped

Arrange Tortillas On Platter

Place Pulled Pork on Tortillas, add two thin Avocado slices on top of Pulled Pork, pile on Grimmway Organic Rainbow Zesty Slaw on top of avocado.

Put a small dollop of sour cream on top of each and sprinkle chopped tomato.





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## HOLLANDIA PRODUCE, L.P.



### UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES

From fine dining to fast casual, it's no surprise Live Gourmet® and certified organic Grower Pete's brands of living butter lettuce from Hollandia Produce are redefining expectations. With its crisp, velvety texture, mildly sweet flavor and stunning hues, this hydroponically greenhouse grown variety delivers unmatched uniformity, superior food safety and customer satisfaction throughout the food service supply chain. Plus, it's more:

**Versatile:** Living Butter Lettuce can be served as a salad, side, soup, smoothie or entree.



**Nutritious:** Rich in vitamins A, C and K, butter lettuce is redefining classic salads like the Cobb and Wedge to give diners more nutritionally rich options.

**Fresh:** With its roots still attached, our living butter lettuce is literally still alive. This means it lasts longer than pre-cut heads, resulting in less waste and better taste for today's food purveyors.

### Butter Lettuce Wedge with Candied Bacon and Avocado Dressing

- 1 head of Live Gourmet® Living Butter Lettuce
- 1 slice thick-cut bacon
- 1 tsp brown sugar
- ½ fresh avocado
- 2 Tbsp fresh orange juice
- 2 Tbsp canola oil
- Salt
- ¼ c. fresh chopped cilantro
- 2 sprigs of chive
- Pomegranate seeds (optional)

#### Directions

Remove living lettuce root ball, clean and cut in half and place on a serving plate. Pan fry bacon to light brown color. Lightly cover bacon with brown sugar, turn over and fry until dark brown.

**Avocado Dressing:** Add avocado, orange juice, canola oil, cilantro, sugar and salt to blender or Cuisinart and gently mix for approximately 30 seconds. Garnish plate with bacon, avocado slices, and chopped fresh chives and sprinkle with pomegranate seeds.

### PRODUCT AVAILABILITY

**Year-Round Availability** – Grown in Carpinteria and Oxnard, California, our living butter lettuce is available through a vast network of leading food service providers.

Our protected, greenhouse growing techniques ensure:

**Food Safety Compliance** – Our products bear many of the industry's most coveted seals of approval, including GFSI, HACCP and GAP/GMP, and maintain one of the cleanest growing environments in agriculture.

**Conventional and Organic** – We believe in making everyone happy; we offer both! In addition to being Non-GMO Project verified, our Grower Pete's products are USDA certified organic by CCOF.

**Value-Added Flexibility** – Through our advanced conservation methods, we reduce our carbon footprint and pass those savings on in the form of year-round stable pricing.



#### TIPS

As an entree, side or ingredient substitute, living butter lettuce adds flavor, texture and nutrition to every recipe. Try it as a low calorie, low carbohydrate ingredient replacement.

**Tortilla Substitute** – As a fajita or wrap, living butter lettuce can cut calories and carbs from many recipe/menu staples.

**Bread/Bun Alternative** – Living butter lettuce is a great gluten free sandwich option; its tender leaves are pliable, yet strong enough to wrap around a burger, chicken, fish patty, or other sandwich fillers.

**Gluten-free Option** – Living butter lettuce, can transform recipe favorites into gluten-free and vegan friendly.



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# Ingredients for Success

Making the right choices is key to a food operation's success. It's not just the ingredients you choose but the relationships you build throughout the supply chain that help deliver masterpieces to the table and results to your bottom line. For unrivaled product quality, consistency and uncompromised customer service, confidently choose Hollandia Produce.

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*Below Left: A Grower Pete's Organic Living Watercress Salad  
Below Right: A Live Gourmet® Living Butter Lettuce Salad*







## MANN PACKING COMPANY, INC.

### TIPS AND TECHNIQUES



- Roast first, then use in various concepts throughout menu. Roasting brings out the natural sweetness of beets and is the best cooking method for most menu applications
- Versatility in use and presentation
- Great option to utilize in health care, college and university vegetarian dishes
- Easy approach for family restaurants to stay “on trend”
- Add to salads, pizzas, risottos, or pastas
- Mix with other roasted vegetables to create a colorful side dish
- Add for color in a hot or cold salad

### HANDLING INFORMATION

Refrigerate immediately upon delivery. Store at 34° F. Keep dry. Rotate first in, first out.

### PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES



- Mann’s Golden Roasteez™ are peeled, washed and cubed, to provide chefs a convenient method to achieve a consistent and visually appetizing menu ingredient.



### Mann’s Golden Roasteez™ Quinoa & Kale Salad

**SERVES:** 6

- 12 cups Kale, washed & shredded, stems removed
- 4½ cups Golden Roasteez™, preparation below
- 3 cups Quinoa, prepared
- 1½ cup Goat cheese, crumbled
- 6 Tbsps Sliced almonds
- Salt & pepper

#### Pesto Buttermilk Dressing

- ½ cup pesto sauce
- 1 shallot, roughly chopped
- 1 cup mayonaise or aioli
- 1 cup buttermilk
- ½ teaspoon coarse black pepper
- ½ lemon, juice of

To prepare Golden Roasteez™

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Toss desired amount of Mann’s Golden Roasteez™ with olive oil and sea salt. Roast, carefully, until golden brown, and cooked through, around 20 – 30 minutes. Ovens vary, so please manage accordingly. Cool & refrigerate for up to three days.

#### To Prepare Salad:

Layer 2 cups kale onto plate. Line up ¾ cup Golden Roasteez™, ½ cup quinoa, ¼ cup goat cheese, and 1 Tbsp almonds. Repeat. Serve with dressing on the side, or toss table side for added interaction.

- Cubing first, then roasting, allows for great caramelization and appealing presentation
- Golden variety does not bleed like red beets
- Mechanized cutting ensures consistent sizing and ultimately more uniformity when cooked ¾ inch cut size designed for optimal “bite” texture when roasted properly
- Always fresh, never frozen
- 16-day shelf life
- Julian pack date code

### BUYING INFORMATION

Fixed pricing and product consistency allow for reliable food cost planning.

Pack specifications: 2/3 lb, CARTON (L x W x H): 13.25 x 9.438 x 4.938, TIE/HIGH: 15/14, CARTONS/PALLET: 210, NET WT: 6 lb, GROSS WT: 7 lb



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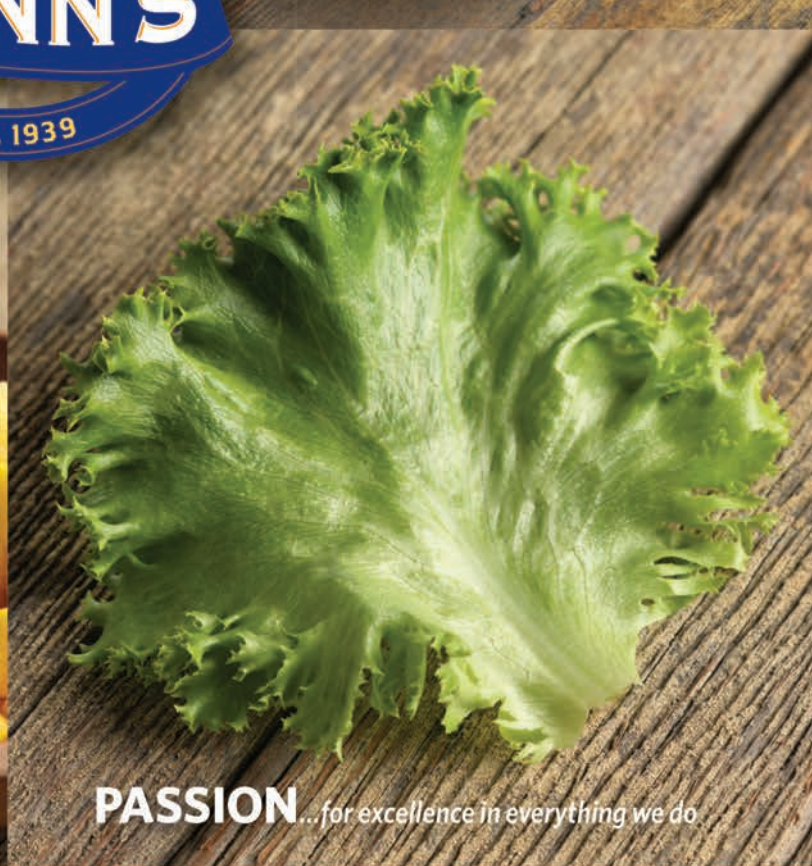
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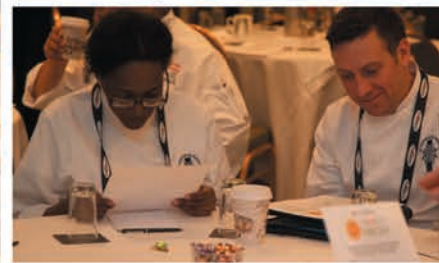
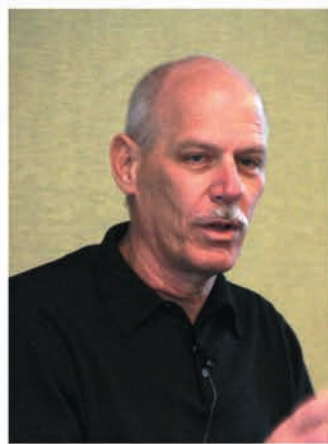
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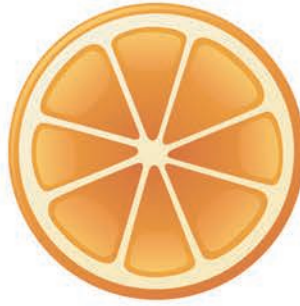


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# Growing In The Hawkeye State



## A glimpse at Iowa's produce and how industry players carve their niches for business.

BY KEITH LORIA

Iowa has approximately 11,000 different soil types, which makes it some of the richest, most productive land in the world, according to the Iowa Farm Bureau headquartered in West Des Moines, IA. Additionally, because of its climate — hot summers, cold winters and plenty of rain — the land is ideal for growing crops as the soil can replenish itself. The state's farmers are responsible for nearly 2.4 billion bushels of corn each year, which is why it remains the state's No. 1 commodity.

But there's more than just corn being grown. Iowa farmers grow everything from blueberries to carrots to squash to watermelons.

Most of the regions farmers and marketers agree that Iowa-grown sweet corn is a huge seller, and most locals believe it's the best you can find anywhere. Also, garden or locally grown tomatoes do well.

"We're in a agricultural area. People have been around produce their whole lives whether

they consume it or not," says Ben Batten, vice president of sales and marketing for Norwalk, IA-based Captial City Fruit. "If a company can deliver high-quality fruits and vegetables consistently, consumers recognize that and will support it."

Matt Russell, resilient agriculture coordinator at Drake University Agricultural Law Center, located in Des Moines, says a large

percentage of what's grown in the area is kept locally, but there's been an increase of late for a demand in Iowa-grown product.

"A lot of the produce grown in Iowa is mostly small-scale, and consumers shop a lot of the farmers markets, with many CSAs [community supported agriculture] growing over time," he says.

According to Russell, Iowa can grow a lot of





good produce, but because of extreme weather, nothing can be certain, which is why many items (peppers, grapes, strawberries) are not pursued to a greater degree.

“We can’t guarantee the quality and volume of production every year,” he says. “That makes it hard to grow any one of those into a huge-producing crop.”

Iowa produced the largest corn crop of any state for almost two decades. In an average year, Iowa produces more corn than most countries, according to the Iowa Corn Promotion Board/Iowa Corn Growers Association. In fact, according to the latest USDA’s Census of Agriculture, Iowa harvested 3,393 acres of sweet corn at last measure.

According to the Iowa Corn Promotion Board, the state’s corn crop is strong, because it has rich soils, it produces lots of livestock whose waste includes nutrients that are key to fertilizing fields for better corn production, and a wide variety of corn hybrids are available that do especially well in Iowa’s environment.

Russell says there are a few large-scale sweet corn operations in the state, with a handful growing for distributors, at just several hundred thousand dollars in sales.

#### FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Gene Loffredo, president and chief executive of Loffredo Fresh Produce Company, Inc., Des Moines, IA, says his company is a full line distributor. Product is sourced all over the world during winter and growing seasons not conducive to local growing, and during local growing season (usually in the Midwestern part of the U.S.).

Loffredo services more than 3,000 restaurants, supermarkets, hospitals, colleges, universities, school systems, health care facilities, distributors, manufacturers and C-stores.

Loffredo sites Des Moines as an easier market to maintain and compete in than some

**“Des Moines and the other Midwestern markets we service are very stable and strong markets for fresh produce ... Being in the heartland of the country, we also have the advantage of locally grown produce for half of the year. Our retail stores and farmers markets have the best of offerings in the summer months.”**

— Gene Loffredo,  
Loffredo Fresh Produce Company

of the larger markets.

“Des Moines and the other Midwestern markets we service are very stable and strong markets for fresh produce,” he says. “We are driven by a strong financial, insurance and health-care environment. Des Moines, being the insurance capital of the U.S., drives a model of healthy living. Being in the heartland of the country, we also have the advantage of locally grown produce for half of the year. Our retail stores and farmers markets have the best of offerings in the summer months.”

Another example of Iowa’s strength is that it is continually seeing more presence of national companies popping up in the communities. Des Moines is experiencing growth it

has never seen in the fresh produce arena. The upscale Greensboro, NC-based Fresh Market, the independent Midwest market Fresh Thyme and other natural food retailers are entering the region and either begin construction or open in the Fall of this year.

Ron Petersen, president of Chandler-Metelman Inc., a produce brokerage company out of Des Moines, says the company has a long-standing relationship with growers and shippers in California.

Chandler-Metelman was originally located in Cedar Rapids, and as the business grew, the owners opened a second location in Des Moines. After a few years, they moved the entire operation to Des Moines and have been there ever since.

“Des Moines is located right on Interstate 80 and centrally located in the Midwest, so there is always a lot freight coming through,” says Petersen. “There are a lot of farm products that are available for outbound freight. There are two retailers based within 60 miles of Des Moines along with three to four wholesalers located right in Des Moines as well.”

The company also owns Summertime Potato Company, which repacks potatoes and soon onions and sweet potatoes as well.

“We deal with mixed greens, cilantro, kale, parsley, collard, mustard, turnip greens, green onions, radishes, bok choy, nappa, spinach and kohlrabi,” says Petersen. “We also do strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries. We are currently exploring more locally grown products for both of our companies.”

Currently, Chandler-Metelman’s largest clients are in the retail world; however, the company is expanding into foodservice more and more each day.

“In the past, with more of a presence in the retail market, we faced challenges of retailers being acquired by other retailers,” says Loffredo. “The acquisitions were usually tied





to a national warehouse that controlled the spend and second distributors.”The company is facing less of that conflict today because of a lack of retail brands in the markets.

“Our other challenges today are large chain business being sold to Private Equity Concerns and the hiring of third parties to manage those businesses,” he says.

Des Moines Truck Brokers, Inc., based in Norwalk, serves as a third-party logistics (3PL) company that’s been serving the produce industry since 1969.

“Our roots are in produce, and we always were co-located with Capital City Fruit [based in Norwalk as well], where we arrange the vast majority of their inbound produce loads from around the country,” says Batten. “I think our market is probably similar to many Midwestern markets in the sense that most consumers buy their produce at grocery chains when their garden or locally produced fruits and vegetable are out of season.”

#### FINDING A NICHE FOR BUSINESS

Loffredo notes his company changed dramatically over the years, since 50 years ago, the company dealt solely with the street vendors. “Relationships were easier, and there was nev-

**“I think our market is probably similar to many Midwestern markets in the sense that most consumers buy their produce at grocery chains when their garden or locally produced fruits and vegetable are out of season.”**

— Ben Batten, Capital City Fruit

er a doubt that your customers trusted you,” he says. “Today you are dealing mostly with corporate America, the U.S. government, and other large entities. Business is more complex, information technology is powerful, customers are dealing directly with shippers (which complicates the process), and food safety is a top priority.”

Loffredo’s national affiliation with Monterey, CA-based Pro\*Act USA brings purchasing

and sales opportunities to the table and helped the company adapt.

Capital City Fruit, Inc., is a shipper, repacker and distributor of quality fruits and vegetables, handling produce originating from several growing regions in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and abroad, as well as from local growers throughout the Midwest.

Among its services are providing private label tomato repacking services to retail and foodservice customers, serving grocery stores, wholesale chains and institutional food service distributors, as well as being approved packers for Salinas, CA-based Markon and Rockford, IL-based ProMark Group.

Batten says there has been a definite shift in the market to get fresh, locally grown items to market in recent years. “Consumers like to walk into the stores and see that the watermelon or peppers they are buying came from a farmer nearby,” he says. “Some displays even feature a picture of the farmer/family or harvest activities. I think this brings a sense of pride that they are supporting local farmers.”

Russell notes that there is an increasing demand for produce in Iowa, and he can envision a creative grower willing to take a risk to find some regional opportunities. **pb**




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# Garlic: The Pungent Smell Of Success



**Ethnic and nutritional appeal bode well for this complementary favorite.**

BY BOB JOHNSON

**U**.S. demographics are growing more garlic-centric every year, with the arrival of large numbers of Asian immigrants. The mainstream is also becoming more familiar with uses for this versatile onion relative, and with its nutritional benefits.

“Demand for garlic is steady, as it is an important ingredient in many cuisines,” says Patsy Ross, director of marketing at Christopher Ranch, a garlic grower, packer and shipper in Gilroy, CA. “We feel the best way to merchandise garlic is in the produce department with the tomatoes and avocados; when you add garlic you get the Italian flag.”

According to Ross, price promotions and visible presentations at the right time should increase sales.

“Sales definitely increase when there are big displays of garlic or when garlic is put on a special price,” says Ross. “It is a good idea to promote California garlic during the summer

and then again in the fall. Every store has a different marketing strategy, we do our best to support their strategy, whether it is every day pricing, special ads a few times a year or California garlic year-round.”

Garlic consumption is up to two pounds per capita in the U.S. and steadily rising, according to the Ag Marketing Resource Center based at Iowa State University, and there are special times when fresh garlic makes an irreplaceable contribution to a popular dish, and to the mer-

chandising of the companion produce items that are ingredients in the recipe.

“You can merchandise garlic with avocados and tomatoes, especially around Cinco de Mayo and the Super Bowl,” says Anthony Sharrino, president of Eaton & Eustis, an onion and garlic wholesaler in Chelsea, MA. “Maybe go on ad three or four times a year.”

There are many opportunities for creative cross-merchandising with other produce items. “We’ve had luck merchandising with mush-

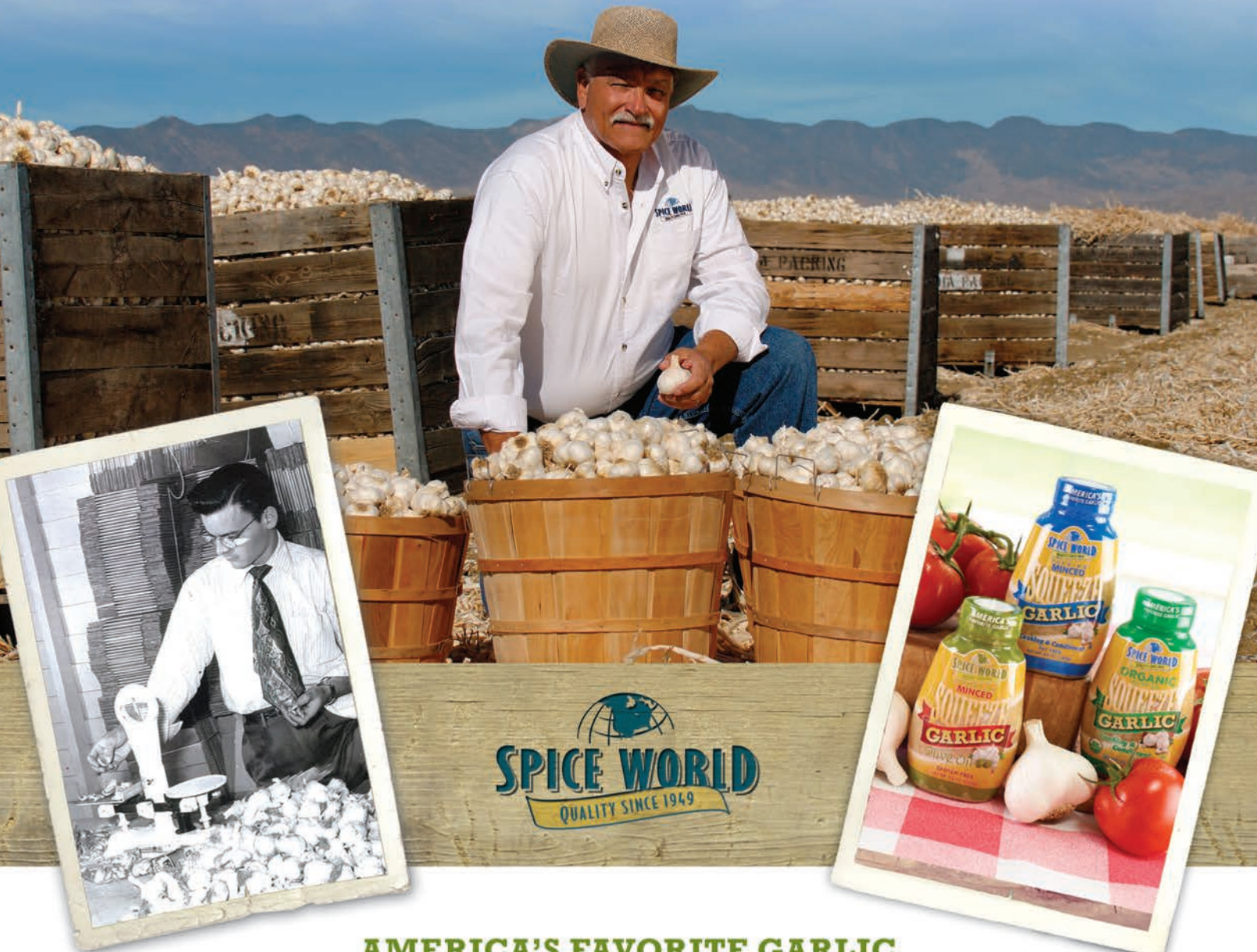


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# CALIFORNIA

## GARLIC GROWERS



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**“Garlic’s been on a very nice trajectory. People like the flavor and they are introduced to how it can be used, because it is in cuisines from all over the world.”**

—Jim Provost, I Love Produce

rooms, and with tomatoes as well,” says Jim Provost, president of I Love Produce, a garlic wholesaler in Kelton, PA.

Savvy retailers recognize that a well-stocked garlic display brings rewards that extend to numerous other items in produce. “Garlic is a popular ingredient in many recipes and as many customers continue to expand their palates, consumption is increasing,” says Dan Donovan, spokesman for Giant Eagle, a supermarket chain based in Pittsburgh, PA. “At Giant Eagle, customers will find a wide selection of garlic, ranging from domestically grown varieties to more artisanal options like purple garlic.”

**GROWING DEMAND AND OPPORTUNITIES**

There are numerous trends driving increased demand for garlic and it begins, in these nutrition conscious times, with the discovery that it is healthy.

“One of the big things is the perception of health benefits, and it is on a lot of the cooking shows,” says Paul Auerbach, president of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc., a garlic distributor in South Hackensack, NJ.

The media has been effective in spreading the word about the health benefits of garlic. “It has been shown as a healthy ingredient in the cooking shows, and that’s a good story for us,” says Provost. “Garlic’s been on a very nice trajectory. People like the flavor and they are introduced to how it can be used, because it is in cuisines from all over the world.”

Some retailers contribute their resources to informing the public about the nutritional benefits, as well as the many uses of garlic.

“The Giant Eagle registered dietitians help to communicate the health benefits of various products through in-store signage and dietitian callouts in the company’s weekly circular,” says Donovan. “In addition to adding flavor to many dishes, garlic contains a number of vitamins and minerals and is being studied for



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many health benefits, including its ability to boost immunity and reduce the risk of certain types of cancer.”

Christopher Ranch, one of the largest garlic producers in the U.S., has materials and containers available for use by retailers.

“Christopher Ranch has some display boxes that make instant displays; this brings some attention to the garlic and is fun for the consumer,” says Ross from Christopher Ranch, family-owned and -operated since 1956. “Some of our retailers even have annual store competitions using our Halloween display boxes.”

But the nutritional benefits of garlic are so well known that many retailers benefit without really emphasizing the point.

“The retailers don’t play up the health aspect

like the fresh garlic association used to,” says Sharrino. “People know about it already. You even see infomercials on garlic pills.”

The changing demographics of the country also contribute to market growth, as many immigrants come from places where garlic is a traditional ingredient.

“We eat more garlic,” says Sal Vacca, consultant and former owner at A.J. Trucco, Inc., fresh produce importer and wholesaler in Bronx, NY. “The Mediterranean people and Asians are eating garlic. Usually it’s in the fresh department unless it’s packed. We mainly sell the bulk in the fresh department.”

The growing number of people from these parts of the world, and the popularity of their cuisines, are adding to demand.

“Garlic consumption is growing slowly, it’s not mainstream, but it’s not a specialty item,” says Sharrino. “The Asian and Hispanic populations use a lot of garlic.”

Cooking shows and restaurants are also contributing to demand by showing the many delicious uses of garlic.

“Garlic is diverse,” says Louis Hymel, director of purchasing at Spice World in Orlando, FL. “You can put whole bulbs on the grill with barbecue. You can use it in pesto or guacamole. There’s no limit to where you can cross-merchandise it.”

Spice World offers a line of minced, chopped and jarred garlic items, in addition to the fresh product.

“People always eat more garlic,” says Hymel.

## SHOWCASE garlic



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"It's good for us, and people love the flavor of it. It's used in a lot of ethnic cuisines."

### MAKE IT FRESH

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to include garlic as an ingredient every day of the year, without thinking about the harvest calendar.

"We've made it easy to use garlic year-round; and people use more garlic if you can

### GLOBAL SUPPLY

The source of freshly harvested garlic shifts with the calendar from the Northern to the Southern Hemisphere.

"California garlic is harvested in the summer, South American garlic in the winter, Mexican garlic in the spring," says Patsy Ross, director of marketing at Gilroy, CA-based Christopher Ranch. "We are the largest fresh garlic grower in the nation; this year we expect to sell more than 70 million pounds of California Heirloom Garlic."

The Chinese product occupies largely the same calendar slot as California garlic, and competes on price.

"Garlic has a cycle; it starts in California in June and July and is marketed out of cold storage the rest of the year," says Jim Provost, president of I Love Produce, a garlic wholesaler in Kelton, PA.

"Other areas produce at the same time as California, like China and Spain. The counter seasonal garlic is the South American product, mainly out of Argentina, but also Chile. It comes in December and January."

The California product is generally credited as being the highest quality white garlic in the world.

"The California and red Mexican are much better than any other," says Sal Vacca, consultant and former owner at A.J. Trucco, Inc., fresh produce importer and wholesaler in Bronx, NY. "As far as the white garlic, California is the best. For the red, it's Mexico; they call them purple."

Some retailers find there is demand for California garlic just because it is grown in California.

"As customer interest in American-grown produce increases, demand for California-grown garlic is surpassing that of product grown in other parts of the world," says Dan Donovan, spokesman for Giant Eagle, a supermarket chain based in Pittsburgh, PA. "While China remains the top producer of garlic, less product is being exported to the United States as retailers are looking to growers in California, Mexico and Argentina."

The reputation of California garlic is so strong that it may even command a higher price. "In many locations there is a premium for California garlic because it is California, which people associate with top quality and food safety," says Paul Auerbach, president of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc., a garlic distributor in South Hackensack, NJ.

"There are other places with good quality and food safety. I have customers who will say they want California garlic; others will say they don't want China, but they are fine with Argentina or Mexico."

There is no special premium, however, for Gilroy garlic, according to Auerbach.

The product harvested in China has the advantage of being the lowest cost garlic available. "The major imports are from China," says Anthony Sharrino, president of Eaton & Eustis, an onion and garlic wholesaler in Chelsea, MA. "They are cheaper, a lot cheaper, but the higher end consumers always prefer the domestic garlic."

The advantage of shifting to product from the Southern Hemisphere is there are consumers who prefer their garlic recently harvested, rather than out of long-term cold storage.

"Some people prefer fresh garlic, so there is an advantage sourcing worldwide," says Provost.

Shippers generally make arrangements to source garlic from wherever the retailer prefers. "We have garlic from California. We also have quite a bit from China, and from Chile," says Vacca. "We have garlic from Mexico and Argentina."

But even suppliers who ship from every harvest region in the world usually consider their California garlic the best.

"We're California garlic growers, and we can supply California garlic year-round," says Louis Hymel, director of purchasing at Spice World in Orlando, FL. "We also source it from Argentina, Central Mexico and Baja. If the customer wants Chinese, we can supply that too. California is the best. With traceability, we know where it came from."

**pb**

**"With fresh garlic, foremost is the cleanliness. When consumers buy garlic they look at the skin. If the skin has spots, you can peel it, or sell it to other outlets."**

— Paul Auerbach, Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.

use it year-round," says Hymel.

The most important part of the category, however, remains fresh garlic sold in the produce department.

"Fresh garlic bulk and fresh peeled garlic cloves are our biggest movers in the garlic category for Christopher Ranch," says Ross. "We do offer a full line of value-added garlic products as well."

There is also a market, especially on the foodservice side, for the product already peeled and ready to use in cooking. Some shippers, however, are also finding demand for peeled garlic on the retail side.

"Demand is increasing, especially on the peeled side because of the convenience, both in retail and foodservice," says Auerbach.

There are also purple or red varieties, and elephant garlic, that round out the category. "Stores should carry one fresh garlic, one peeled, one of elephant and one organic," advises Auerbach. "The extra items help the whole category. Peeled are more expensive, but there is still a market for them. Fresh is still the No. 1, and you want nice clean heads. There are markets for organic, but it's more expensive."

Although a well-stocked section includes diverse products, the category begins with high-quality, unpeeled, fresh garlic.

"Fresh bulb garlic is increasingly popular among customers, and in many Giant Eagle supermarkets, it is displayed with an assortment of complementary offerings, such as avocados, tomatoes, guacamole mixes and Italian spices," says Donovan.

Appearance is the key to strong sales of unpeeled fresh garlic, which drives the category.

"I think fresh has a better taste; the closer to cooking the peel comes off, the better the taste," says Auerbach. "With fresh garlic, foremost is the cleanliness. When consumers buy garlic they look at the skin. If the skin has spots, you can peel it, or sell it to other outlets." **pb**



# Dates And Dried Figs



PHOTO COURTESY OF VALLEY FIG GROWERS

**These companion items can energize fresh produce.**

BY JANEL LEITNER

**D**ates and dried figs add diversity and sales to the produce department, and when they are promoted year-round and cross-merchandised, the possibilities are endless.

“Dates and figs are a great ring in the register,” says Paul Kneeland, vice president of fresh merchandising for Fresh Formats, which is a division of Carlisle, PA and Quincy, MA-based Ahold USA that manages niche market stores. “They are a healthy alternative for snacking and baking.”

Nancy Grace, produce manager at George’s Dreshertown Shop n Bag, an upscale independent grocer with one store in Dresher, PA, concurs. “Dates and dried figs are becoming increasingly more popular and are a fantastic value-added item,” she says.

The popularity of dates and dried figs is growing. “It isn’t just a holiday item any more,” explains Ben Antongiovanni, vice president of sales with Atlas Produce and Distribution Inc., located in Bakersfield, CA. “If consumers

know they can rely on their local store to have dates available year-round, that store will be rewarded with strong date sales.”

Sal Vacca, consultant and former owner of A.J. Trucco, Inc., located in Bronx, NY, agrees. “We have seen an increase in volume with dates and dried figs quite a bit compared to years ago,” he says.

“Dried figs are making appearances in a lot of different venues from dollar stores to club stores to mass market retailers; in produce departments across all channels figs are becoming more important to consumers,” says Linda Cain, vice president of marketing and retail sales with Valley Fig Growers located in Fresno, CA. “We are also seeing a real up-swing in restaurants using figs in many of their menu items.”

Dates and dried figs are advantageous in many ways to the department. “Caramel Naturel Brand Fresh Medjool Dates are important to the department because they are a high margin low shrink item and very shelf stable,” asserts Antongiovanni. “Medjool dates are one of the top-selling dried fruits in produce.”

Cain says margins are good too. “Dried figs are a great item to merchandise and we are seeing pretty healthy margins at retail,” she says. “Consumers are really discovering

this item and it’s important for retailers to keep them included in their dried fruit mix.”

## FOCUS ON FRESH ASPECTS

Profitable displays require thought and planning. “Where to display is key to selling dates and figs,” explains Keith Cox, produce category manager at K-VA-T Food Stores located in Abingdon, VA with 104 stores. “Display in a high traffic location since normally this will be an impulse buy and not usually on a shopping list.”

“If you are going to sell Medjool dates you need to give them attention,” says Anton-giovanni. “Create a permanent home and keep it stocked year-round.”

Creating a fresher perception with consumers leads to sales. “Merchandising dates and figs in the fresh-cut fruit sections of the produce department enhances sales and helps the customer think about them differently,” explains Kneeland of Fresh Formats.

“Some of our customers put them in a dry place where it seems they don’t have that fresh look,” says Vacca of A.J. Trucco, Inc. “I always suggest to our customers to display them in the fresh department, where it seems they are kept cooler and stay fresher looking.”

The produce department is the most logical location to merchandise these items, suggests





PHOTO COURTESY OF VALLEY FIG GROWERS

Valley Fig Growers is a grower-owned cooperative headquartered in Fresno, CA. The cooperative represents 40 percent of the California fig industry (fresh and dried) and markets its products worldwide. Retail products of dried figs are sold under Sun-Maid and Valley Fig Growers' own brand names of Blue Ribbon Orchard Choice, Orchard Choice, and Blue Ribbon.

Grace of George's Dreshertown Shop n Bag. "Some varieties are shelf stable while others require refrigeration so to keep them in the same general location. By doing this you are also showcasing their nutritional value to a customer who is more than likely already health conscious."

Cross-merchandising with other popular fruits is another sales generator. "Dried figs pair beautifully with a lot of other summer fruit items," says Cain of Valley Fig Growers.

"If retailers build nice displays in the middle of the bananas they will be rewarded with large incremental sales," says Antongiovanni of Atlas Produce and Distribution Inc.

"Both items do well when displayed with the tropical section," reports Cox.

Cross-merchandising in other departments also helps move product. "We do a lot of pairing figs with fine cheeses and find consumers are excited about using figs," explains Cain. "Not only do we sell well in the produce department, we are finding a home in the cheese and deli departments and even pairing well with chocolate."

Kneeland offers this: "Merchandising in baking areas around holiday times helps create solutions to what is for dessert."

Providing variety in product as well as packaging expands potential. "A lot of our retailers selling our zipper stand-up bags tend to have a pretty consistent audience all year long," says Cain. "Our trays and cups, viewed as more seasonal items, seem to be sold more during the holidays."

"In our produce department we carry Black Mission figs, Calimyrna figs, Conadria figs,

**"We do a lot of pairing figs with fine cheeses and find consumers are excited about using figs. Not only do we sell well in the produce department, we are finding a home in the cheese and deli departments and even pairing well with chocolate."**

— Linda Cain, Valley Fig Growers

Turkish figs, Medjool dates, California pitted dates, and diced dates," explains Grace. "Some of these we buy in pre-packed tubs, crowns, and finger packs in both conventional and organic."

Ads and promoting multiples are highly recommended tools. Kneeland of Fresh Formats suggests, "Promoting dates and figs in store ads and running ads with price multiples — like two for \$5 — drives additional sales and unit sales."

### MULTIPLE OCCASIONS FOR PROMOTION

Numerous occasions help spread the word about dates and dried figs. "The best times to promote dates include October for new harvest, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Passover and Ramadan in the summer," explains Anton-

giovanni of Atlas Produce and Distribution Inc.

"Christmas is generally a great time to promote," says Cox of K-VA-T. "We have had great success with shipper displays during this time period because they double the movement."

Vacca of A.J. Trucco, Inc. explains the difference in promoting fig varieties: "Italian figs are usually more popular for Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays but the California fig, Greek fig and Turkish figs are popular year-round."

Promoting nontraditional usage expands the customer base. "During back to school season and the holiday season we always have promotions for retailers highlighting how the produce is portable — great for lunches and great for instant energy," says Cain with Valley Fig Growers.

"Dates are great for snacking and they are great to eat prior to working out," asserts Antongiovanni.

Sampling can drive purchase of dates and dried figs. "You need salesmanship with new customers who haven't tried the item," says Vacca. "You must say 'try and see what you like'."

"We are doing a fair number of sampling events at biking and hiking events," explains Cain. "We are distributing a lot of samples with a two-prong attack highlighting how figs are great in recipes but are also a tremendously healthy item. Long distance bikers and long distance runners are finding figs important for their training regime."

Retailers are encouraged to promote



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nutritional content. “Figs are extremely nutrient-dense. They have more fiber than prunes, more calcium than milk, more potassium than bananas, and are high in micronutrients (such as copper, magnesium, iron),” asserts Cain.

Stores can use websites, social media and POS to educate consumers. “We are doing a lot of activities on social media and working with a couple of television shows to encourage people to incorporate figs in their recipes,” says Cain.

“Recipes always help promote sales,” says Kneeland of Fresh Formats. “Usage information at point of purchase certainly helps.”

“There are many great recipes calling for Medjool dates,” advises Antongiovanni of Atlas Produce and Distribution Inc. “Recipes can be easily found on our website.”

### KNOW YOUR PRODUCT

Consistent and fresh product is a crucial aspect of selling both dates and dried figs. “The biggest challenge with dates and figs is knowing the growing cycle and making sure you receive fresh product especially at the peak of sales in the fourth quarter,” explains Kneeland. “Keep it fresh; keep it moving!”

Understanding where product comes from and when it is available is a must. “Our harvest

**“The biggest challenge with dates and figs is knowing the growing cycle and making sure you receive fresh product especially at the peak of sales in the fourth quarter. Keep it fresh; keep it moving!”**

— Paul Kneeland, Fresh Formats

typically begins the latter part of August or early September,” says Cain. “However we are expecting a much earlier crop this year because of weather changes. We put our product in cold storage and then we process it as needed to address the needs throughout the rest of the year.”

“Our Medjool dates are available year-round,” says Antongiovanni. “The crop is


harvested once a year starting in late August to early September.”

Vacca of A.J. Trucco, Inc. says: “Our shippers store them loose so when we give them orders in January or February, they pack them fresh based on the orders we give them.”

California growers go to great lengths to ensure the quality of their product. “California has very strict standards that we are obligated to adhere to and we know our standards are second to none,” explains Cain of Valley Fig Growers. “The California label has an implied endorsement that it is going to be a high-quality great tasting product.”


“Caramel Naturel only ships Medjool dates grown in Southern California,” explains Antongiovanni. “We have strict food safety standards in place and our dates are always handled and packed the right way to guarantee the consumer is getting the best-tasting dates available 365 days a year.”

Fresh figs are seasonal and natural. “The figs are dried naturally on the tree then fall to a prepared surface at which time they are harvested,” explains Cain. “The figs are grown in California’s Central Valley because we have the weather conditions to replicate the Mediterranean where figs originate.” **pb**



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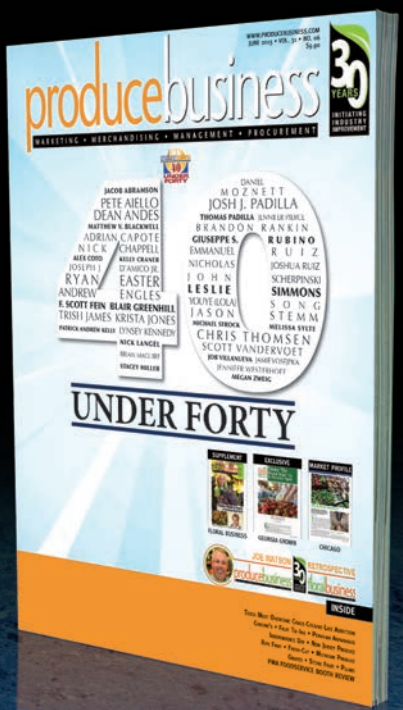
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# The X Factor In Produce

BY DON HARRIS

In the course of Monday meetings, there often is a discussion about consumer attitudes and perception of the store. The question is always asked, “How can we improve what our customers think of our store?” The discussion often centers on pricing, front-end checkout, and customer service. The discussion takes in most of the departments in the store but, notoriously, often neglects the perimeter departments. When I advised clients on how to address produce, management seemed surprised when the solution was not quality or product cost but customer service. This advice was often dismissed by management as being too expensive for the produce department, and labor costs would prohibit more personnel to be employed in the produce department. Once again management “just didn’t get it”!

Management’s equating of customer service with labor costs totally misses the point. Customer service in produce is a faceted concept that includes product knowledge, interpersonal skills, and product placement, among other things. It is proven time and again that customers react favorably to produce departments that have well-trained, knowledgeable personnel who are anxious to help them select product they may not have purchased before or are not familiar with. This concept cuts across all ethnic and income categories as well as different generations of shoppers. All customers are concerned with understanding and learning about the food (in this case, produce) that they are consuming. The more information provided to them in an interpersonal conversation represents tremendous value in terms of the store’s perception in the consumer’s mind. This simple act of talking with customers and providing them with information is what separates the truly successful produce department from all others.

In our increasingly technological world, information is becoming more valuable. The ability to research any topic quickly through mobile devices and the Internet provides all customers with as much information as they desire to utilize about their food. The X Factor making the difference to customers of all ages, income, and ethnic background is the personal contact by produce personnel. The perception formed in the produce department by personnel sets the standard for the entire store and can help elevate the total perception of the store in the consumer’s mind. Some customers may not be knowledgeable about the processes in agriculture and how products are grown, brought to market, and their usage. The

value of customer service cannot be underestimated.

While this would seem to be a simple thing to do, it is not being done by the majority of the retailers in the United States. A superior customer service program requires training, labor, and a commitment from management at every level to drive this company culture home. There are many examples in the industry of companies that mastered the delivery of superior customer service. Most of them are privately owned, middle-size and smaller chains that chose to

“invest” resources to properly train personnel and empower them to deliver superior customer service. Unfortunately many of the larger chains “talk a good game” but don’t make the strong commitment to the program or provide enough resources (labor) to make it viable and sustainable. Many times, this type of training is lost in the zeal to trim operating costs by cutting labor. But this approach is shortsighted and does not provide the customers with their major need for information on the produce they want to buy. Given the overall consumer desire to eat healthier, such information is absolutely essential to educate the customers to the benefits and multitude of uses represented by produce commodities.

As we grapple with the question of how best to attract the younger generations to the retail store and produce departments, we should re-examine the benefits of having well educated personnel in the produce department to interact with customers providing them with information and suggestions.

If allowed to take root, the rewards of a consistently delivered customer service program are substantial in terms of sales and profits, as well as improved customer perception for the produce department and the entire store — plus the benefit of customer satisfaction. It would seem that this outcome would be a very wise and prudent investment in the success of the store. Without this investment, the operation is destined to remain locked in mediocrity.

**pb**

**The perception formed in the produce department by personnel sets the standard for the entire store and can help elevate the total perception of the store in the consumer’s mind.**

*Don Harris is a 40-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@produce-business.com.*





# Lettuce And The Little Guy

BY ALAN SIGER

Let me start this month's column with a disclaimer: I am not an attorney, I don't play one on TV, and I don't believe I ever stayed at a Holiday Inn Express. I do have a sense of fair play, and I am always sensitive about protecting the "little guy" on the streets or in business.

In 1961, the USDA issued a "Good Delivery Standard" for lettuce in the Code of Federal Regulations to address condition problems faced by eastern receivers when product arrived with discoloration and/or bruising — rendering the lettuce unsalable. Lettuce is normally sold with no contract as to a U.S. Grade, so receivers at the time faced financial losses, with little recourse to the shipper, when product arrived distressed.

The standard requirement seemed like a reasonable solution to the problem. It wasn't until the mid-1970s, when members of the Central California Lettuce Producers Cooperative had problems making good delivery to eastern markets because of a tough growing season. At the time, that organization represented about two-thirds of the Salinas and adjoining Valleys' lettuce production.

In a vote, the co-op's members agreed to add the following language to their invoices: "Good delivery standards apply excluding bruising and/or discoloration following bruising." That short sentence effectively circumvented much of the protection for the buyer intended under the Good Delivery Standard.

So why am I writing now about something that happened 40 years ago? In the early 1970s, most western lettuce shipments were delivered by rail, meaning midwestern and eastern buyers were reasonably large receivers with the buying power to have leverage with suppliers when a problem occurred. Today, most western lettuce is sold to industry mega buyers (such as Wal-Mart or Costco), the national chain stores, or in smaller quantities in mixed loads to broadline distributors or smaller produce receivers.

The large volume buyers need not worry about rules or regulations when it comes to dealing with suppliers. Their buying power is such that they can reject a load at any time for any reason. Countless times over the years, my former company received loads rejected by a large buyer with instructions from the shipper not to bother getting a USDA inspection. Whether or not the rejected load made "good delivery" did not matter, because the seller would not dare anger the mega customer by disputing the rejection. It's the "little guy" (the small buyer) who has to play by the rules and who is impacted by being forced to buy product that is exempt from USDA good delivery standards.

Forcing the receiver to accept product that does not meet good

delivery standards increases shrink, which, in the end, raises the price paid by the consumer. Congress felt strongly enough about this issue to include language in the 2014 Farm Bill directing the Secretary of Agriculture to enforce Good Delivery Standards for lettuce as written. Unfortunately, the Department of Agriculture's attorneys interpret the disclaimer that's printed on every western lettuce shipper's invoice as an agreement between the buyer and seller to alter those standards. This is despite the fact that the "agreement" is imposed on the buyer with no recourse.

When the members of the Central California Lettuce Producers Cooperative got together in the 1970s to add the exclusion to bruising and discolorations to the invoices, they were protected from antitrust

laws by the Capper-Volstead Act, which provides agricultural cooperatives some exemptions from antitrust laws. Given that the cooperative today is a shadow of its former self, does this protection still exist, or are these western shippers violating antitrust regulations by continuing to stand together to circumvent the intent of the legislation?

Smaller buyers are coerced into purchasing lettuce with no protection for bruising or discoloration. Western shippers control more than 80 percent of the nation's lettuce supplies — leaving the buyer with little alternative other than to buy the product on the shipper's terms or go out of the lettuce business. To get relief, it may take a damaged party to ask the Federal Trade Commission to investigate these shippers for antitrust violations.

My guess is that after 40 years, the lettuce suppliers feel pretty comfortable in their position, and the likelihood of an investigation by the Federal Trade Commission is pretty slim. That's probably the way the members of The United Potato Growers of America (a cooperative that represents the vast majority of the United States potato acreage) felt before being slapped with a lawsuit charging the co-op and its members with violations of the Capper-Volstead Act. It will be interesting to see what happens.

pb

Smaller buyers  
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discoloration.

*Alan Siger is chairman of Siger Group LLC, offering consulting services in business strategy, logistics, and operations to the produce industry. Prior to selling Consumers Produce in 2014, Siger spent more than four decades growing Consumers into a major regional distributor. Active in issues affecting the produce industry throughout his career, Siger is a former president of the United Fresh Produce Association.*





BY JOHN GILES

# How US Exporters Can Prepare For New Competition Infiltrating Europe

The EU remains one of the largest fresh produce markets in the world. Despite the recent, and in some cases, ongoing economic challenges that have to be confronted, the EU is still a fundamentally attractive market for fresh produce suppliers around the world. This is based on the 500 million consumers found in Europe, relatively high levels of consumer affluence, and the demand for a wide range of high value and innovative fresh products.

The U.S. traditionally faces competition across a wide range of temperate product categories from other international established suppliers such as Chile, Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, Israel and South Africa, as well as from within the EU from the likes of France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

Consumers' tastes in the EU are changing however. These products can be added to a range of exotic produce sourced from suppliers such as Thailand, India, East and West Africa and the Caribbean. Overall fresh produce consumption across the EU is relatively static. What we are now seeing is the competition to supply retail and foodservice customers heating up in a way not seen before.

This is also being fuelled by the emergence of a number of newer suppliers all eager to secure a place at Europe's fresh produce table. These might include the likes of Ethiopia, Uruguay and Vietnam. It would have been not too long ago that these, and other similar emerging countries, would have been regarded as not substantial enough to supply the EU market. This perspective is beginning to change. All three have serious ambitions to develop business in Europe. While maybe not presenting a head-to-head threat to U.S. exporters, all of them will add to the multitude of supply sources and products that European buyers can now consider.

Both Vietnam and Ethiopia have large domestic markets to consider too — some 90 million in both cases. They have fast growing populations and expanding per capita incomes. Uruguay is a much smaller country with a domestic population of just some 3 million. In many ways for its industry to expand further, it has to look for new export markets.

Production in all three countries rose in the past 10 years. Vietnam's exports rose rapidly with China and the U.S., which is the prime target market to date. So far, only the Netherlands in the EU show up as an important export destination. We believe this will change in the future. Vietnam will begin to target Europe more closely with a range of Asian style vegetables and tropical fruit products.

Uruguay mainly produces apples, grapes and stone fruits, but is probably best known for its citrus and, to a lesser extent, its berry exports. Exports to the U.S. are still largely underdeveloped due to problems with non-tariff and phytosanitary barriers. The EU has been the main export market, along with Russia. Even if the situation in the U.S. market eases, Europe will still be a prime market for Uruguayan exports, which, to date, are concentrated around the U.K., the Netherlands and Spain.

Ethiopia saw its vegetable exports to the Middle East and Europe develop rapidly in the past five years. The success of its cut-flower industry is phenomenal. Ethiopia is now the fourth largest flower exporter in the world, after the Netherlands, India and Kenya. Investment in the sector has been flooding in from a combination of Europe, the Middle East and (to a lesser extent) China, as well as local entrepreneurs. There is no reason to suspect that this investment won't reach its way in the fresh produce sector in the future.

The best farms in Ethiopia are well organised and managed. While the overall enabling environment is still sometimes challenging, they can already compete effectively with other international suppliers. There will be more — not less — of them in the future. This situation is replicated in Uruguay and Vietnam where there will be more international standard produce companies in the future.

In the face of this increased competition in the EU, what do U.S. companies need to be thinking about? In many ways, the basics still apply, but just need to be worked at harder. For success in the EU, the ground rules are easy to understand. Some rules are challenging to implement but include development of the following:

- An aligned position to leading retail customers and investing on an ongoing basis in new facilities for production, procurement, storage and distribution.
- A degree of scale in business; achieve a degree of importance to the customer base, rather than being one of a number of potential suppliers from which a retailer can pick and choose.
- A capability to supply customers on an as requested basis and invest in marketing and promotional support to care for customers, and in some cases, their own brands.
- A streamlined supply chain, which removes any unnecessary costs and inefficiencies.
- High levels of environmental good practise and corporate social responsibility.

The other main implications for the U.S. are that there will be an opportunity for inward and outward trade with these markets. This should not be overlooked, nor should the potential need for U.S.-based expertise in fruit farming, post harvest skills, education, training and supply-chain technology. These components will all be in demand as these markets continue to grow rapidly. They look to play catch up with the established suppliers to the global fruit markets.

Europe, Latin America, the U.S. and Africa — now all part of an interconnected global market where what happens in one region impacts on the rest. If we didn't know this already, we better get used to it.

**pb**

*John Giles is a divisional director with Promar International, the value-chain-consulting arm of Genus plc, and a specialist in international produce markets.*



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& Co., Incorporated.....	82	718-991-2340	www.rtcocochran.com	of Agriculture.....	97	609-292-8853	www.jerseyfresh.n.j.gov
Coosemans New York, Inc.....	87	718-328-3060	www.coosemans.com	New Jersey Peach			
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	135	610-268-3043	www.countryfreshmushrooms.com	Promotion Council.....	56	973-744-6090	www.jerseypeaches.com
D'Arrigo Bros. Co.				New York Apple			
of New York.....	80-81	800-223-8080	www.darrigony.com	Association, Inc.....	69	585-924-2171	www.nyapplecountry.com
Deitz Melon Source.....	38	800-624-2123	www.cipmarket.com	New York Apple Sales, Inc.....	104	518-477-7200	www.newyorkapplesales.com
Del Monte Fresh Produce.....	180	800-950-3683	www.freshdelmonte.com	New York Produce			
Del Monte				Show And Conference.....	27	561-994-1118	www.nyproduceshow.com
Fresh Produce.....	148-149	800-950-3683	www.freshdelmonte.com	Niagara Fresh Fruit Co.....	134	716-778-7631	www.niagarafreshfruit.com
Des Moines Truck				Pacific International			
Brokers, Inc.....	165	515-981-5115	www.dmtb.com	Marketing.....	134	831-422-3745	www.pim4u.com
Dole Fresh Fruit Company.....	2	818-879-6600	www.dole.com	Pacific Tomato Growers.....	135	209-450-9810	www.sunripeproduce.com
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.....	76-77	800-333-5454	www.dole.com	Jerry Porricelli Produce.....	101	718-893-6000	www.porricelli.com
Dorot Farm.....	132	516-882-2018	www.dorotfarm.com	Produce for Better			
dProduce Man Software.....	60	888-PRODMAN	www.dproduceman.com	Health Foundation.....	162	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Eastern Produce Council.....	126	973-564-6295	www.easternproduceouncil.com	Produce Marketing Assoc.....	25	302-738-7100	www.pma.com/stories/mattm
Eastern Propak, LLC.....	134	856-881-3553	www.easternpropak.biz	Produce Pro Software.....	62	630-395-9600	www.producepro.com
Eli & Ali's Organic and				Pure Hothouse Foods, Inc.....	43	519-326-8444	www.pure-flavor.com
Specialty Produce.....	109	718-389-2100	www.eliandali.com	R Best Produce Inc.....	85	516-705-0800	www.rbest.com
Fierman Produce Exchange.....	95	718-893-1640		J. Renella Produce, Inc.....	108	718-991-4210	
Floral Business.....	9	561-994-1118	www.floralbusinessmagazine.com	Rice Fruit Company.....	132	800-627-3359	www.ricefruit.com
Fresco LLC.....	88	718-589-5000	www.frescony.com	Riviera Produce.....	129	201-227-7105	www.rivieraproduce.com
Fresh Origins, LLC.....	49	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com	RLB Food Distributors.....	125	973-575-9526	www.rlbfood.com
Fresh Origins, LLC.....	135	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com	RockHedge Herb Farm.....	135	845-677-6726	www.rockhedgeherbs.com
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Global Bloom.....	113	347-926-5500	www.globalbloom.com	Spice World, Inc.....	167	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Gourmet Specialty				Spice World, Inc.....	168	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Imports LLC.....	169	610-345-1113		Sunkist Growers, Inc.....	5	818-986-4800	www.sunkist.com
Gourmet Specialty				Target Interstate			
Imports LLC.....	132	610-345-1113		Systems, Inc.....	131	800-338-2743	www.targetinterstate.com
GPOD of Idaho.....	102	208-357-7691	www.gpodpotatoes.com	Taylor Farms.....	35	831-772-6664	www.taylorfarms.com
Grimmway Farms.....	152-153	661-845-9435	www.grimmway.com	Top Banana.....	91	718-328-6700	www.topbanananyc.com
A. Gurda Produce Farms.....	92	845-258-4422	www.agurdaproduce.com	Top Katz, LLC.....	99	718-861-1933	www.topkatz.com
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Hollandia Produce.....	154-155	805-684-4146	www.livegourmet.com	United Fresh Produce Assoc.....	54	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
Hunts Point Co-Op Assoc.....	146	718-542-2944	www.huntspointcoopmkt.com	The USA Bouquet Co.....	26	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Hunts Point Co-Op Assoc.....	144	718-542-2944	www.huntspointcoopmkt.com	Vision Import Group.....	71	201-968-1190	www.visionproduceco.com
I Love Produce LLC.....	169	610-869-4664	www.iloveproduce.com	Vision Phoenix.....	71	201-968-1190	www.visionproduceco.com
Interrupcion Fair Trade.....	103	718-417-4076	www.interrupcion.net	Western Fresh Marketing.....	173	559-662-0301	www.westernfreshmarketing.com
				Young Pecan Co.....	134	800-469-6607	www.youngpecan.com





## THE 'BLUEBERRY QUEEN'

**I**n the early 20th century, people didn't think blueberries could be domesticated, but Elizabeth White (1871 - 1954), the daughter of a New Jersey cranberry farmer, was determined to grow a flourishing industry for cultivated blueberries.

In 1911, she teamed up with USDA botanist Frederick Coville to identify wild plants with the most desirable properties, crossbreed the bushes, and create vibrant new blueberry varieties. Coville and White (pictured above in 1920) harvested and sold the first commercial crop of blueberries out of Whitesbog, NJ, in 1916.

In 2015-2016, the Folsom, CA-based U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council is commemorating the history of blueberries and the Centennial anniversary of team Coville and White.

As a young girl, White began working on her father's cranberry bogs and became his companion in exploring nature. The desire to add a second crop was mutual, and since blueberries and cranberries were in the same family, they seemed the obvious choice.

"When I was a girl, I used to hunt the largest and best-flavored

berries and dream of a field full of bushes," White once told *The National Cranberry Magazine* in a 1936 article.

Often referred to as "Blueberry Queen," White's work with Coville and beyond catapulted her into horticultural fame. During her lifetime, she would work to improve the lives of migrant workers and go on to be president of the American Cranberry Growers Association as well as the first woman recipient of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture citation.

White's legacy is alive and well and celebrated in the work of her great nephew, Joe Darlington. Darlington and his wife, Brenda operate a farm at Whitesbog Village in Pemberton Township, NJ, where they are actively cultivating the oldest field of "Elizabeth variety" blueberries.

"Elizabeth was very proud that the blueberry industry grew during the Depression, when very little else was going on," says Darlington. "She was also very proud of being the first to sell blueberries under a cellophane cover."

**pb**



# Boom



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