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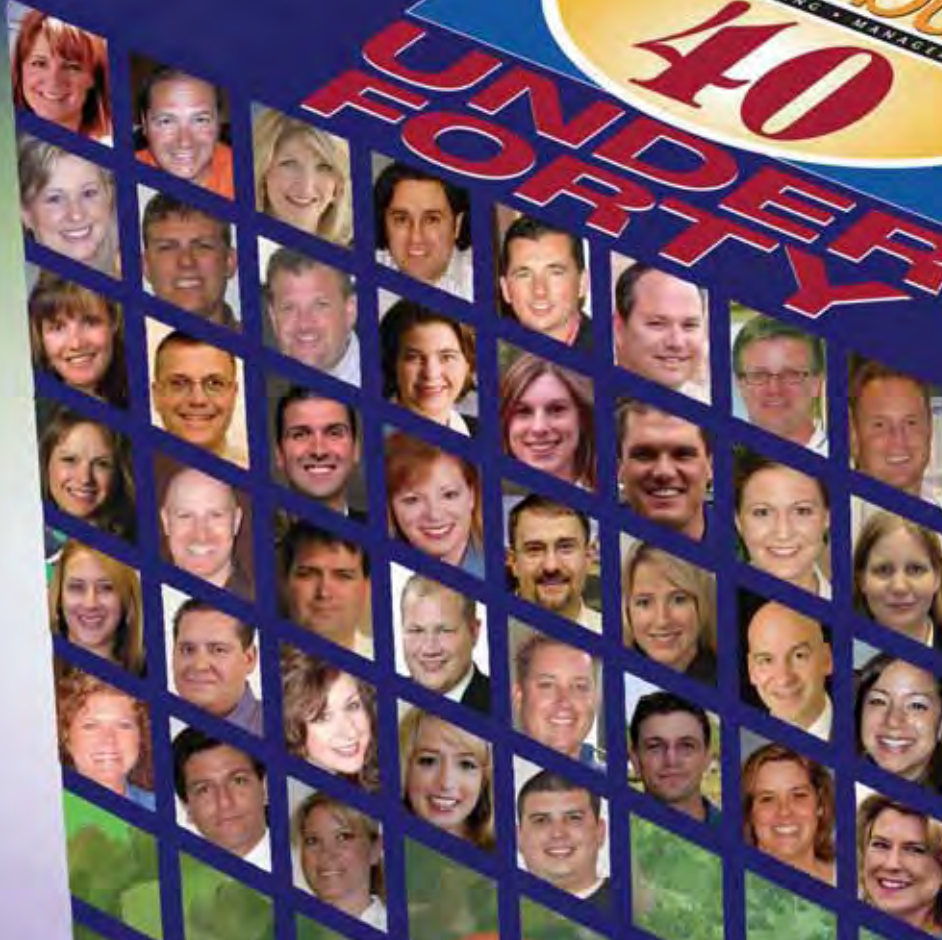
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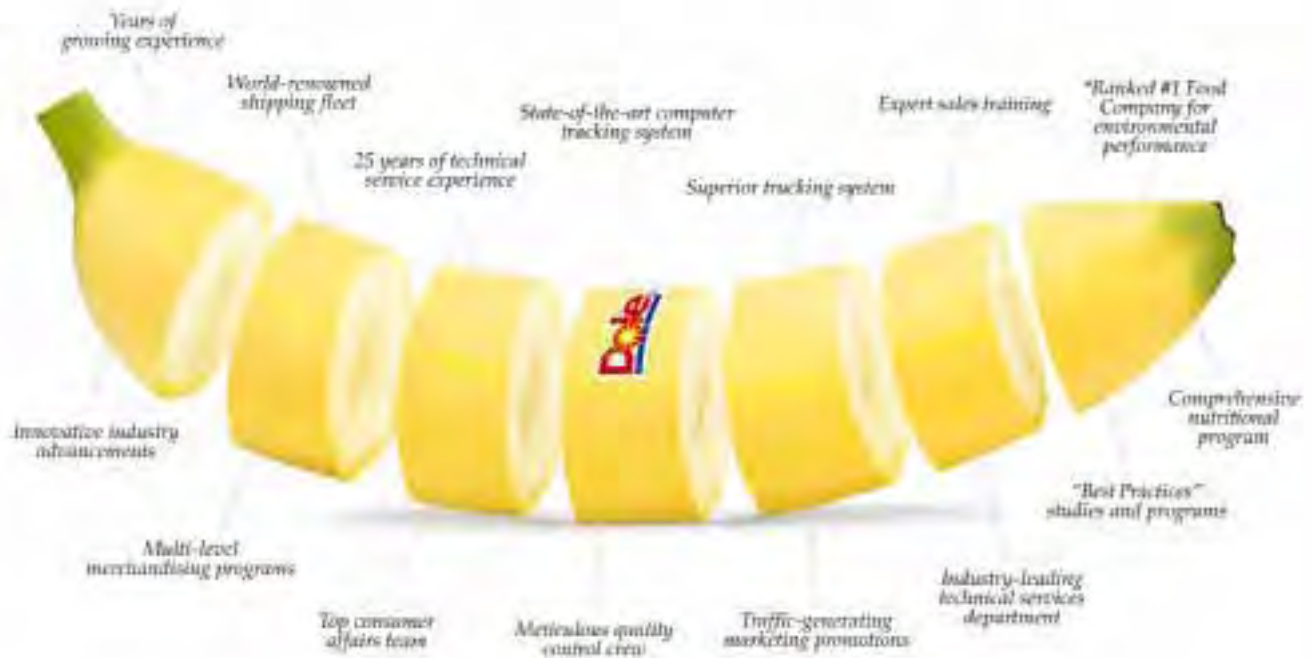


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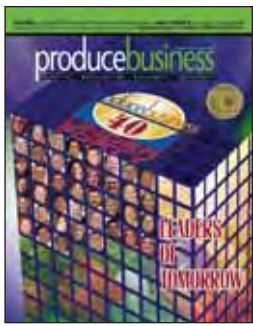
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Called "the Pulitzer Prize of business media," the prestigious Jesse H. Neal Award recognizes editorial excellence in business media. The Neal Award was presented to Jim Prevor, President/Editor-In-Chief of PRODUCE BUSINESS, for excellence in journalism by American Business Media, an association of business information companies.

PRODUCE QUIZ



THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

Andrew Felts
Sales Manager
Wileman Bros. & Elliot, Inc.
Cutler, CA

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

Wileman Bros. is a family-owned grower and packer of citrus, primarily oranges, but with some minneolas and tangerines. The company's clientele consists of retail customers, export customers, brokers and wholesalers.

Andrew joined the company four years ago, fresh out of college. His responsibilities include keeping track of inventory and managing the sales force.

He has been reading PRODUCE BUSINESS since he started in the industry. "I like to read about the current topics that face the produce industry, specifically food safety issues and new packaging ideas," he explains. "I also enjoy the spotlight articles on retailers, which provide me information about new buying trends."

As the winner of the April Quiz, Andrew wins an iPod Nano.

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- 5) What is the Web address for Litehouse? _____
- 6) What is the name of Kingsburg's limited edition apricot? _____

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Reader Service #21





WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE

A report on the inside happenings of government.

SUBMITTED BY ROBERT GUENTHER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC POLICY • UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION



Making A Difference

The debate over comprehensive immigration reform rages on in Washington, DC. Some things are not likely to change, but a breakthrough agreement reached by Republican and Democrat leaders in the U.S. Senate this May offers hope a potential solution is on the horizon to one of the most controversial and emotional issues tearing at the nation's social fabric.

Importantly, the fresh produce industry has earned a lesson to treasure — we can make a difference.

As more than 160 agricultural industry leaders flew to Washington for the Agriculture Supporting Immigration Reform national lobbying day on May 16, the deep divisions among members of the Senate remained clear. Some senators told the produce leaders gathered in their offices any pathway to earned legal status for those presently in the country illegally amounted to amnesty and they would not support such a bill. Others claimed they recognized the dire straits of the nation's fruit and vegetable farmers in trying to employ a legal workforce but stopped short of promising any real action.

But an interesting thing happened that day in more than 100 grassroots meetings between produce leaders and members of Congress — the industry members said inaction was unacceptable, and they meant it. Apple growers talked of having to leave fruit on their trees last fall. Vegetable farmers told of having to choose which crops to harvest, because they were short workers to pick them all. Produce shippers and packers told of offering wages far above minimum wage and exceeding local pay rates in other business sectors, only to find a handful of applicants for more than 100 job openings.

In a trembling voice, one leader begged for Senate action now, because they might not be in business next year to come back and ask again. Words from the heart. Words that make a difference.

Those Congressional visits alone did not force the breakthrough Senate compromise reached the very next day. Thousands of peo-

ple have been working for many years on immigration reform and will continue until a real deal is signed by the President into law. But those visits on one day in May did make a difference. Securing an agreement to meet

Produce industry members who sometimes trudge to Washington wondering whether their efforts really make a difference got a refreshing answer.

agriculture's needs was front and center in the final compromise. Sens. Diane Feinstein (D-CA) and Larry Craig (R-ID) spoke of the critical importance of AgJOBS, with pictures from their press conference on the front page of the *Washington Post*. Senators with little interest in agriculture nevertheless knew agriculture was unique and essential to forging an ultimate solution.

Less than 24 hours later, Senate leaders who had been so far apart stood together and proclaimed the virtues not only of their agreement but also of a legislative process borne of compromise and good faith for the good of the country.

"Politics is the art of the possible," said Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) at the press conference announcing the agreement. "Here on this platform are senators from different regions, different philosophical views on a wide range of issues, but we have tried, tried, tried to come together to deal with something that is of central concern to our country and our country's future. The agreement we have just reached is the best possi-

ble chance we will have in years to secure our borders and bring millions of people out of the shadows and into the sunshine of America."

From the other side of the aisle came Sen. John McCain (R-AZ). "The American people expect us to work in bipartisan fashion to resolve compelling issues that affect our nation. This is what bipartisanship is all about. When there is an issue requirement for our nation and its security that transcends party lines, I'm proud to have been a small part of it."

And for the cynics and those who have lost faith in politics as usual, Sen. Lindsay Graham (R-SC) said it well. "I have never been more proud to be a member of Congress, to be a member of the Senate. This is what my ninth grade teacher told me government was all about, and I finally got to experience it a bit."

Is the job done? Of course not. Less than an hour after these glowing remarks, the sniping began. Some politicians from the right and left railed against the compromise their friends had forged on middle ground. Television commentators spun into gear to lambaste the other side, whichever side that was, as leading the nation on a one-way path to destruction. Business, labor and religious groups hunkered down to see if they could all get just a slightly better deal in the end. The outcome is far from settled, and much work remains to secure a final solution.

But, a breakthrough occurred on two levels that day, regardless of the path ahead.

Politicians from the left and right who are regularly at each other's throats were at each other's side for a change. Ted Kennedy and John Kyl. Diane Feinstein and Saxby Chambliss. Ken Salazar and Arlen Specter. That can only bode well for the democracy.

And, produce industry members who sometimes trudge to Washington wondering whether their efforts really make a difference got a refreshing answer. Their time and energy paid off. They were heard.

That, too, can only bode well for the next produce challenge around the corner.

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Tesco's Take On American Consumers

Tesco's move into the U.S. market is different than other European operators that purchased U.S. chains as their mode of entry. Its move is also very important. As the fourth largest retailer in the world and one famed for assessing consumer needs, Tesco plans to open in America with the unique prospect of something we haven't had since Wal-Mart went into the produce business: a major new produce buyer.

In a world defined by consolidation and shrinkage in the number of buyers, this fact accounts for the enormous attention paid to Tesco's arrival here.

The long-range impact of Tesco's new venture in America will be determined by whether its new concept, Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market, is a success. It is larger and more fresh-oriented than a convenience store but smaller and more private-label-focused than a supermarket; if the concept works, not only can we expect Tesco to build thousands of them but we can also expect every other supermarket chain to build them as well.

Unlike super centers, real estate is available for these small footprint stores. If they deliver a decent ROI, we could anticipate as many as 100,000 stores across North America.

Even more important than the new concept is the thought process that seems to have driven its development. Most supermarkets have viewed the customer as one to be wooed; customers choose whether to shop at Stop & Shop or Shaws, at Von's or Ralph's, at Winn-Dixie or Publix, at Giant or Safeway.

More research and a more sophisticated understanding of the consumer indicates that this either/or model is not capturing the dynamic nature of consumer shopping patterns. This is especially true in light of the plethora of concepts available. Consumers can load up at a warehouse club, plan for a blizzard at a super center, go upscale at a Food Emporium or Balducci's, do good for the planet at Whole Foods, get some Latin flavor at Publix Sabor, buy specialty foods on-line, use an Internet service to get groceries delivered — not to mention pick up certain items everywhere from convenience stores to drug stores to gas stations. And also go to the supermarket.

The insight in store planning Fresh & Easy represents is to stop thinking about winning over the customer and start thinking about winning over certain shopping experiences from the customer.

Consumers don't choose formats as if they are obligated to enter into an alliance with one. Instead they have different moments when they need different things. Some are simple and regular — the stock-up and top-off trips. Others are more complex and episodic — for example, a big dinner party shopping trip.

The key today is not so much to focus on "who" shops the store — the demographics and psychographics we have been looking at for years. The key is to look at "why" consumers shop your store.

This is more actionable for retailers and suppliers. Wanting

women 18-40 to shop a store or buy a product is interesting but doesn't really provide a guide of what to do. Looking at your own store and own shoppers and identifying a few key shopping experiences that draw people allows the creation of layouts and products that can make the store a "killer application" in serving that need.

It seems likely Tesco's concept was to develop an extraordinary application for the fill-in shopping market. U.S. convenience stores, so oriented toward blue-collar males with their emphasis on tobacco, beer and quantity of food, do not fit this need. Supermarkets meet it but with many frustrations because they are designed to encourage stock-up shopping.

Drawing on the consumer insight gained through its Dunnhumby partnership, Tesco has designed a store focused on delighting a consumer looking for fresh foods fill-ins and a fresh dinner tonight.

There are still more questions than answers. For one we don't know how produce-centric the concept will be. Our understanding is prepared foods and private label are likely to drive the concept and offer major differentiation from conventional supermarkets.

We don't know if the concept will work. It is unclear if those who want to pick up dinner wouldn't rather get curbside pickup at a popular chain, fast food or delivery of pizza or Chinese.

It is also true that lower U.S. population densities may make it difficult to turn the prepared foods sufficiently to sustain a large and appealing selection. Without that broad selection, the Tesco concept may lose its main draw.

Even if the concept succeeds, it is not clear Tesco will win. When Wal-Mart launched its super center concept, something unusual happened: Nobody really competed. Other vendors of food felt incompetent to start selling so much general merchandise, and other general merchandise retailers felt hesitant about a large move into lower-margin food. So Wal-Mart had the playing field to itself.

That is unlikely to happen simply because Kroger, Safeway, Supervalu and others are already selling all the same products.

Still and all, the opening of Tesco's Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market in the second half of 2007 will be the seminal moment for a new way of approaching retail and product development.

From now on, retailers' focus will be identifying the occasions that consumers use their stores for and then designing and stocking the stores to make those particular experiences exceptionally good.

Producers will have to offer products that reinforce these exceptional experiences retailers are trying to create. This means fresh-cut items and proprietary produce must be developed from inception in a collaboration between retailer and producer to satisfy particular consumer needs.

Tesco is spending a lot of money on something that may fail. But its efforts give us a thought process that will transform the trade. **pb**

There are still more questions than answers.

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Reader Service # 60



Reach Out And Touch Someone

Because of my line of work, food shopping is not a chore. I enjoy seeing how different produce retailers can offer similar wares, and I try to intuit shoppers' decision-making as they shop one display but bypass another. I also watch retailers' staff at work.

Back home, we shop a few stores in our area. We frequent the same stores because of their location and the service we receive, in addition, of course, to their variety and high-quality offerings. Those stores are rewarded with my family's repeat business.

After focusing on topics involving current events such as food safety over the past few months, Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) latest consumer survey returned to a topic near and dear to me because it can make such a difference to sales: customer service in the produce department. In late March, Opinion Dynamics Corporation surveyed 1,000 primary shoppers for us by telephone on this subject.

Shoppers generally have a favorable opinion of the service they receive from their local supermarket produce department, although there is plenty of room for improvement. Sixty-four percent positively rate the service they receive; 34 percent give the highest possible rating. While some readers may be satisfied with those numbers, I see much opportunity to better satisfy customers. And that means increased produce sales.

For customers to be wowed, they must first be "touched" — by product offerings or by service or, preferably, by both. When asked what characteristics best define a good produce department experience, shoppers point to the people as well as the produce. They most highly rated product freshness, variety and selection, department cleanliness, staff courteousness and low prices, respectively.

When asked to tell us what they look for from produce department staff, our respondents ranked staff's knowledge of freshness, produce in general, quality and availability as most important. Shoppers who give their produce department service a neutral (21 percent) or negative (8 percent) rating similarly

echoed the same sentiments. They reported they want improved service, better selection/variety, fresher produce, lower prices and better quality — but apparently they aren't getting it, unlike their fellow respondents who gave us a positive rating.

Perhaps one reason produce retailers don't earn stellar marks for service is because most shoppers don't interact very much, if at all, with produce staff. Almost half of shoppers surveyed reported they have no contact at all with their produce department staff. Meanwhile, only 17 percent reported some degree of contact and less than 10 percent report they have a lot of interaction.

Isn't it strange that the produce department, the place where stores have the highest level of "high touch" in product offerings, often does so little to reach out and touch its customers? Why do we allow so many of our employees to work with a focus on the shelves, avoiding eye contact with customers, intent mostly on stocking, not on selling? Why do we settle for mediocre performance in selling products whose sales can be driven so much through proactive customer service?

Touching customers has both intangible and tangible value. Our research shows that it not only helps promote customers' loyalty and goodwill, but it also has a very real impact at the cash register. Almost half of shoppers who have some interaction with staff report they are "somewhat" to "much more" likely to buy more fruits and vegetables based on that interaction. If our retailers can engage a fraction of those shoppers who said they had no contact with produce department staff at all, they will foster customer relationships that can also be measured in dollars and cents.

Our survey looked at one particular touch-point opportunity: taste testing. While consumers typically report that taste is the most important reason they buy fruits and vegetables, many of our shoppers (64 percent) report their stores don't offer taste-testing. The shoppers also told us tastings encourage them to increase their purchases. Among those who do have access to tasting, 55 percent report they are somewhat to much more likely to buy

Almost half of shoppers surveyed reported they have no contact at all with their produce department staff.

more fresh fruits and vegetables when tasting is offered.

Just as importantly, even those who don't have access to taste-testing said they would be more likely to increase their purchases if tasting were offered. In addition to reducing the risk consumers may feel about buying a produce item new to them, taste-testing gives produce department staff an opportunity to connect with their customers about any and all things produce. Anyone who eavesdrops on tasting conversations, as I do, knows how often shoppers seize that opportunity to approach staff with other produce questions. A bond is built, a relationship created, a value added. Suddenly we're no longer just in the commodity business.

An investment in customer service training and produce education can pay for itself in short order through higher per-trip sales and return business. Savvy retailers know this well, and best-of-class stores are living proof that customer interaction and taste-testing are activities with a very definite return on investment. I encourage retailers who want to equip their produce staff to deliver a higher level of customer service to contact PMA's education department for assistance. We are now developing some new associate training tools designed to meet this specific need; stay tuned for more information in the future.



Solutions Go Beyond Staffing

It has been said the difference between elections and capitalism is that while elections will tell you what most people want, capitalism will tell you what people want most. Thus we confront a limitation on the power of consumer surveys that, roughly speaking, translates into this: The answer you get depends on the question you ask.

If we ask consumers whether they like uniformed gas station attendants who pump gas upon arrival, people may say yes. Whether they would patronize gas stations with that service — and a correspondingly higher price — is another matter entirely.

Questions about consumer satisfaction produce results that are as indicative of how low we have set the bar of consumer expectations as of how good a job we are doing.

The past 15 years have seen an explosion in the growth of low-service retail concepts such as warehouse clubs and super centers. Most conventional supermarkets have cut back on produce department man-hours, even as departments have expanded in both square footage and number of items carried.

This didn't happen by mistake; the logical conclusion is that when confronted with real life choices, the great mass of consumers, whatever their abstract preferences, prefer low prices to more manpower in the department.

There are exceptions, of course. An explosion of high-end concepts, natural- and organic-based concepts, specialized ethnic concepts, new convenience-oriented concepts and more indicates a substantial market for high-service concepts — but we shouldn't kid ourselves. Fifteen years ago, there weren't 200 stores in the whole country we would recognize as a super center; today there are over 3,000. The tens of millions of people voting with their dollars in those stores every week are telling us something.

It is often easy to forget about these stores as their basic approaches are boring. They don't get cover stories in trade magazines and seminars and workshops at conventions and industry functions. How much more interesting to profile the retailer growing his own herbs hydroponically in the window and fea-

turing a juice bar with 200 produce items grown on the roof!

Now the research reminds us of something important as well — that people react to being “touched.” The mistake all too often made in the industry is to think that the only solution is more staff, and since they rarely get the budget for that, the retailers do nothing.

For 19 years, PRODUCE BUSINESS has produced an annual special report entitled *The Mystery Shopper Report*. We send undercover sleuths into departments across the land and ferret out what actual consumers experience.

Some stores do an excellent job, yet, by and large, 19 years of experience studying these reports teaches us staffing has severe limitations as an answer to this problem:

First, very often staff is not there. Many stores are now open 24 hours, and during many hours, the stores operate with a skeleton staff or no dedicated produce staff at all.

Second, even if staff is there, the number of hours in the department is so low it is all they can do to keep the shelves stocked. Managers increasingly complain they have no time to train or manage because they, themselves, have to replenish all day long.

Third, there can be a language barrier. If the clerks don't speak the language of the customers, it is hard to get quality interaction.

Fourth, the quality of interaction is irregular. Over the 19 years of the report, we have received wonderful spot-on information and horrible, incorrect advice that could even damage people's health if it were followed.

It is wonderful PMA will offer new training tools. Of course, we need to train our people better. Yet we also need to look at alternative means of interacting with customers.

In the age of the Internet, why rely on an associate's memory of a particular product or the best advice for someone looking for something specific? There is something almost bizarre that every supermarket does not have available for customer use, both in store and at home, all this information, plus recipes, nutritional data and more.

Getting the customer to taste the product shouldn't depend on the happenstance of a

Of course, we need to train our people better. Yet we also need to look at alternative means of interacting with customers.

consumer interacting with an associate and asking for or being offered a taste.

Sampling and demos have always been hindered by the commodity nature of produce. Retailers have tended to rely on vendors to offer free product for sampling and demo and often to pay for the staffing, insurance and other expenses. Some retailers have even made doing demos a kind of profit center.

Many of these in produce have been paid for by ancillary product vendors. Why? Simple — a salad dressing is a unique product and consumers are likely to look for the brand if they really liked that particular dressing.

On the other hand, apple shippers were hesitant to pay for demos because they have no way of knowing if the store will carry their product next week, and consumers are unlikely to seek out a particular trade brand.

We are at the threshold of a new day in marketing produce. Retailers need new varieties and packs to distinguish their stores from competitors; shippers are producing proprietary items to prevent being caught up in an oversupply of commodity produce and to capture the value of promotional expenditures.

Together, retailers and vendors now have interests congruent enough to join together in an aligned supply chain to provide consumers with intriguing and exceptional product. Add a little technology to the store, upgrade training to capitalize on this plethora of product, and we will touch enough to get them reaching for their wallets.

**READY PAC FOODS, INC.,
IRWINDALE, CA**

Robert Spence has joined the company as division vice president, retail sales, and is responsible for development of business in multiple central and western U.S. markets. He also serves on the UFPA Marketing Committee, PMA RFID Committee as Chair and PBH Marketing Committee as Chair.



Tip Murphy has joined the company as division vice president, retail sales, and is responsible for development of business in multiple east central and northeast U.S. markets. He spent 13 years with Chiquita and most recently Paganini Foods. He is currently a member of the PMA board of directors.



Scott Harrington has joined the company as vice president, business development, with a focus on new channel development and key customers in the Southwest. He has a strong history of industry service having been involved with UFPA, ALA/Southern California for DeCa and the Fresh Produce and Floral Council of Southern California.



Tammy Gainey has joined the company as national account director. She will be located in Bentonville, AR, and will report to Robert Spence.



Brian Orr has joined the company as national account director. He will be located in Pleasanton, CA, and will report to Alan Ediger.



FRESHWAY FOODS, SIDNEY, OH

Dale Chase is the company's new director of retail development. He will focus his efforts on growing Freshway's retail division by developing specific sales strategies aimed at introducing new lines of products into the retail channels. He has over 20 years of experience with an extensive background in marketing, sales and forecasting.



Alex Coles is the company's new director of supply chain/food safety. He will be based in Sanford, FL, where he will develop and implement advanced food safety initiatives and procedures. He has over 12 years of experience in HACCP development and implementation, microbiology, sanitation, label compliance and sensory analysis.



Larry Barton is the company's new director of international supply chain development. He will be based in Mexico and will focus on expanding Freshway's Mexico and Central America grower relationships, optimizing food safety and product specifications. He has over 17 years of quality control and total quality experience in the food industry.



**DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES,
WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA**

Russell Evans has joined the company as a senior marketing manager. He will be responsible for leading all marketing activities for the packaged salads product category throughout North America. He has more than 10 years of professional marketing experience, with his most recent position as director, Cambridge Innovation Center.



**AMERLUX LIGHTING SOLUTIONS,
FAIRFIELD, NJ**

Sam Newberry has been promoted to vice president of sales. He will be in charge of overall sales and the national sales team and overseeing development of relationships with national accounts, distributors and specifiers. He was previously Amerlux vice president of national account sales and has over 12 years of lighting industry experience.



**TAVILLA SALES CO. OF
LOS ANGELES, LOS ANGELES, CA**

Robert Stauffer has been promoted to executive vice president and general manager. He joined the company in 1987 and has managed the vegetable department for the past 10 years. He will be responsible for the daily tasks of running the company.



**NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE, TRENTON, NJ**

Emma Davis-Kovacs has been named director of the Division of Food and Nutrition after serving as its acting director for eight months. She has been with the state for 27 years, serving in the Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, first in the New Jersey Department of Education and in the Department of Agriculture since 1999.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

SUN PACIFIC JOINS CALIFORNIA TOMATO FARMERS
The newly formed California Tomato Farmers, Fresno, CA, announces the addition of Sun Pacific, Exeter, CA, to its list of existing grower/owners. California Tomato Farmers membership includes the state's most reputable family-farming business and represents nine out of every 10 tomatoes grown in California.



Reader Service No. 300

GIUMARRA IMPORTS NEW ZEALAND CITRUS

The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, will be importing New Zealand citrus for the first time now that the U.S. market is open. It will focus on Satsuma mandarins and Yen Ben lemons, among other varieties. The Satsumas will be available through early July. Yen Ben is unique to New Zealand. Both are post-harvest chemical free.



Reader Service No. 301

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

WATERMELONS AND WUMBLERS

The National Watermelon Association (NWA), Plant City, FL, has partnered with The Giddy Gander Co. to sponsor *The Wumblers*, a pre-school television series that will begin airing this fall on Trinity Broadcasting (TBN). The cartoon series was developed for pre-school children and will teach kids about healthful eating and good nutrition while making it fun.



Reader Service No. 302

GIANT HAS FAMILY-SIZE CONTAINERS

California Giant, Watsonville, CA, has developed new packaging options to reduce costs and increase efficiencies, including a new packaging mix for 4-pound clamshells. The new Master Container conforms to modular 5-down footprint and holds three 4-pound clamshells. When palletized, the new containers will hold 330 clamshells per pallet.



Reader Service No. 304

LATINO SHOPPING GUIDE FROM OLDWAYS

Latino Nutrition Coalition (LNC) and its parent company, Oldways Preservation Trust, Boston, MA, have launched *Camino Mágico*, designed to help Latinos eat more healthfully based on traditional Latino eating patterns. The pocket-sized bilingual guide includes the recently redesigned Latin American Diet Pyramid and other helpful information.



Reader Service No. 306

NEW ONION COMPANY

A merger of American Onion, Inc. and Rivergate Farms, LLC, both of Hermiston, OR, with a major interest purchased by CIC Partners, Dallas, TX, has created River Point Farms, Hermiston, OR, a new onion company. River Point Farms provides a year-round supply of whole and processed onions to foodservice, restaurant and retail customers.



Reader Service No. 308

ORGANIC PACKAGING PROGRAM

Earthcycle Packaging, Vancouver, BC, Canada, announces that Four Seasons Produce Inc., Ephrata, PA, will use Earthcycle's signature compostable produce trays for its entire organic packaging program. The packaging is made of palm fiber, an agricultural biomass that composts in less than 90 days, turning it into a healthy contribution to the soil.



Reader Service No. 310

PARADISE BRANDED TROPICALS

Southern Specialties, Pompano Beach, FL, has launched its Paradise tropicals line, which includes mangos, papayas, avocados and limes, with more products to be added later. An eye-catching new box and PLU sticker for each Paradise product feature hot colors that attract consumers and evoke a sense of the tropics.



Reader Service No. 312

NEW STRAWBERRY PACKAGING

Well-Pict Inc, Watsonville, CA, has introduced a new packaging configuration for its 4-pound strawberry clamshells. At 35 percent more unit density, the new clamshells will help retailers and consumers by achieving cheaper freight rates and reduced fuel usage without compromise in product volume or safety.



Reader Service No. 314

PISTACHIO DISPLAY CONTEST

Paramount Farms, Inc., Bakersfield, CA, is offering the Sunkist pistachios *Fuel Up and Win* display contest, beginning June 18. The creator of the winning display will receive a grand prize trip for two to the 2008 Pepsi 400 at Daytona schedules for July 5, 2008. Five first prizes will receive a \$1000 Visa gift card.



Reader Service No. 316

DOUBLE OZONE WASH PROCESS

Certified Pack, Nogales, AZ, offers an environmentally friendly double ozone wash process for produce distributed through its warehouse. Efficacy studies have verified a 99.9999 percent eradication rate of harmful microorganisms including *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus*, *E. coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Trichophyton*, *Listeria*, *Brettanomyces* and anthrax.



Reader Service No. 303

**RICHARD E. RYAN
CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY**

Richard E. Ryan & Associates, Ltd., Toronto, ON, Canada, is starting its 25th year in business. Its success rests on its strong supplier and customer relationships. Many customers and suppliers have been dealing with the firm since its inception, a testament to the service and integrity of the people at the company.



Reader Service No. 305

SK FOODS BUYS SALYER

Scott Salyer, CEO of SK Foods, Monterey, CA, has become the sole owner of Salinas, CA-based Salyer American Fresh Foods, established 20 years ago by the Salyer family. Salyer American Fresh Foods, one of the largest fresh produce suppliers to corporate and retail customers nationwide, will become a division of SK Foods.



Reader Service No. 307

CHERRY VIDEO "WEBISODE"

The California Cherry Advisory Board, Lodi, CA, is offering a "You Tube-like" video movie that is both entertaining and informative. It uses "rocket science" to convey a very simple message about how cherry sales can be expanded astronomically by making a simple change to the produce department's display allocation.



Reader Service No. 309

APPLESWEETS SNACKS FROM STEMILT

Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, WA, introduces a new line of sliced apples. Applesweets contain all-naturally flavored slices that taste like caramel candy or wild berry lollipops, but with no additional calories or fat. Unflavored Tart Applesweets, made from Granny Smith apples, and Sweet Applesweets, made from Gala apples, are also part of the line.



Reader Service No. 311

ASIAN MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

Decofrut, Santiago, Chile, has three new offices located in Hong Kong, Guangzhou (Canton) and Taiwan, and it hopes to open additional offices in Japan and Korea. The Asian market represents important commercial opportunities for the fruit export industry, with last season registering a 14.8 percent growth.



Reader Service No. 313

2007/2008 ASPARAGUS OUTLINE

The Peruvian Asparagus Importer's Association (PAIA), Philadelphia, PA, is now distributing the *2007/2008 Category Management Plan Outline* for Fresh Peruvian Asparagus. The outline identifies market growth and trends, industry facts and information to aid retailers in the marketing and promotion of Peruvian asparagus.



Reader Service No. 315

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

Ready Pac, Irwindale, CA, has received a strategic investment from Miami, FL-based Bayside Capital, a leading private equity firm specializing in acquisitions and recapitalizations of middle market businesses. The investment will allow Ready Pac to accelerate bringing its high-quality innovative new products to market.



Reader Service No. 317

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



TRUE CONFESSIONS OF A CONFERENCE JUNKIE

BY JOHN PANDOL

I go to 'em all — conferences, seminars, webinars, symposia, presentations, workshops, retreats, summits, speeches, short courses and training classes. I suffer from a paranoid compulsion that I might be missing something. I buy the recordings and actually listen to them. I attend trade shows of tangentially related industries to pick up little bits of insight. I've gone to meetings of other industries just to benchmark the meetings available to produce people.

I usually learn something at these events. Often you look at your business in a different light and see something that was previously overlooked. Every speaker has something worthwhile and you pick up a cute quote or two. That is known as a 'the takeaway.' But once in a great while, there is an event that just rocks your world, the kind of event that causes you to tell yourself, "I'm coming back and I'm bringing staff with me."

The recent PMA Consumer Trends Conference in Charlotte, NC, was like that for me.

Many of us spend so much time doing the business that we have no time to think about the business. We get bogged down in the transactional details and operations, running gun battles from our little fox-holes in the supply chain. After all, there are crops to harvest, produce to pack, PO's to get, orders to cover, bird dogs to placate, trucks to load, bills to collect and account sales to render. We spend all this time and energy worrying about the gatekeepers but we forget what is past the gate. Consumers — duh!

Yes, the consumer. A few hundred of what I am proud to call thoughtful colleagues showed up — and I really mean showed up — in Charlotte to talk about consumers. People were there when it started and most stayed to the end. I saw no one, retailers included, who tried to hide their identity by turning their badge around. Most attended the networking receptions. Charlotte is a fine city but there is nothing



special about Charlotte, and that is exactly the point. This event could have taken place in any of a hundred cities at a hotel or college. We were produce professionals in a big room listening to ideas and then produce people discussing them in small rooms. All those 'destination' distractions — the rooms with a view, the 5-star restaurants, the world-class shopping and the PGA event golf courses — were absent. It was lecture, then lab, then back to the lecture hall.

So what did we talk about? The Consumer — duh! The turn-ons and the turn-offs. What drives their passion and what drives them away? Do they like a big store where they can buy cooking oil and motor oil on the same trip or not? How do we get from satisfied to loyal? Is a brand the product, the label or the experience, and does the consumer even care? What drives kids and the moms who buy for them? How does a retailer approach these concepts and how should a grower/shipper customize his offer for a given retailer's business model and execution capability? And get this — you're having this conversation in a room with 30 people who are up on their game, and it's being lead by a retailer and a foodservice buyer!

I find great merit and much to recommend in these smaller, more focused meetings. My evaluation forms at the larger trade events have run more critical than congratulatory, but I have nothing but praise for the PMA Consumer Trends Conference. To use one of the takeaway terms, I believe I am becoming a brand evangelist.

pb

Once in a great while, there is an event that just rocks your world, the kind of event that causes you to tell yourself, "I'm coming back and I'm bringing staff with me."

JOHN PANDOL IS IN CHARGE OF SPECIAL PROJECTS AND MEXICAN SOURCING FOR PANDOL BROTHERS CO., DELANO, CA.

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Reader Service # 59

Honoring Front Line Personnel Through Display Contests And Awards



From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, May 4, 2007

One of the time-honored methods for attracting retail attention and boosting visibility and sales, especially during a slow time of the year, is the retail display contest.

One of the biggest around is hosted each year by the Idaho Potato Commission. Now the winner's are in:

2000 RETAILERS GET CREATIVE FOR CHANCE TO WIN A SHARE OF MORE THAN \$150,000 IN CASH – AND MERCHANDISE PRIZES 2007 Potato Lovers Month Retail Display Contest Winners Announced!

EAGLE, IDAHO, May 2, 2007 — Retailers love their spuds and from the contest entries received, it's evident that February is, without a question, Potato Lovers Month. The Idaho Potato Commission's (IPC) Retail Display Contest received 2,000 entries this year and awarded more than \$150,000 in cash and merchandise prizes to retailers across the country. This year, everyone won! Every qualified entrant received a free MP3 Digital Music player, a \$70 value!

February is typically a slow time of year for potato sales and this unique contest, which is in its 16th year, has become increasingly popular among retailers. In just the past three years, an average of over 2,000 stores have participated in this contest annually. For thirteen years prior, the average was barely 600 entries each year.

"The growth and popularity of this contest is unbelievable. The spike in interest is largely due to the fact that the contest is easy to enter, it's fun, everyone wins a prize and it helps boost sales during a slow time of the year," said Seth Pemsler vice president, retail/international, IPC. "However, if this contest continues to grow at its current pace, February may no longer be a slow sales month for Idaho Potatoes."

CREATIVITY IS KEY

While many displays featured the IPC's famous Spuddy Buddy mascot, a few retailers went over-the-top with themed displays like "Dancing With the Spuds" and one carefully fashioned in the shape of the state of Idaho.

"This year we are particularly impressed with the quality of the entries — the retailers pulled out all stops and created some very eye-catching and unique displays," said Pemsler. "No matter how creative a display is though, it has to sell product and that's not always easy to do. However, this year, retailers accomplished both."

In addition to Idaho Potatoes appearing front and center in all displays entered, long-time partners (and potato topping favorites) Kraft Cheese Whiz, Kraft 100% Grated Parmesan Cheese and Oscar Mayer Real Bacon Bits were also included prominently in the displays.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

More than 150 prizes totaling more than \$150,000 were awarded across three general categories: Display Winners (broken down into three categories based on number of cash registers at each store), Military (East Coast and West Coast) and Ad Overlay Contest. [Photographs of all the winning entries are available on the IPC Web site.]

Thousands of dollars in prize money were awarded to the top five Display Winners in three different store categories (with matching category manager prizes), plus \$100 each to 100 honorable mention winners. The following individuals and stores received first place awards in the Display Contest categories:

1-5 CASH REGISTERS	6-9 CASH REGISTERS	10+ CASH REGISTERS
1st Place Jeff Stewart	1st Place Donna Shuey	1st Place Brett Reed
\$1,250	\$1,250	\$1,250
Piggly Wiggly Bonifay, FL	Sloane's Signature Mkt Jackson, KY	Hy-Vee Food Stores Windsor Heights, IA



This winning display, showcasing the healthy attributes of Idaho Potatoes, won first place in the 10+ Cash Registers Category. The entry was submitted by Brett Reed of Hy-Vee Food Stores in Windsor Heights, IA, who received \$1,250.

Continued on page 18



Turn Your Marketing Into An **Awarding** Experience

Right now, and on through July 7, 2007, we're taking entries for the **19th Annual Marketing Excellence Awards Program**, presented by **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. The awards recognize excellence in marketing in each of five categories: retailers, restaurants, wholesalers, shippers, and commodity organizations. Print, broadcast and other media are eligible to win.

To participate, send us the following:

1. Your name, company, address and phone.
2. Type of business.
3. Names and dates of promotion (must have taken place between June 1, 2006 and May 31, 2007).
4. Promotion objectives.
5. Description of promotion.
6. Promotion results (sales or traffic increases, media attention).
7. All support materials used in the promotion – such as POP, ads, posters, TV commercials.

2006 Marketing Excellence Award Winners

Albert's Organics • Calavo Growers, Inc.
CA Tree Fruit Agreement • Campari Marketing Group
Carl's Jr. • Columbia Marketing International (CMI)
Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc.
Desert Glory, Ltd — Naturesweet Tomatoes
Diamond Foods • Family Tree Farms
FL Tomato Committee • The Giumarra Companies
Grimmway Farms • Idaho Potato Commission
J. Kings Food Service Professionals
Litehouse Foods and Rainier Fruit Company • Litehouse Foods
Mann Packing Company, Inc. • Mastronardi Produce Ltd.
Melissa's/World Variety Produce., Inc.
NJ Department of Ag. • NM Department of Ag.
NC Department of Ag. • Sammy Fruits S.A.
Stemilt Growers, Inc. • Sunrise Growers
TX Department of Ag. • Vidalia Onion Committee
La Tienda Thriftway/Fenn Foods Inc.

Send entries to:

PRODUCE BUSINESS MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARDS

P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425

Deadline for entries is July 7, 2007

For additional information, call: 561-994-1118, Ext. 101

Continued from page 16



This Idaho Potato display, featuring a potato heart for Potato Lover's Month, was a winning display! It was submitted by Jon Duff of Hy-Vee Food Stores in Maryville, MO.

The following individual/store received the first place award for the Ad Overlay Contest category:



AD OVERLAY CONTEST
1st Place — Jeff Stewart
\$1,250 — Piggly Wiggly, Bonifay, FL

For a complete list of winners and a breakdown of how the prizes were awarded, please see available on the IPC Web site.

THE CONTEST

The contest was open to retail supermarket chains and independents only. Displays had to be in place for at least one week during the January 23 — February 27, 2007, contest period, set up in the produce section of the store and include the following: fresh Idaho Potatoes (bag/bulk or both) that have a clearly discernable label showing the Idaho name and the Grown in Idaho seal; a clearly marked Idaho dehydrated potato product; and two of the following three items, Kraft Cheese Whiz, Kraft 100% Grated Parmesan Cheese and Oscar Mayer Real Bacon Bits.

Entries were judged by the Potato Lovers Month Retail Display Contest review committee on the following criteria: use of Potato Lover's Month signage; creativity of the display; how the display incorporates the partner products; perceived success in generating incremental sales for those products; and, perceived impact on the produce section and the store.

MORE ON THIS YEAR'S CONTEST

Overall, the contest generated entries from supermarkets of all sizes and from all corners of the country — each using existing and customized point-of-sale materials and recipes to drive sales of Idaho Potatoes and the participating Kraft products.

Due to the success of this year's promotion, Kraft has already agreed to partner with the IPC in the 17th annual Potato Lover's Month Retail Display Contest in 2008.

These types of contests are more important than is often understood. Some large chains won't participate because basically they don't allow their store level people to do more than follow a plan-o-gram. (To its credit, however, Kroger runs a separate competition within the Idaho Potato Commission contest.)

The problem with this approach is that most people with the creativity needed to manage staff and handle relations with store managers, etc., won't enjoy working under these conditions.

Managing a produce department may not be the most elevated position in the community, but it's their gig and if you want decent people to take the job, you have to give them a chance to do something great once in a while. The Pundit doesn't know Donna Shuey, but she did this *Dancing with the 'Spuds* display at Sloane's Signature Market in Jackson, KY, and she went home the night that picture was taken knowing she did something great. And so she did.



Donna Shuey, Sloane's Signature Market, Jackson, KY.

Every opportunity we have as an industry to encourage creativity and leadership among the front line troops interacting with consumers is a great thing. So kudos to the Idaho Potato Commission for sponsoring such an event.

And for those in Chicago... for United, [I hope you stopped by to] salute the winners of the 2007 Retail Produce Managers Award sponsored by Ready Pac. Take a look at the winners from 2006 and 2005 on the United Fresh Produce Association Web site.

Sure the Idaho Potato Commission wants to sell potatoes, Ready Pac has fresh-cuts to move, but both ventures focus on the place where the consumer meets the produce — and that is an excellent place for the produce industry to be. **pb**

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40
UNDER FORTY

Winners of our third annual 40-Under-Forty Awards Program should be truly honored because they were chosen by industry mentors. PRODUCE BUSINESS conducted an extensive, widespread search throughout the industry to elicit nominations for top young industry leaders under the age of 40. The search involved fax and e-mail broadcasts to thousands of executives, consultants, associations and universities as well as intensive networking and phone interviews.

We had far more nominations than we could use. Individual candidates were contacted to highlight their key company, industry and community accomplishments, sharing meaningful examples of how they have been leaders in the industry, as well as their future goals and aspirations.

If you were not chosen this year or if you nominated someone who was not selected, please understand that the process was highly competitive, and we encourage you to re-submit updated nominations for next year's competition. We encourage everyone to alert PRODUCE BUSINESS of well-deserving candidates and to help praise and support future produce movers and shakers as we look forward to honoring 40 new 40-Under-Forty leaders in 2008.

Profiles by Jodean Robbins



Nelia Alamo

Nelia Alamo, 32
*Director of Sales & Marketing
Gills Onions, LLC
Oxnard, CA*

With Gills Onions for over 10 years, Alamo has worked in many different areas of the company and contributed to its success and evolution. Working at the field level, packaging, sales and marketing have given her a better understanding of the company.

She served on the board of the International Fresh-Cut Produce Association (IFPA) and now the United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA) as well as the Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH). "It is so important to get involved with the organizations supporting and promoting our industry."

She served as chair of her local Cal Poly Alumni Association for two years and is involved in the local chapter of California Women for Agriculture. With two children at home, she spends a good deal of time being involved in their school and extra curricular activities.

Produce has been a passion in her family for many generations. "It is unique because we are dealing with a highly perishable product," she explains, "but there are many wonderful bene-

fits. Produce and specifically Gills Onions have become so much of who I am. I love our company and the foundation it was built on. The quality of the people and products inspires me. I am motivated by the future of this industry, especially the fresh-cut segment."

Her biggest mentor is her father Steve Gill. "He has given me opportunity to be a part of this industry. He is a great inspiration for the way he conducts business. He is very personable and has always given opportunities to all his employees. He is willing to listen to everyone. He is a great leader and businessman and I feel fortunate to be a part of what he's involved in.

"Lorri Koster of Mann Packing and Jennifer Armen-Bolen of Nunhems are role models as women in the produce industry, leaders and mothers. At times it is such a juggling act, trying to balance career and motherhood, and I look to them as inspiration."

Gus Arrigo Jr., 40
*President
Martha's Garden Inc.
Toronto, ON Canada*

Arrigo has been in the produce business his whole life. He began with his father in the wholesale/ re-packing business at Bailey River Farms, then moved to the fresh-cut side.

In 1990, when he founded Lakeside Processing, there were only a handful of fresh-cut processors and HACCP was its infancy. Around 1999, he purchased Martha's Garden; later the Lakeside name was dropped. Within two years, Martha's was a full-line processor supplying a good portion of the major QSRs in eastern Canada and had fully implemented HACCP and GMPs formally into its policies and procedures.

"We have been honored to win many quality and achievement awards from our valued inter-

national customers," reports Arrigo.

Martha's produces everything from retail lines of fresh, single-serve shake-and-eat salads and fresh soups to fresh pie fillings for foodservice. It also has been at the forefront of innovation and R&D. "We were the first to bring sliced and diced tomatoes to the Canadian market. We were one of the first in the industry in general to work with this product."



Gus Arrigo Jr.

He has been a part of the Canadian Safe School Network, an organization to stop violence in schools and give kids a safe learning environment. He is also actively involved in cooking a holiday feast for the homeless of Toronto. "This function involves our whole management team actually cooking for over 600 people. All food items are donated by Martha's Garden."

He would like to be able to eliminate pathogenic bacteria harmful to the consumer. "I think an industry task force needs to be developed specifically for this purpose. We need somewhere to pool our knowledge to better the industry."

He would also like to see a drastic reduction in the amount of packaging used in the food industry. "We are always thinking fresh and wholesome, yet we are one of the worst offenders

of excessive packaging. There needs to be a push on reducing the amount of packaging used.”

Phil Swyden, whom he knew while at Pepsi-Co, was influential from a processing aspect. “Phil was very instrumental in guiding me toward total quality in our processing facility.”

Anthony Arrigo of EG Lister & Co. is a produce mentor. “Anthony has been a leader in the produce industry for over 45 years now. He has and still does inspire me to be better and better.”



Wendy Brannen

Wendy Brannen, 35
Executive Director
Vidalia Onion Committee
Vidalia, GA

Brannen has successfully overcome the monumental challenge of rebuilding the trust in the Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC) of growers and packers and rebuilding the Vidalia marketing legacy after the office suffered tumultuous times. “It’s been my personal mission to prove to everyone what this office can do when it’s properly running on their behalf.”

With the support of a tiny staff, in her first year (2006) she rolled out a new Vidalia Onion logo that was incorporated into all new correspondence, three new brochures and new POS materials. Under her direction, VOC also sent out six first-ever Vidalia Onion newsletters to 3,000 retail professionals and completely revamped its Web site. She coordinated a national partnership with Weight Watchers as its 2006 second quarter Pick of the Season, receiving a PRODUCE BUSINESS Marketing Excellence Award, and she orchestrated a national consumer media blitz, reaching more than 64 million potential Vidalia Onion purchasers through TV appearances, newspaper recipe releases and materials sent to food editors.

“I’ve covered a lot of ground around the country from displaying at PMA [Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE] to frying onion rings at area farmers’ markets to volunteering the Committee as part of the Vidalia Christmas parade line-up. One thing of which I’m particularly proud is securing a spot as sole sponsor of the Vidalia Onion Cook-off at the annual Vidalia Onion Festival. Unbelievably, the farmers have had virtually no presence at the event started 30 years ago to celebrate their crop.”

Another major accomplishment has been rebuilding the compliance end of things. “We are regulated by the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] and have very specific requirements. To be in USDA compliance we must

make so many house calls to the packingsheds and each year audit a certain percentage. Neither of these requirements had been done in years. In 2006, I hired a compliance officer and between the two of us, we’ve seen our staff packinghouse visits go from less than a dozen in 2005 to over 150 in 2006. We are well on our way to completing the requisite number of packingshed audits.”

For the 2007 season, Brannen coordinated the purchase of an entire trade newspaper devoted to Vidalias and got Vidalias on Martha Stewart. “The greatest compliment I hear is when people tell me my love of and enthusiasm for my job are readily apparent as soon as they meet me. I believe in my product, and I am honored to work for the fine growers of Vidalias.”

Brannen is active in the area Convention and Visitor’s Bureau and was asked to sit on the Toombs Montgomery Agri-Tourism Board. As such, she won approval to rebuild the Vidalia Onion Museum. “We should have the new museum doors open just in time for the 2008 annual Vidalia Onion Festival.”

Turning around the reputation of her office has been a challenge and the goodness of the growers and packers inspires her. “Their earnestness and strong work ethic make me want to give them my best.”

Making her dad proud has pushed her to excel. “My father, grandfather, his father and so on have always had strong ties to farming the land. My dad has been very successful in running a peanut buying point and fertilizer company in nearby Bulloch County. He is well liked and very respected, so I’ve had some big shoes to fill.”

She wants to get more involved nationally. “I’d like the opportunity to step into leadership roles with some of the regional and national councils, such as Southeast Produce Council. It’s important to stake a claim in what’s going on in our industry.”

Pat Calabretta, 40
Director Of Merchandising
Sobeys Quebec, Inc.
Boucherville, QC, Canada

Calabretta started as buyer of electronics and seasonal goods at Costco and moved to IGA (Sobeys) in 1997. His team turned the produce department into a consumer destination. “This was done from merchandising, marketing, buying and the retail side to make sure all these programs are executed,” he says. “Currently, the IGA banner has become No. 1 in Quebec, the result of the gallant efforts put forth by everyone.”

Under his direction, IGA stores have gotten higher quality and greater variety. “The most dramatic change is when we changed our potatoes from direct store delivery [DSD] to warehouse. After that, we realized we weren’t delivering the best to our clients. We created specs according to what we wanted and our suppliers found it tough. It was challenging because they would ship DSD and were never challenged. Now, we are the No. 1 warehouse when it comes to inspections done by third-party inspector Qualiterra, which inspects Metro and Loblaws.”

A director of the Québec Produce Marketing

Association (QPMA), and Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), Calabretta is very involved in promoting fresh fruits and vegetables with the 5-to-10-a-day program. He also works to provide industry solutions on food safety issues and Best Practices.



Pat Calabretta

He has participated in many QPMA activities for the promotion of health and well being, such as Defi Sportif, 2900 athletes from 12 countries with five types of disabilities. Another program is Petit Dejeuner, which gives fruit to school-children so they can have a healthful breakfast.

Health, nutrition and the passion of growers and all in the industry chain are his inspirations. “It motivates me to know the president of a company can also be the person loading your extra load on a Saturday morning.”

His 2-year-old son is an inspiration every morning, when he asks his papa for “des fraises” — strawberries please. “This for me is inspiration enough. I already made one very important person happy.”

Calabretta will continue to promote consumption of fruits and vegetables and provide underprivileged children with healthful fruits to start their day. He wants to continue finding solutions and consistent messaging on food safety issues. “These points are important to me because with the increased consumption, we must make sure food safety is followed. Our kids are our future leaders — we must take care of them so they can lead healthy lives.”

Christian Bourbonnière, a vice president at Metro Richelieu, is an inspiration. “He took me under his wing in 1995 and gave me the opportunity to be where I am today. He portrays signs of passion and integrity for the industry. Christian is very well known in the industry and respected by his peers. I will always be grateful for the opportunity he gave me.”

Wayne McKnight, vice president of global procurement food for Wal-Mart Stores, challenged him to see the bigger picture. “Wayne had such a vision we often said he was from a different planet. I look back and many of his visions that many thought were non-attainable are now being worked on by some of those who thought he was from a different planet.”

Chris Cervini, 35
President
Lakeside Produce Inc.
Leamington, ON

Cervini has expanded Lakeside Produce into

an international company with production in Canada, the United States and Mexico, allowing it to offer a year-round program in Canada and the United States with consistency and dependability.



Chris Cervini

He was recently chosen one of three North American distributors from Enza Zaden with an exclusive seed agreement. He retains control of all aspects of growing, marketing and distribution of the product and stays a step ahead of his competition. "Product development mixed with my aggressive style helps me grow my business in new markets with innovative items."

He believes in the highest customer service available and is known as someone who will not mislead them for the quick-sell. "All of my dealings are first and foremost integrity based. I will not approach a new market if I do not believe I will be able to service the retailer or wholesale distributor with the highest quality and spec product and the best customer service."

Lakeside is a member of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Association (OGVG). Vice chairman from 2003 to 2006 and its representative on the North American Tomato Trade Working Group, Cervini remains very active in OGVG. He was recognized by the Board of Business Improvement in Leamington, ON, receiving the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 1998 and the Home Grown Award in 2007.

Lakeside is active in the community and donates to many local charities and events. Cervini is especially proud of the company's sponsorship of We Care For Kids, a program supporting local pediatric care programs and allowing ill children to be treated in their own communities. Lakeside is also a sponsor of the Leamington Hospital.

The competitiveness of the industry inspires Cervini. "I believe in my product, I believe in my people and I believe I can make a difference in this industry. I am inspired to be the very best every single day. I am extremely involved in making a difference in this industry through my growing practices and marketing efforts. I am inspired by the opportunity to lead and continue a legacy begun by my great-grandfather over 70 years ago. It is a driving force of mine to keep the legacy of Lakeside Produce moving forward and adhering to those core values."

The biggest challenges he faces come from innovative competitors and the need to expand into new markets. "When approaching retailers, it is your job to give them a reason to bring you on as a vendor. You have to include innovative

items, superior customer service and competitive pricing. You have to push yourself to go the extra mile everyday."

His most immediate goal is expanding Lakeside's ground equity. "I am committed to becoming a vertically integrated grower. My plans and expectations are to have my own growing operations in Mexico within three to five years while sustaining our current relationships with our Mexican growers. With vertical integration, I will have control of the growing and marketing, without having to solely rely on other growers."

He also plans to take aim at childhood obesity. "With child obesity levels reaching an all-time high, everyone in our industry has a responsibility to help reverse this trend. The produce industry should be leading this charge. Not only can we help fight child obesity, but we can also increase consumption of our products and help to build a stronger more sustainable market. Lakeside is currently putting together a line of specialty products marketed toward children. Working with marketing groups, I can make certain our product line has relevance to the end user."

John Coppa, owner/operator of Highland Farms, has been his mentor and good friend for years. "He has been instrumental in teaching me the needs of the retailers. He showed me how important customer service is and why you need to make sure you are relevant to the retailer. John has helped me learn the importance of my growth and breaking into new markets."

Mark Cassius, COO of Euro Fresh Farms, and Eric Janke, COO of DiMare Fresh, are also industry mentors. "They are both visionaries and the challenges of the industry excite them without discouragement. They are both extremely progressive in their attention to retailers' and consumers' needs. They both make me a better owner/operator by pushing me on quality, spec, color and cost."



Charles A. Ciruli III

Charles A. Ciruli III, 37
CEO/Partner
Ciruli Brothers, LLC
Tubac, AZ

Ciruli is in charge of the day-to-day operations of Ciruli Brothers and leading over 40 people who work there. Under his oversight, the company has grown 30 percent each year. He is very involved with the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Cruz County and is a founding Board of Directors member, serving on the Board since 1993.

He served on the Board of the Fresh Produce Association in 2004/2005 and was a member of

the United Fresh Produce Association Leadership Class of 2005. He is an avid believer in the benefits of volunteering. "I enjoy working within the local produce industry to raise funds for local charities because I feel it is important to give back to our community."

He is most inspired by being part of three generations of a family business that has been able to maintain relationships for over 50 years. "There are definitely challenges in being a part of a family business but those challenges are far outweighed by the benefits."

Ciruli wants to grow and strengthen the business and position it as viable in the ever-changing industry for the next generations to come.

He considers himself fortunate to have had many industry mentors. "I am extremely grateful for all of their help and encouragement. However, the greatest influences have been my father for his constant support and guidance and Pete Purcell, with CANMEXUS, for his wisdom and care over many years."



Brett Combs

Brett Combs, 39
President
Combs Produce, LP
First Choice Distributing Co., LLC
Combs Specialty, LP
Combs Fresh Pak Co., LLC
Dallas, TX

Combs started his career at JC Combs Inc. fresh out of college. His father had passed away five years earlier and his mother and several key employees kept the company afloat. His first position was handling walk-up sales. "In those days, we were just trying to figure out ways to keep paying our bills," he notes. After gradually taking on numerous responsibilities, he became vice president. Since he began running the company, sales have more than quadrupled.

In 1995 he started First Choice Distributing to offer direct sales, and in 1999, Combs Fresh Pak to offer potato repacking. In 2002 the Comito Family of Capital City Fruit approached him about a concept called Nation Fresh. "I came on board and was on the management committee for one year. My marketing director, Steve Phipps, left Combs to head up the initial marketing of Nation Fresh. Being involved with Nation Fresh has given us the capability to sell nationwide tomato programs with a consistent food safety program."

In 2004, he started Combs Specialty to offer a full line of specialty produce. The parent company was eventually renamed Combs Produce LP



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and in 2006, it completed a major expansion by purchasing three buildings formerly occupied by Nogales Produce Co. In addition to the massive warehouse facilities, the company owns 20 delivery trucks and distributes throughout a 5-state region.

Combs lists competition, food safety, rising costs and constantly evolving customer demands as daily challenges but calls his staff an inspiration. "The great people working for us here and our incredible customer base inspire me every day."

Steve Fleming, James Baker and Ronnie Gaubatz, all with Combs, have been his mentors. "Steve came on board shortly before I did and is third generation like me. He's been an inspiration. He's solid as a rock and a real produce guy. I hired James several years later and the same can be said of him. Then Ronnie came on board not long after James. These are all produce guys. I'm just the guy with the finance degree who helped put it all together."

Steven J. Condit, 36
National Sales Manager
Custom Pak, Inc.
Immokalee, FL

As national sales manager, Condit has been responsible for several successful and innovative programs. He is project manager and co-creator of Custom Pak's first trademark, Gator Packer, in cooperation with the University of Florida — IFAS. Gator Packer automates packaging reports and efficiencies of the packing lines to track packaging efficiencies and productivity. He also created the first sustainable, homegrown tomato program for Sam's Club and other retailers to promote local farming operations in North Carolina, Florida, South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and California.



Steven J. Condit

Condit is responsible for direct-to-retail sales management handling in the California, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Florida and North Carolina repack facilities to laterally integrate core strengths between Custom Pak and its clients, allow additional discounted savings to the consumer and help facilitate the proper sale of its food safety program to key buyers on national, regional and local levels. He promotes the R&D department of Six Ls Packing Company, Inc. in sales and procurement of unique varieties.

He has managed marketing tools for the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign

(FAPC) *Fresh from Florida*, a joint venture between the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and private growers like Six Ls. "The direct result has been effectively designed campaigns, promotions and buying events benefiting retailers, growers and the consumer," he states. "I have also increased awareness to retailers, wholesalers, club business, QSRs and Custom Pak's foodservice clients, by pushing the *Florida Tomato — USA Grown Fresh* campaign in conjunction with the Florida Tomato Committee. The results helped increase public awareness of the importance of Florida's \$87 billion agriculture business to the state's economy."

Condit is program manager for co-packing Disney Garden tomatoes nationally and watermelons east of the Mississippi in a national campaign to promote the *Increased Consumption of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables among Children* to fight childhood obesity. He is also an advisory board member for Imaginations Farms, Disney Gardens' marketing/sales arm.

He has been active in Six Ls fund raising for Children's Miracle Network, Ronald McDonald Care Mobile, Redlands Christian Migrant Association and The Guadalupe Center, as well as Custom Pak's fund-raising for the United Way.

He became interested in the industry as a young boy working on his father's 150-acre farm in Bath, NY. "My family taught me the importance and discipline of farming the land and respecting the environment. I began to learn the importance of how to profit from the land. My father, with a high school education, knew more about farming, weather, soil and production than most farmers I know in today's educated society."

Larry Lipman, CEO, board member and part owner of Six Ls, is his principal mentor. "Larry's family-run, privately owned businesses operated a multi-national growing, repacking and shipping agribusiness for over the last 75 years. Combined with an irrigation systems business and a research facility, the Lipman family has managed to put together one of the most sophisticated operations in tomato and vegetable growing today."

Dana Davis, 36
Sponsorship Sales Manager
Produce Marketing Association
Newark, DE

During eight years at PMA, Davis has served in the marketing and business development departments, moving from marketing specialist to business development coordinator to sponsorship sales manager. She has helped PMA gain revenue through registrations, booth sales, sponsorship sales and membership. In the sales field, she continually meets or exceeds the revenue goals set by the organization.

She helps growers and other industry suppliers with their marketing efforts and has a reputation of never trying to sell sponsorships just to make a buck. "Through sponsorships of PMA's events and products, members of the produce industry can increase exposure of their brands," she explains. "I bring new and exciting marketing opportunities to the attention of the marketing

departments within many companies. I listen to their needs and recommend sponsorships to help them meet their goals.”



Dana Davis

Her community accomplishments include fund-raising for the American Cancer Society. “This is a cause hitting home a few too many times. My mother is a breast-cancer survivor. I work alongside others at PMA in bringing in funds for this worthy cause.”

She is inspired by the passion of this industry and how it represents health and nutrition. “I am constantly impressed with how strongly the companies I work with care about their brands. We do good things for people. If I can support it, no matter how small my role may be, I feel my life has more meaning. My job, like this industry, is challenged by Mother Nature. A grower may have been hit by a hurricane or lost its crop due to a freeze so we may lose a customer for one, two or more years. I am always pleased to see companies bounce back, as well as saddened when they go out of business due to the loss.”

She admires Lisa McNeece of Grimmway Farms, Jin Ju Wilder of Coast Produce and Jan DeLyser of the California Avocado Commission. “I am immediately inspired by their dedication to the industry and their brands. While I do not have a mentor or protégée relationship with any of these women, I take pride in knowing there are strong women in the industry who are doing great things.”

Todd DeWaard, 32

Salesman
Superior Sales
Hudsonville, MI

DeWaard started as a part-time repacker at Harvest Produce, became a full-timer, was promoted to hilo-driver/produce inspector and eventually was brought into the office as a salesman. After two years in sales, Harvest merged with Superior where he climbed the sales ladder. He is now considered owner Randy Vande Guchte’s right-hand man. Currently he manages a large local foodservice account, which has grown 400 percent since he took it over three years ago. “We won an award from this customer for being one of its top suppliers for 2006,” he says. “In the summer, my duties expand to include handling key growers for our Michigan growing season while also selling Michigan vegetables to numerous customers east of the Mississippi River.”

A graduate of the United Fresh Fruit and Veg-

etable Produce (UFFVA) Leadership Program Class 9, he helped spearhead the effort to get growers third-party certified and take the necessary steps to ensure food safety in Michigan. “This class helped to jump-start my leadership journey in this business as it turned my focus from looking at this like a bill-paying job into being a career I loved. The course helped show me even a little Michigan shipper like Superior could make a difference in this industry.”

He and his wife are youth leaders at their church. “It gives us insight into the ways the younger generations look at the world and gives me tools to help Superior adapt to the newest customers in our industry. It also gives us a way to help mentor teens and give them advice based on the experiences I’ve had climbing the ladder.”



Todd DeWaard

He is an avid runner and runs as many races as his schedule will allow. “This helps keep me on a healthful path and hopefully sets an example for others to eat healthfully and stay in shape helping to lead to a successful career.”

His inspiration comes from knowing the industry is providing the general public with a healthful product. “You will never find a person who will tell you to stop eating our product because it is bad for you or will make you fatter. Knowing everyday I can take a product from a hard-working farmer and help the process of getting it out to those who want it for healthful living is an extremely rewarding feeling.”

DeWaard would like to see the produce industry continue to push for more of a presence in the school system. “I don’t think you can put a price on what it would mean for our society to be raised on apples, oranges and bananas at an early age over items such as Twinkies, donuts and chips. I think it would create a stronger industry for us while also raising healthier, smarter future generations.”

He names Randy Vande Guchte as his mentor. “It took me awhile to understand some of his methods and understand how he made the company a success. Once I focused on this, I was amazed at how much I learned. He cares deeply for his employees but is not afraid to confront them if they are not following the Superior way at work or in life. His business has been a great success since he started it more than 15 years ago and sometimes I have to take a step back and realize this when going to challenge him on an issue. He is very loyal to his vegetable growers as well and makes sure his employees understand without the grower there is no Superior.”

Danny Dumas, 38

Vice President, N.A. Sales & Product
Management, Banana & Pineapple Programs
Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A. Inc.
Coral Gables, FL

Dumas made his entrée into Del Monte by helping successfully establish its first and only Canadian office. Designed to handle sales and customer service for all of Eastern Canada, the office has been very successful, growing sales year after year.

Dumas was promoted last year to his current position and relocated to corporate headquarters in Miami where he manages the banana and pineapple programs in North America. “I saw this as a great learning experience, a great career move and an exciting opportunity not only for myself but also for my family,” he explains. “This new position has broadened my horizons on other aspects of our business since Del Monte is a vertically integrated company.”



Danny Dumas

Dumas has 18 years experience in the produce industry including nine with Dole and some experience with a Canadian wholesaler. He has faced several challenges during the course of his career and is motivated by the industry’s ever-evolving challenges. “With all the publicity and studies about the benefits of eating produce, it is inspiring to be part of such a dynamic industry that contributes to the health and well-being of people around the globe.”

His goal is to continue to increase his knowledge on a professional and personal level. “I have spent 17 years servicing the Eastern Canadian marketplace. One of my goals is to quickly gain knowledge on the American market and continue to grow within the industry in North America. By the same token, with our new life in the United States, I am happy my wife and two sons have the same privilege to live this experience.”

He has been very involved with his kids’ sports, coaching hockey and football. “It’s a great way to spend time with my kids and allows me to give back the time others gave me as I was growing up. Since our move to South Florida, I continue to get involved with ice hockey.”

Through the years, Dumas has enjoyed working for and with great people who were not just great leaders but also mentors. “There would be too many to name. When dealing with different departments within a company, everyone has a different way to approach or address certain situations and all this shared experience makes this great business what it is.”



Tanya Fell

Tanya Fell, 34

*President, Aynat Consulting
Executive Director, Colorado Onion Association
Director of Marketing & Retail Relations,
Strohauer Farms
LaSalle, CO*

Fell's produce career began almost 10 years ago when she became director of public and industry relations for the National Onion Association (NOA). She was responsible for managing, coordinating and implementing national consumer and foodservice marketing and public relations efforts, membership relations and recruitment, and special event and meeting planning. While there, she was an educator for the twice-yearly PMA Fresh Produce Academy.

After the birth of her triplets in January 2003, John McClung recruited her to be vice president of the Texas Produce Association (TPA). "He felt I would be a good fit for their organization," she reports. "My activities and accomplishments there included coordinating and overseeing nationwide communication efforts, membership, program and event planning, media relations and issues management."

After leaving TPA, she began a consulting firm focusing on the produce industry, Aynat Consulting. Under this umbrella, she became director of marketing and retail relations for Strohauer Farms, doing marketing and public relations, sales, package and carton development and design, chemical handling and usage, managing the potato shed and more.

She also serves as the executive director of the Colorado Onion Association. "I was recruited for this position this past November. It is a pleasure to be back involved in the onion industry."

Fell was part of the UFFVA Leadership Program Class 7 and is currently on the board of directors for the Leadership Alumni Board. She was the only female and the youngest person in the class. "My 'big brothers' deserve a lot of credit for guiding me through and giving me direction to learn the produce industry more fully."

She serves as vice president for the Fort Collins Parents of Multiples Club and will become president in July. She is also co-chair of its tag sale committee. She was responsible for the marketing efforts and Web site development at Genesis United Methodist Church.

Working with trade associations and commodity groups inspires her. "The more knowledge I held, the more informed the members were and are. This really challenged me to attend as many educational seminars and produce

workshops as possible so I could educate our association members with what I learned."

Wayne Mininger, NOA executive vice president, is a mentor. "He groomed me to be who I am today. He taught me a lot about the onion industry and the produce industry as a whole. He inspired me to strive for success while maintaining a high level of professionalism. Without Wayne as my mentor I would not be who I am or where I am today in the produce industry."

McClung has taught her the importance of legislative and issues management. "John was instrumental in helping me recognize my leadership abilities and strengthen my weaknesses."

She continues to learn about the farming perspective from Harry Strohauser, president and owner of Strohauser Farms. "This has been one of the largest learning curves I have experienced. I have been responsible for marketing and public relations on a national level but I now have the opportunity to learn the growing and shipping side of the business. Harry has been an outstanding mentor from whom to learn about farming, the issues directly effecting production like water and labor, and how much work really goes into bringing food to consumers from the farm to the table. He has also pushed me to do many things I never thought I would be able to do."



Julie Feltis

Julie Feltis, 25

*Associate Category Manager — Produce
Hannaford Brothers Company
Scarborough, ME*

In four years with Hannaford, Feltis has taken on several roles. She pioneered the Supply Chain Leadership Development Program, helping design it and being the first to complete it. It prepared her to lead in several areas, including retail, merchandising, distribution and supply-chain services. In her current role as a produce category manager, she is responsible for 15 categories including stone fruit, apples, grapes, tropical and cut fruit. She has implemented a process for completing in-depth category analyses, built strong industry partnerships with vendors and growers, and worked to ensure the highest quality standards and compliance with federal regulations and food safety.

Programs she has implemented or carried out include Sesame Street Apple of the Month and a vendor-produced cut-fruit program. In 2005 she helped found the Libra Future Fund (LFF) and is a member of its board of directors. "LFF was created to capitalize upon the energy and creativity Maine's young people embody

and to combat youth out-migration by supporting initiatives increasing the number of Maine-based professional opportunities," she explains. "So far we have funded more than a dozen entrepreneurial endeavors contributing to the economic development of Maine."

Working in the produce industry has been eye-opening. "Having spent my first year of category management on the grocery side, it was intriguing to see the differences between grocery and fresh food. Perhaps the most challenging part is trying to stay on top of all of the geographic, varietal and seasonal changes. There has been no lack of inspiration in my role. From the influx of consumer and produce manager feedback to the in-depth discussions with growers about the crops they live for, it's easy to find motivation to help push the industry forward."

She admires the dedication and enthusiasm her retail produce associates put forth each day. "These folks have such a passion for the business and are the frontline to our customers. I have had the opportunity to visit numerous growing regions and spend time with several farmers and there is nothing quite like the pride a farmer takes in his or her crops. It has been a joy to listen to the stories of how family businesses came to be, and the passion and sheer devotion these folks have for their land and their product are undeniable. This is not something you find in all aspects of the grocery world and it is a pleasure to be a part of something so meaningful."

She mentions several people at Hannaford as mentors, in particular her partner in category management, Mark Jewell. "While I represent the fruit side of produce, Mark represents the vegetable side. I have never met anyone with as much passion and excitement for the business as Mark. Produce is his dream field and it shows in everything he does. Not only does he have such a strong desire for his work but he also has an incredible knowledge of all ends of the business from procurement to logistics to growing regions and variety offerings to how to best display it for our consumers. Mark has been a true inspiration for me and is someone I can continuously lean upon for support, advice and guidance."

Anthony Gallino, 37

*Vice President of Sales
California Giant, Inc.
Watsonville, CA*

Gallino has helped build CalGiant's reputation and customer base. Since he was hired as a coordinator over 10 years ago, the company has tripled in size. Currently, he leads the entire sales team in a year-round berry program. As the volume increases each year, Gallino keeps pace with the growth track by increasing demand from existing and new customers.

Gallino grew up in the ag community and wants to be part of the effort to help U.S. agriculture prosper. He has served on the local Water Board helping to resolve issues between ag and residential needs.

Seven years ago he organized a grassroots local cycling team sponsored by CalGiant. He has taken it from a local group to an international

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competitive team with a winning record. The success has garnered multiple corporate sponsorships and integration into CalGiant's mainstream marketing campaign. "I wanted to promote our brand and increase visibility for the company with the community and consumers relating to the positive attributes of a healthful diet as well as a healthful lifestyle," he reports.



Anthony Gallino

Changes in the industry challenge and inspire him. "The best part about being in produce is that no two days are the same when you work with a product grown outside. I am also inspired and challenged by the changing face of the customer. The business changes so much when buyers and chains change that it keeps me focused on continually building relationships and improving service."

His goals in this industry are to continue to position California Giant as a leader and innovator. "I enjoy providing a quality product and strong message to the consumer about health and nutrition. I want to continue to be a part of a movement increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables with the American consumer."

Gallino calls Pat Riordan and Bill Moncovich, owners of California Giant, mentors. "They've taught me the values of business and life in the industry."

Amy L. Gates, 30
Chief Operations Officer
Frontera Produce
Edinburg, TX

Gates has improved Frontera's organization by developing a company structure, structuring departments with accountability and improving communication. She created a human resources department to maintain the integrity and consistency of policies for employees and updated health and other employee benefits and corporate insurance.

She improved financial procedures and implemented key revisions to the legal structure and company systems. She evaluated the RPC provider and managed the transition to a lower-cost, better-service provider and established daily inventory management to monitor materials. She improved systems and information flow for new programs including cantaloupe imports from Guatemala, mango imports from Peru and Ecuador, Frontera's pineapple operation in Isla Vera Cruz, the watermelon-packing warehouse set up and the Jensen onion deal.



Amy L. Gates

Gates believes leaders work directly with the people who follow them. "I take time to work with employees, customers, vendors, growers and supporting shippers. I listen to them so I can make the best decision possible for them and our company. My reputation in the industry grew out of my career in a sales and consulting role with Famous Software where I worked shoulder to shoulder with the clients to insure their success. My leadership style drew the principals of Frontera Produce to hire me and it's a work ethic I maintain while in my position as COO here."

The produce possibilities available to a motivated person are her inspiration. "There is no other industry as dynamic, unpredictable and filled with opportunity. The perishable nature of produce is what makes all of these things possible and it almost can reinvent itself in one season with the right conditions. The things inspiring me are the same things another person would see as challenges, but I just see opportunities."

She credits Jim Steele and Will Steele with helping shape her views about the produce industry and business in general. "I admire what they have accomplished here in just 15 years and am so excited about the future for this company. They have given me an amazing amount of trust and respect, allowing me to become the leader I am today. Mentors, to me, are those you work closely with and share thoughts and ideas, and those are the reasons I choose the Steeles."

Melissa Heinrich, 30
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc
Western Vegetable Buyer
Bentonville, AR

Heinrich is known for doing anything she sets her mind to. She is a consummate industry professional who conducts business with clarity and purpose. Vendors recognize her as a tremendous asset to the industry. In her previous position as a field buyer for Albertsons in Salinas, CA, she co-founded the Central Coast Young Farmers and Ranchers (CCYFR), part of Monterey County Farm Bureau. Through CCYFR, she was involved in raising funds for local food organizations, America's Second Harvest, Monterey County Food Bank and Meals on Wheels.

She volunteered on Habitat for Humanity and Monterey County Ag Education projects and was selected for the California Leadership Farm Bureau and UFFVA Produce Industry Leadership Program class 11.

The people in the industry are her inspira-

tion. "I grew up in Blythe, CA, a small agricultural town in the Palo Verde Valley and knew I wanted to be in agriculture. I have met some of the best people through my involvement in the produce industry."



Melissa Heinrich

She credits several industry mentors throughout her career. "This industry has so many great people willing to help and give opportunities to people who are young and ambitious. There are many people I call on for advice. I have been fortunate to work for a number of great companies and consider the leadership at each of these companies as my mentors."

Laura Johnson, 40

*Section Manager
Idaho State Department of Agriculture
Boise, Idaho*

Starting with the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's (ISDA) Market Development Division in 1991, Johnson has worked her way from trade specialist to section manager. Under her management and direction, the division has made some significant strides, including assembling a great team of professionals who support the division's efforts. "I can't take credit for all the success because each of the staff members has played a major role. We have a great team of hardworking professionals."

One key to the success has been the partnerships developed with industry and other agencies. In September 2003, ISDA's brand identity campaign, *Idaho Preferred*, was launched with a produce promotion in Wal-Mart. "The program has really taken off. Fresh produce is the bulk of the program and includes potatoes, onions, strawberries, pumpkins, watermelon, apples, pluots, peaches, plums, asparagus, lettuce, herbs, cherries, table grapes and more."



Laura Johnson

A Wal-Mart pilot "outdoor air produce market" at an Idaho store in 2006 increased sales by 17 percent; Wal-Mart will expand it this fall.

Through *Idaho Preferred* and in cooperation with the Department of Education and Ag in the Classroom, ISDA launched a campaign to get Idaho produce into Idaho schools. "What began as a pilot project in two schools in 2004 now encompasses all 28 elementary schools in the Meridian School District and another 25 schools throughout the state that participate in the USDA-funded Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program."

In August/September 2006, the district featured Idaho fruits on the menu of 28 elementary schools for a total of 14 days. Over 15,000 elementary students were treated to Idaho peaches, grapes, melons, pears and apples on their lunch trays. Students in year-round schools also enjoyed Idaho berries, apricots and nectarines in August. In addition to fruits, the district added baked Idaho potatoes to its school lunch menu — year-round."

One of the most innovative international programs created under Johnson's direction is a cooking show in Mexico. "With the assistance of the ATO in Monterrey, Mexico, I was introduced to Lulu Pedraza, a well-known celebrity chef with a weekly cooking show. We developed a program to feature Idaho products, including onions and potatoes, on her show. The program has grown to include produce as well as processed products from the western United States."

Johnson's division has spent several years working with the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Union Committee and the Western U.S. Agricultural Trade Association (WUSATA) to develop a market for yellow onions in Mexico. A strategy involving in-bound buying missions, outbound trade missions, in-store promotions, public relations, advertising, technical training and recipe development has resulted in increased sales. "It's important to be persistent. We faced a number of naysayers who said we couldn't ship yellow onions into a principally white-onion market. But sales this last season exceeded \$1.5 million."

She worked closely with the Idaho Potato Commission on a multi-pronged strategy to get Idaho fresh potato shippers more engaged in exports with a primary focus on Mexico. "The initiative included export education, promotion and trade policy. Idaho had taken the lion's share of the market, getting over 30 percent of the share of U.S. exports and the lowest rejection rate at the boarder. Unfortunately, the market was temporarily closed due to a pest concern but it just recently re-opened for Idaho. We look forward to renewed emphasis on the Mexican potato market."

Johnson is chair of the Western Region North America Agricultural Marketing Officials (NAAMO), which hosted the first Food and Agriculture Brand Identity Conference in February 2007. "I generated the idea and the staff executed a very successful program, providing ideas for enhancing brand identity campaigns across the country."

Johnson cites Rick Waitley, administrator of a number of groups, including Ag In The Classroom, Leadership Idaho Agriculture and Food Producers of Idaho, as a mentor. "He is a leader

in forming strategic alliances and collaborating with various organizations. His efforts to champion issues for agriculture are extraordinary. He is a role model and a great coach."

Another mentor is Stewart Hyndman, a former boss who started an export company. "Stewart led by example and I learned a number of things from him when I started working on international issues. He had a real focus on return on investment and helped me learn about the importance of setting priorities."



Mike Krell

Mike Krell, 36

*Produce Merchandiser
Kroger
Shenandoah, TX*

At just 36, Krell recently celebrated his 20-year anniversary with the Southwest Division of Kroger. He has worked in store operations and as a produce merchandising field specialist, division floral merchandiser and buyer, division produce buyer and division assistant produce merchandiser. He is currently a division produce merchandiser.

He has volunteered in the community through his association and involvement with the Houston Food Bank and the Houston Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association. As a former president of the Houston Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, he worked hard to help raise the profile of children's nutrition and increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

His grandparents, retired watermelon growers, instilled him with values such as honesty and integrity early on. "I seem to have a passion for produce and for agriculture in general. Working with highly motivated, professional individuals in my company and the industry helps motivate me to do more daily."

Krell acknowledges he has been fortunate to work with some industry greats. "Reggie Griffin, vice president of produce and floral for the Kroger Company, hired me as a produce field specialist many years ago. Under Reggie's leadership and guidance, I learned the details of successful in-store merchandising as well as many basic business principles I still draw from today."

Ron Lemaire, 39

*Executive Vice President & Director of Marketing
Canadian Produce Marketing Association
Ottawa, Canada*

Under Lemaire's leadership, CPMA has gained strength and implemented unique and

valuable programs. As part of the CPMA Trilateral team (CPMA, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Canadian Cancer Society), Lemaire developed and delivered the national *5 to 10 a day, for better health program*. In 1997 the program had a 4 percent consumer awareness. As part of the team, Lemaire re-launched it in 1999 and it now has a 47 percent brand awareness and continues to drive consumption of fruit and vegetables in Canada. "The program's success is based on a sound integrated social marketing approach to behavioral change," he describes. "Success is driven through partnerships and collaboration."



Ron Lemaire

During his tenure at CPMA, with the support of the president and elected industry leadership, he has been influential in its growth, development and issues. "These link directly to the

seven key pillars upon which CPMA is focused. These include government relations, food safety, produce identification, health and nutrition, networking. We've seen 200 percent growth in convention and trade show participation, education and marketing and promotions."

Lemaire has served as chairman of the International Fruit and Vegetable Alliance since its inception. He was instrumental in the development and incorporation of the International Fruit and Vegetable Alliance, whose role is to encourage and foster efforts to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables globally for better health by supporting national initiatives, promoting efficiencies, facilitating collaboration on shared aims and providing global leadership.

He is chair of the National/Provincial Produce Marketing Association Working Group, which meets twice a year to discuss industry issues and how national and regional groups will work to address them. "This can include marketing/promotion, government relations, food safety and crisis management. This group is key to building synergies within Canada and the national and provincial stakeholders."

On a personal level, he coaches community hockey and soccer, plays hockey and basketball and is treasurer of his men's basketball league.

He mentions Dan Dempster as a mentor. "Dan has been president of CPMA for 24 years and his vision and commitment to the industry have enabled me to develop and expand my hori-

zons domestically and internationally by providing me with clear, direct guidance and support. Above all, Dan has also shown me what it is to be passionate about the produce industry."

Lemaire also mentions John Anderson of The Oppenheimer Group. "John was part of the recruitment team that hired me in 1998 and was a CPMA director and chairman. He is truly a visionary in how to build relationships and synergies both domestically and internationally and has demonstrated to me how to pull together relationships and alliances within an industry that has a diverse group of stakeholders from the public and private sector."

Lisa Lockard, 38

*Marketing Manager
Chiquita Brands International
Cincinnati, OH*

In a little over 2½ years with Chiquita, Lockard has developed several key marketing and innovation programs, including Partners for Profit, an integrated consumer and trade marketing program designed to strengthen brand equity, increase volume and profit, and bring innovation to the core banana business. The yearlong program featured branded hammock displays, rotating consumption-driving point-of-sale, merchandising, radio/billboard advertising and public relations. In conjunction with the program, she introduced the Chiquita Second

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Stickers program, providing consumption-building messages to consumers and earning over one billion media impressions a year. Over 3,500 stores participated in the program, experiencing sales lifts of four to seven percent. The hammock display was awarded a Gold POPAI award for Outstanding Merchandising Achievement as well as a Silver Design of the Times Award for its innovation and creativity.



Lisa Lockard

Lockard also worked on the Chiquita To Go (CTG) program. "These premium single-serve bananas are consistently ripe and ready to eat, and the technology enables convenience stores, coffee shops and other small retail outlets receiving deliveries only once or twice a week the ability to merchandise perfectly ripe bananas every day," she explains.

She developed CTG brand architecture, trade and retail marketing materials, in-store displays, and a retail education and execution support structure. CTG bananas are available in 8,000 convenience stores nationwide, with plans to triple it by the end of 2007. CTG was one of the top new products in 2006 chosen by the NACS, the association for convenience and petroleum retailers. Chiquita To Go Wave Merchandising System was awarded a "Bronze Design of the Times Award" for its innovation and creativity.

For the Chiquita Fresh & Ready program, she developed brand architecture and consumer positioning, packaging graphics, in-store displays and POS, retailer training materials, PR and media plan including television, radio, direct mail and internet advertising.

With over 15 years of experience at a variety of consumer products companies like Coca-Cola, Heinz and Mead School and Office Products, Lockard has developed over 200 products and has been involved in countless new product and marketing program launches. However she is especially inspired and challenged by produce. "Working with and developing products built by Mother Nature presents very unique challenges not experienced with man-made products. The variability, fragility and perishability of fresh produce add a high level of complexity to new product development. In addition, commercializing products in retail channels that have not typically had extensive fresh produce distribution makes product handling education and flawless retail execution a priority."

Since joining Chiquita, Raul Fernandez, vice president of technology and innovation, and David Lund, director of innovation and product

development, have added most to her success. "Between the two of them, I have learned more about bananas than I ever thought humanly possible and they both exhibit a strong desire to bring profound innovation to the industry. The insights and experience they possess are critical to bridging the old with the new and bringing ground-breaking products to market. They truly represent the best in the industry."

John Longaker, Jr., 37

Treasurer/Purchasing Manager
Condies Foods
W. Salt Lake City, UT

Longaker is known throughout the industry for his integrity. He joined Condies in 2000 with purchasing responsibility for all raw products. He has unique experience working with many different commodity shippers in many different areas. As the company and the industry evolved, his position evolved to include management of the IT infrastructure and Condies real estate interests. He was appointed Treasurer several years ago. Besides modernizing all company purchases and contracts and updating all IT systems, he has represented Condies Foods in multiple customer symposia and action teams.



John Longaker, Jr.

He participated in the first United Fresh Produce Executive Development Program. "It was a great honor to experience the pulse of all the related industries, including fruit and vegetable shippers, processors and retailers in the focused environment of Cornell University," he reports.

The people in the industry inspire Longaker. "I believe if one claims to value the virtue of integrity, then one must practice it. There are so many names I wish I could mention those who have been tremendous examples to me personally. They would represent a range from customers to shippers to brokers to transportation companies, all providing their respective safest and best product, day in and day out."

A major challenge is food safety. "Customers have been lost due to a loss of confidence in the safety of food they eat. Ronald Reagan often used the phrase 'Trust but verify' when he discussed nuclear arms treaties. Our customers are demanding more verification than ever before in order to safeguard trust in the food they eat on a daily basis. We need to regain and retain the public's trust in the food we provide."

Labor is also a challenge. "Labor seems to get tighter and tighter each year, while there are greater requirements involved with immigration

and with providing good working conditions. We need to find a good balance of interests and stable supply of workers. It needs to be win-win."

Many people have influenced his career and life, including Condies president Gary Black and vice president Scott Black. "Gary has sincere dedication to the customer. It is never just lip service. Scott has a tremendous drive for operational efficiency. He understands how and where the pieces fit in a facility and also how to get the most out of what he has been given."

He admires Tom Church and his vision of the industry and has seen great integrity in brokers like the Calixtros, Tim Sheehy, Steve Kaiser and Mike O'Grady. "I value the consistency and quality of the Teixeiras and Fresh Kist. I admire the commitment of Perricone Juice, Six L's and Live Oak tomato. As a religious person, I remember the mission statement of the Bolthouse family and its founding principles. Our industry provides food not just to faceless consumers but also to our spouses, our children and our friends. We are in a noble industry and it is a pleasure to serve here."



Ande Manos

Ande Manos, 38

Sales Manager —
New Business Development & Marketing
Babé Farms, Inc
Santa Maria, CA

Manos has worked in the sales and marketing of specialty vegetables for 13 years and contributed significantly to the vision of Babé Farms and the specialty produce industry. She is responsible for new business with foodservice distributors and retail accounts nationwide and plays an integral part in setting the pricing for more than 100 specialty items grown and packed at Babé Farms. She now has responsibility for key marketing functions including product development and promotion as well as directing Babé Farm's image in the industry.

"Understanding the needs of the world's top chefs and the health-conscious consumer is integral to product development," she explains. "The attempt to meet these evolving needs is what led to my role in new product development by researching new and heirloom varieties of specialty leaf items and vegetables. I worked with global seed companies and our own production team to trial and produce some of the finest and most unique specialty produce items available."

As a proud alumna of Cal Poly — San Luis Obispo, she assists college students in the foreign exchange program, creating a larger understanding of the agriculture program in the Unit-

ed States. “I host and coordinate placement of students from Cal Poly’s sister University of Querétaro, Mexico. These exceptional students have the opportunity to work for and learn about agribusinesses throughout California.”

Manos has also been a presenter at Stanford University and University of San Francisco for the Farm-to-Fork program, promoting and supporting local and sustainable agriculture.

She is challenged and inspired to create new and exciting specialty produce items fulfilling a niche no other produce company fills. “Setting benchmark trends and continuing to fulfill the nutritional needs for a society constantly under fire to eat more healthfully motivates me. By producing and selling specialty vegetables, you are offering an exciting alternative for the end user, expanding into the veggie side of the plate. Our company’s goal is to be cutting edge while maintaining the integrity of the product and to continue to surpass the expectations of the end user.”

Manos reveres several industry leaders but calls Frieda Caplan a pillar for women in agriculture. “Frieda has contributed a tremendous amount to the growth of specialty produce with innovative marketing concepts. She has been a charismatic and invaluable trendsetter for all men and women in agriculture to learn from.”

She has tremendous respect for farmers. “These non-tiring people continue to buy the seed and put it in the ground season after season. While the world and the produce industry become more complex, the grower is still in touch with the land, soil and weather systems making or breaking a market. In light of the real estate gains, the farmer is still willing to till the ground and continue to produce a healthful product to feed our ever-changing and expanding population.”

James M. Margiotta, 33
J. Margiotta Company, LLC
Bronx, NY

After college, Margiotta immersed himself in his family’s wholesale produce business at New York’s Hunts Point Market but changing times and business practices soon became apparent to him. In July 2000, he founded J & J Bros., a trucking company, and began to build a delivery service. In 2005, he established J. Margiotta Company International, became an importer of produce, currently working with shippers in the Caribbean, South America and Europe.

“At the end of the summer, we will begin the first distribution of our foreign product line by releasing Jimmy’s Best, our exclusive brand of Peruvian sweet onions, and aiming for the highest quality and customer satisfaction,” he says. “Working directly with our farmers in Peru, we believe there will be a tremendous advantage to being involved in the process from the farming to the delivery to our customers. We plan to continue and enhance the excellent tradition of quality our customers have come to depend upon.”

His father, a lifelong industry veteran is his mentor and inspiration. “He has taught me a great deal about how to think of new ways to change while holding on to the traditional cor-

nerstone values of hard work and honesty.”

His great grandfather came to the United States from Italy in 1900 and began the family’s commitment to the produce industry. Since then, they have had locations in the markets at Washington Street, Bronx Terminal and Hunts Point. “We have over 100 years of history in the produce business. I understand how my father grew and changed the business with the times and the superb job he did at finding ways to meet his customers’ changing and growing needs. He taught me to pursue excellence for our family, our business and our future.”



James M. Margiotta

His principal challenge comes from his business location in New York, one of the most competitive markets in the world. He is a member of the Hunts Point Board of Directors and treasurer of the New York Produce Trade Association. “In both of these endeavors I hope to help influence positive change and growth for my company and those of my fellow merchants in the Hunts Point Market. Each day presents new and different scenarios in learning how to succeed, how to grow, how to innovate.”

He has also contributed time and energy to charities, including Surfers Healing, a non-profit foundation working hands-on with autistic children, and has helped feed the homeless and poor of New York.

Emily Marlephansakul, 28
Executive Vice President
Fresh Produce & Floral Council
La Mirada, CA

Through hard work, leadership skills, a thirst for knowledge and searching for challenges, Marlephansakul has risen to executive vice president after success as vice president and membership development director/event coordinator in just five years with the Fresh Produce & Floral Council (FPFC).

She has been responsible for balancing an approximately \$1 million budget and increasing FPFC membership while planning more than 15 events per year including annual dinner dances, golf tournaments, luncheons, produce/floral tours, Board retreats, exposition/trade shows, VIP dinners and committee meetings. She works directly with the Board of Directors and volunteer committees to plan events that vary in size from 30 to over 1000 attendees.

Working with diverse groups and developing partnerships, she has an infectious positive atti-

tude that complements her ability to work on a team and develop solutions to any challenge. She spearheaded the development of a produce handling guide utilized by large and independent retailers and the Public Health Institute/CA 5-A-Day. She has also served as an alternate representative on the PBH Board.



Emily Marlephansakul

She has held a director position on the board of the Intercommunity Blind Center. “While on the board, I utilized my talents and aided in implementing fund-raising events,” she reports. “I have been involved with public radio by volunteering in the music department, participating in member events and daily station activities at KCRW. I also volunteer for The Studio for Southern California History where I most recently worked with a group of young children who are participants in a USC study on the development of nutrition in women.”

Developing relationships on the Los Angeles Wholesale Produce Market (LAWPM) has proven both an inspiration and a challenge. “One of my goals at the FPFC was to increase participation of the LAWPM. I was focused on showing the LAWPM the value the FPFC offered. My face-to-face interactions were a great way to listen to the comments and concerns of the LAWPM and provided me with new perspectives of the changing produce industry.”

She notes industry leaders as mentors, including Jan DeLyser of the CAC and Jin Ju Wilder of Coast Produce. “Both have provided inspiration, guidance and friendship throughout my career in the produce industry. Jan is an outstanding leader within the industry through her industry presence and years of experience. Her talent as a key industry leader inspires me to want to make a difference. Jin Ju provides similar inspiration to me and also provides me with a great example of how to successfully balance family and a career. She is a dynamic leader and a great example of what a committee member is capable of contributing by integrating her voice in an industry often dominated by men and an older generation.

“I have had a very successful career at the FPFC, but the guidance, inspiration and friendship of Jan DeLyser and Jin Ju Wilder have encouraged me and helped me see how to make a difference in the industry. Just as teachers often inspire their students to continue with their studies and be excited about school, Jan and Jin Ju provide great examples of strong women changing the face of the industry.”



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Wendy McManus

Wendy McManus, 40
Marketing Director
National Mango Board
Orlando, FL

During her time at the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB), McManus developed the *Lycopers Leader* logo, gained USDA approval for it and worked to incorporate the logo into box, bin and label designs to get the information out to consumers. “We worked with fresh-cut watermelon suppliers and provided stickers so they could feature the message on fresh-cut product,” she states. “We had great success getting retailers to include the logo in their ads.”

She developed a user-friendly category management program using regional scan data aligned with regional consumer research to help retailers better understand how to build watermelon sales. Such an intensely data-driven tool is very difficult for small commodity boards, such as the NWPB, to develop and implement.

At Consumer Effects, a retail promotions company, she developed concepts and managed the creative process for several co-marketing promotions. Some were produce-only projects, but others allowed funding from packaged goods to help move more produce. She developed Pink Ribbon Produce, a produce promotion and fundraiser for breast cancer, raised over \$80,000 for local Susan G. Komen affiliates in the three participating retailers’ marketing areas. Her stepmother and her husband’s stepmother are battling breast cancer, so she was motivated to harness the power of a produce promotion to help raise money for this cause.

At the National Mango Board (NMB), her leadership role has grown with the enormous responsibility of building a commodity-marketing program from the ground up. “We have just approved a branding graphics package and we’re currently redeveloping a vastly expanded Web site. These are just two projects on a long list of fundamentals we’re taking on, one by one. I believe the mango industry will benefit from these efforts for many years to come, regardless of who is sitting in my chair.”

She finds working with commodity boards an especially challenging and unique opportunity. “You have to earn the trust and respect of the industry members who fund the program and sit on the board. The industry communication component of commodity marketing adds a layer of complexity and a great deal of work to the job description. It’s not enough to get the job done, arrange great retail promotions and land

stellar media placements. You also have to find ways to illustrate you’ve done the very best you could with their money to your industry members. I find this part of the job very challenging, but also very rewarding.”

McManus enjoys the mango industry. “This is an amazing product on the cusp of a major spike in awareness, demand and consumption. When I accepted the position, the board was still in its first year of operation, the job wasn’t well defined and the employee benefits were non-existent. However, I really wanted to work with this industry and help build the program from the ground up. Accepting this position was a leap of faith and I’ve never regretted it for a minute.”

William Watson brought her into the produce industry when he hired her at NWPB. “I didn’t know produce, but he had confidence in my marketing skills and background. He has been a mentor and an inspiration to me ever since and now we’re together again at the National Mango Board. He has taught me so much about the produce industry and about life.”

McManus also acknowledges former NWPB colleagues, specifically Cece Krumrine and Sheila Carden. “They were always willing to answer questions, provide feedback and help me understand what their retailers were looking for. They also went out of their way to introduce me to people at industry events so I wouldn’t feel like such a newcomer.”

She also learned a great deal from Dave Parker from Fruit Patch and Jan DeLyser from the CAC. “Both of these amazing people have taken the time to show me the ropes working from the very unique commodity board perspective.”

Stacey Larson, who owns Consumer Effects and was her boss for two years, is also a mentor. “She has taught me so much about creativity and persistence. She and her company have done an amazing job with long-term produce promotions, such as Make The Most Of Your Produce at Kroger. I’m proud I was involved in the early phase of this young company developing into a real player in the produce industry.”

Eric Mitchnick, 40
Sales/Buyer Specialty/Organic Division
S. Katzman Produce
Hunts Point Terminal Market Bronx, NY

Mitchnick has a true passion for the produce industry and a tenacious pursuit for excellence. During the past 20 years, he has committed himself to promoting and marketing the benefits of organic produce while working for industry leaders and creating his own company. He developed and implemented a specialty and organic division for S. Katzman, a leading wholesaler on Hunts Point. He won the first Big O Merchandising Award sponsored by the Organic Trade Association (OTA) and two consecutive PRODUCE BUSINESS Marketing Excellence Awards. He has been a spokesperson and speaker at OTA seminars in Maryland and Florida.

A pioneer in organic produce, he has helped educate retailers, wholesalers, consumers and growers about the positive benefits of organics on a personal and environmental level. “When I

started speaking to people about organics 20 years ago, they laughed,” he reports. “With extensive research and education, I felt I could turn the laughter into inquiries about organics and their benefits to the general public/retailers. I wanted to bring organic produce into the mainstream because of its obvious health and environmental benefits without ever forgetting the potential profitability of the category.”



Eric Mitchnick

Changing perception about organics and their benefits has been a challenge. “I feel fortunate large companies like Whole Foods and Wal-Mart have brought organics into the mainstream and helped my job become a bit easier.”

He wants to continue educating consumers and colleagues about organics. “I want to help produce more educational materials for the mass markets like TV, radio and magazine venues. I’d also like to work with small organic growers to increase their presence in the marketplace and introduce to them new items they should grow organically. Eventually, I’d love to grow organics on a small organic farm in upstate New York and supply farmers markets and some select retail stores.”

Mitchnick’s mentors include Bill Wyland of Seald Sweet, Joe Forte of Wild By Nature and Joe Procacci of Procacci Brothers. “They are very passionate and knowledgeable about the produce industry. They are all hard-working individuals, very entrepreneurial, and have been extremely influential in my work ethic and growth in the produce business.”

Greg Mixon, 39
Vice President/Sales Manger/Owner
SunnyRidge Farm, Inc.
Winter Haven, FL

Known for passion and enthusiasm, Mixon, along with his two brothers, purchased SunnyRidge from his father three years ago. He has been with the company for eight years, the last four as sales manager. Under his sales direction, the company has undergone substantial growth.

He started in the early days of the business. “When I started the job, my father told me it was a great job and seasonal so my wife and I could travel in the off-season and see the world,” he remembers. “That same year we went year-round on blueberries for the first time, so I never got to travel the world.”

Wearing grower and marketer hats has kept him attuned to the needs of everyone in the

chain. "My success is due to the products we sell and the growers we work with. Good reliable products can make anybody a good salesperson."

He has been married for 12 years and has two sons and one daughter. He enjoys fishing with his boys. "This job forces you to focus on your family and we enjoy spending time together as much as we can."



Greg Mixon

The daily competition in produce is a challenge. "What inspires me every day is the discovery of what the market will hold today. The challenge it creates is fantastic. This industry can change on a dime, upward or downward."

The product itself also inspires him. "It's motivating how berries have become so important and how I can provide such a needed product. I love being able to sell a product with so many health attributes. It's something people truly love and benefit from."

His company goal at this point is to create a sales organization that continues to value its products and to grow the demand for those products. He would also like to create more balance between his passion for work and his passion for his family. "Every year we have growth and it challenges how I manage my day."

Mixon calls his father Gerald Mixon a visionary and a mentor. "He saw the potential for blueberries 15 years ago. He was a well-studied man. He learned about blueberries and was able to see the prospective opportunity. He gave our company a strong foundation on which to grow and his innovations include forced air-cooling, new varieties and small pack sizes. I believe the industry owes him a lot of credit for his leadership."

Kenny G. Myers, 36
Chief Operating Officer
Kegel's Produce
Lancaster, PA

At 18, Myers left college to run the family business in light of his father's deteriorating health due to cancer. He led the company from a small two-dock warehouse to a 100,000-square-foot facility. "I attribute our growth to focusing on quality and customer service," he states. "I am adamant about food safety."

As a part of the new warehouse, he created a concept known as the Produce Playground. "The Produce Playground is a test kitchen and the will-call area for our customers to experience produce. When customers pick up produce at our business, I want them to have an experience.

We invite in guest chefs to do cooking demos and the area acts as an event headquarters for groups to hold fund-raisers. I wanted to spotlight produce and be able to open the minds of consumers to trying new produce items."



Kenny G. Myers

Myers is a board member of the PMA food-service division. "Becoming a part of PMA has taught me valuable lessons. The PMA leadership and members have energy and being a board member has been a truly rewarding experience."

Myers is also very active with the Lancaster Farm Land Trust, a group helping farmers preserve their land and providing incentives to maintain farms rather than selling to a developer. The *Central Penn Business Journal* named him Outstanding Entrepreneur under 40 in 2003 and the Pennsylvania Restaurant Association named him Associate Member of the Year in 2003.

In 2004, he won the Pennsylvania Restaurant Association Excellence in Food Safety Award. He graduated from the Dale Carnegie Human Relations Course in 2007 and the PMA Produce Academy in 1999.

His inspiration comes from family, employees and customers. "I strive to reach out to different people every day and encourage them to eat healthfully and consume more fresh produce. I'm faced daily with such a diverse group of wonderful people. It really keeps me on my toes. I will go from talking to the local pizza shop owner to the chef at a four-star hotel."

His mother is a significant mentor. "She is at a point in her life where she should be sitting back and enjoying life, but her life is our customers, which is where she gets her enjoyment. She has taught me how taking a product a customer needed on a Saturday afternoon in her car is the ultimate customer service Kegel's Produce customers deserve."

Another mentor is Dick Santana of Santana Banana. "Dick knew my father well and talks about the old times with me regularly. It is normal for Dick to stop by and pay us a visit. This means a lot to me and shows he really appreciates our business relationship."

Bryan Silbermann of PMA is also at the top of his mentor list. "With compassion and intelligence Bryan never ceases to amaze me."

His own version of *Cheers* helps him cope with stress. "Captain Gus operates Lancaster's No. 1 cheesesteak joint and I visit it a few times a week. Going there offers so much more than good food. The Captain is always telling stories, doing tricks and making people laugh. I can

leave the stress of the day at the door. I've learned a lot from the Captain — like how important it is to have fun at work. So many of us are so focused on multi-tasking we forget to have fun."

Jeff Nichol, 35
Director of Sales and Marketing
The California Mushroom Farm
Ventura, CA

After 10 years in sales in the produce industry, Nichol is now in a position that focuses on enhancing the company's presence in the marketplace and stimulating mushroom consumption. He has instituted sales protocols helping ensure seamless service between mushroom production and customers.

He previously worked for Tanimura and Antle as a regional sales manager responsible for fresh vegetable outside sales for the western United States and Canada. "This required developing and preserving rapport with foodservice and retail clients," he explains. Before T&A, he spent five years with Gills Onions where he developed sales of its processed onion line.



Jeff Nichol

He is active in leadership roles at church and spends time coaching soccer for his daughters.

Nichol enjoys meeting the challenge of selling a new product to a market, handling seasonality and bringing new clients to my company. "I always strive to develop a win-win relationship between customers and the organization I work for. Meeting these challenges is what inspires me to further push my abilities and myself."

His father Rick Nichol has been an inspiration. "He is a great communicator. He has a strong work ethic and is always diligent to take care of his customers' needs."

Nichol would like to be involved in a trade organization such as PMA or United to support the cause of increasing produce consumption and healthful living.

He mentions Steve Gill as one of the people most influential in his career. "He exudes a contagious passion for what he does and produces. He is the type of leader I strive to emulate."

He recognizes Greg Sagan, senior vice president of Modern Mushroom Farms, as one of the most knowledgeable people in the industry. "Greg is an expert in sales, knows how to develop relationships and provides great solutions to customers. His expertise in customer presentations and category management is a terrific learning tool for me."

Matt Reel, 27
Sales Manager
Seald Sweet
Vero Beach, FL

Since starting in the industry five years ago with no background in produce, Reel has worked hard to educate himself, working his way up the ladder, and has made significant contributions to his company.

After hurricanes Frances and Jeanne, he helped organize a farm-worker relief promotion with several retailers and raised \$200,000. This initiative helped Seald Sweet win supplier of the quarter with Wal-Mart in 2005. When Seald Sweet went through a major restructuring effort in 2005, he helped integrate departments and reshape the way it went to market with products. It is now a stronger, more diverse and more focused company than at any time in its nearly 100-year history.



Matt Reel

A team player, Reel credits the relationships he has with co-workers and industry leaders for his success. He is the father of three and often volunteers at his children's school and athletic activities, from assisting with carnival set-ups to coaching his son's basketball team.

He considers himself very competitive, and since there is a new challenge everyday in this industry, he loves going to work every morning. "One of my biggest inspirations on a day-to-day basis is the people I work with. There are great people within the company, as are those I have an opportunity to deal with everyday including customers, growers, packinghouse personnel and service providers. So many people I've met over these past five years I now consider close friends. I can't imagine being involved in a different industry."

Bruce McEvoy, Mayda Sotomayor and David Mixon of Seald Sweet and a few others have been very important to his career development. "Bruce, Mayda and David play vital rolls within the company and their vision, work ethic and integrity have set the bar very high for me.

"Frank Hunt is the managing director of Hunt Brothers Cooperative here in Florida, and although he is one of the most knowledgeable and successful people I know, he always has time to answer questions and discuss issues as they relate to the Florida citrus industry. Frank demonstrates the respect and integrity everyone in our business should admire. Ed Kay who has worked with Seald Sweet for over 40 years exemplifies the kind of dedication I've always

admired. All these people have been crucial to my development and growth. I know I wouldn't have made it this far without their leadership."



Tammy Sparkman

Tammy Sparkman, 35
Produce Buyer
Sam's Club
Bentonville, AR

Sparkman's produce career began in 2000 as an hourly replenishment associate at Sam's Club. She quickly advanced to an assistant buyer in floral, assistant buyer in produce and her current position of produce buyer. Her responsibilities include a budget in excess of \$250 million in sales with tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, melons, mushrooms and all holiday items.

Her biggest successes come when the market is tight. "When the product is in short supply and other retailers are getting cut or experiencing quality issues, my sales go through the roof," she explains. "This is a direct result of solid relationships I have forged with my growers. I have aligned myself with the best in the business and we work together to move crops."

Sparkman focuses on sustainability. She planned, organized and executed the first Nationwide Tomato Program at Sam's Club in 2006. "By going after homegrown tomatoes, we supported the American farmer, promoted sustainable agriculture and experienced enormous logistic savings. I have also encouraged the majority of my vendors to switch to environmentally friendly packaging and aligned distribution centers for logistical savings."

Community involvement expands her horizons. She works with small communities, helping them in their stores, helping them clean up their firehouses, etc. "The need for volunteers, especially in small communities, is in short supply. There seems to always be something better people think they can do with their time but I would disagree and encourage others to give of themselves. It helps you become a better, more well-rounded leader, helps you understand special circumstances of those less fortunate and also increases your compassion."

Her inspiration is the challenges and responsibilities of working for the world's leading retailer. "I am inspired not only to meet the challenge of this position but also to surpass it. The job of the buyer is to make sure you are bringing products your consumers want to the market. In produce, not only do you have to bring the right items but you also have to bring them in at the highest quality available. My value equation

always needs to be in place. It is imperative all my growers are PRIMUS-certified, practicing GAP and ensuring the health and hygiene of their workers. This is a substantial challenge for me due to the sheer volume I purchase.

"In the world of marketing, we are in a unique position. We have something with great taste that also has nutritional value. It is the job of the buyer to make sure we are purchasing the correct varieties and quality to take to market. We need to make sure we always have the consumer in mind. Consumers come in and buy a peach from your store; if it's not good, they assume you don't have good produce. As we all know, this is not necessarily the case. However the assumption is made and it sticks with this consumer, so getting caught up on the spot buys is very dangerous."

Three of her mentors are Bob DiPiazza, formerly with Sam's Club and now a consultant, Michael Cochran with Wal-Mart and Paul DiMare of DiMare Fresh. "Bob is an amazing merchandiser and has been involved with produce for roughly 40 years. He took me under his wing and explained specs and markets with the knowledge and experience few possess. His passion for produce is contagious and I can only hope I can pass on the lessons he taught me with the same excitement. Bob DiPiazza is truly one of the great people in our industry."

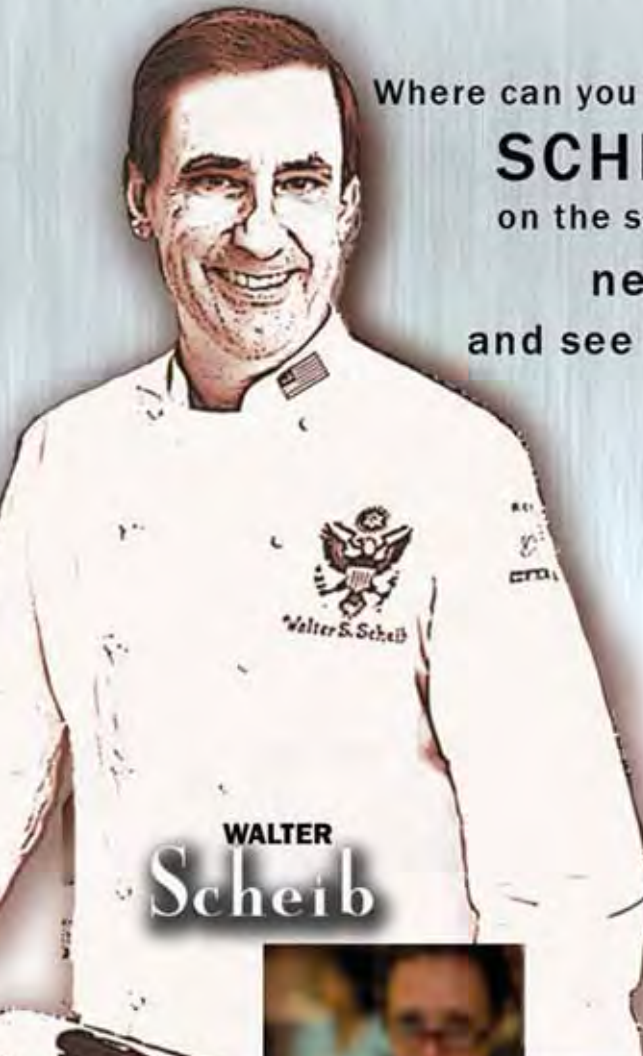
Cochran was the first produce buyer Sparkman worked under. "When I began in merchandising, we were buying apples, pears, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, melons and holiday items. Michael gave me watermelons after only two weeks on the job. Terrified, I took them and ran. He was always there to make sure I was on track. He was always involved in the day-to-day and showed me the value of grower relationships. One of the biggest things Michael taught me was how to be open to new ideas. He never gets stuck on how it should be done. Even if he doesn't agree with your decisions, he will always give you the latitude to try it. He always understood the value of experiencing things for yourself and gets how you will learn the most from your failures."

Sparkman considers DiMare an innovative grower. "He teaches me the value of the grower and how important it is to help sustain the American farmer. He is very vocal on his viewpoints but leaves room for me to come to my own conclusions. I deeply respect his viewpoint and he respects mine. As you can see, I have mentors who give me differentiating views from the merchandising, buying and growing sides — Bob in merchandising, Michael in buying and Paul in growing. This helps me better understand all standpoints and make the best decisions."

Kimberly St. George, 37
Senior Marketing Manager
River Ranch Fresh Foods, LLC
Salinas, CA

In the 10 years St. George has been at River Ranch, she has made significant contributions in the areas of trade development, key customer sales growth, consumer relations, company advertising and industry/community exposure.

The company's first Web site was created



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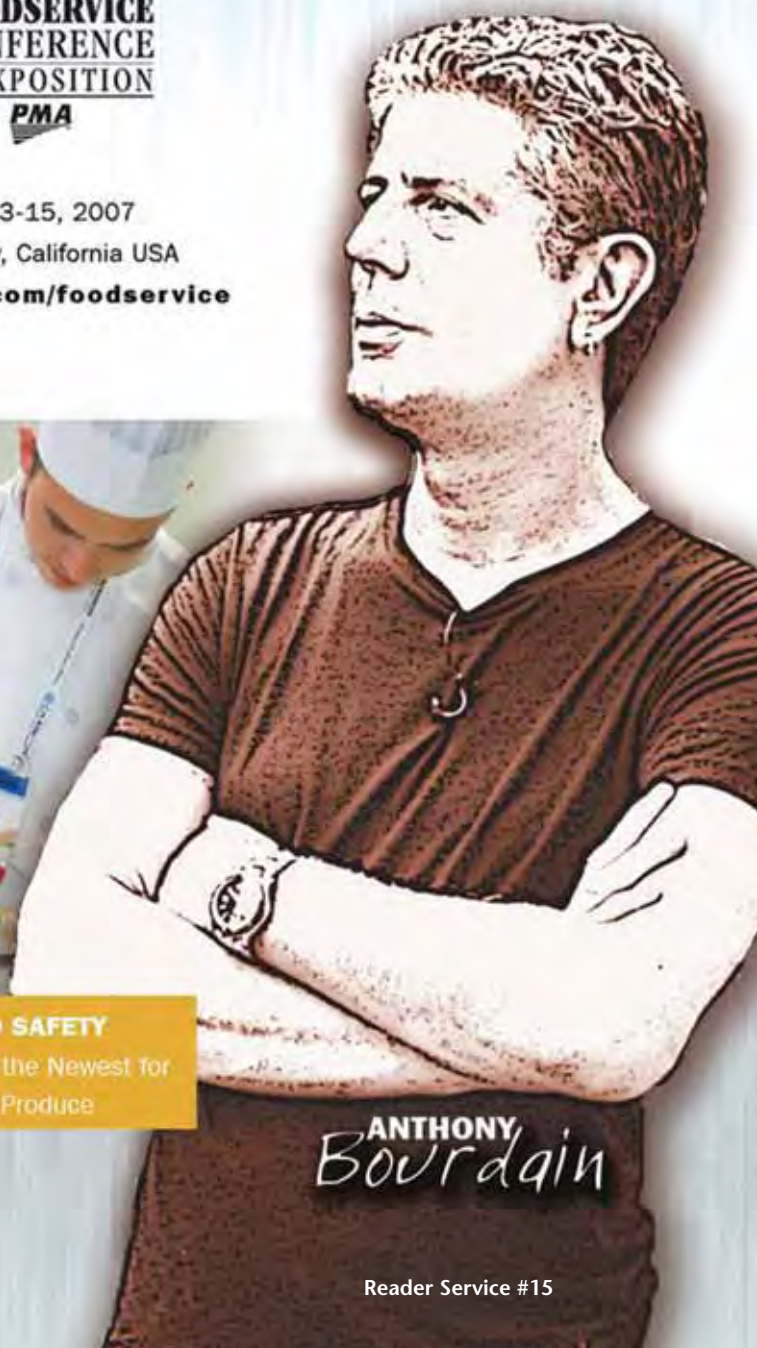
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under her direction in 1999. It evolved to a more expansive trade site in 2002, and a dedicated consumer site was added in 2003. "These sites serve the company's trade industry partners, regional employees and consumers by providing valuable product and company information," she notes.



Kimberly St. George

She directed the design and implementation of several comprehensive trade-advertising campaigns across all media, including trade print ads, direct mail, printed collateral material, sales materials, convention show graphics and sales presentations. "These campaigns were launched at the introduction of our integrated core competency campaign and redesigned Popeye Fresh! product line."

By working directly with one of the company's largest key retail accounts, her marketing efforts have been instrumental in growing its business by launching over 10 new items specifically for this customer. Quarterly customer-specific promotions, including sweepstakes, demos, couponing and cross-promotions have led to increased consumer loyalty to store brand and increased sales.

Her implementation of a formal consumer response department system, protocol and procedures has become a way for the company to have direct contact with consumers and provide immediate response to their needs. Through the successful management and execution of over 50 conventions, customer events, exhibit trade booths, trade shows and community service events, she has established strong industry organization affiliations and important company ties to the community.

St. George serves on the Salute to Agriculture Marketing Committee of the Salinas Chamber of Commerce and the PBH Dinner Auction Committee. She served on PMA's Fresh Summit Convention Programming Committee and PMA's Fresh Summit Exhibitor Advisory Committee.

Since 2001, she has been the River Ranch team captain for the American Cancer Society (ACS) Salinas Relay for Life. Team River Ranch has raised over \$100K for ACS since her involvement. She has served on the UC Davis Alumni Association Board of Directors, as the UC Davis Alumni Monterey Chapter President and Chapter Scholarship Chair and she has been active in leadership roles in the Salinas Jaycees.

The mother of two small children, she knows the importance of exposing kids to a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. "Although it is challenging to introduce new produce items to chil-

dren, our industry has begun to develop more innovative, healthful, convenient produce items, making it easier for families to consume fresh fruits and vegetables, rather than the canned and frozen vegetables I grew up with. We need to find ways for fruits and vegetables to appeal to all generations. When children become produce consumers at a young age, they start asking their parents for fruits and vegetables and develop a lifelong commitment to healthful eating habits. This is an important goal we should all embrace to help build our industry."

John Pryor, who passed away this year at the age of 90, became her mentor two decades ago when he awarded her a high school scholarship to attend UC Davis. "Over my college years, he honored me with several scholarships to attend his alma mater and inspired me to excel at UC Davis, pursue agriculture and return to his hometown of Salinas to work in the produce industry. John's knowledge of the industry and his self-made company combined with his generosity inspired me to give back to UC Davis and the community. I continued to stay in touch with John years after graduation and was proud to nominate and present an award he received in 2000, the UC Davis Alumni Distinguished Achievement Award. John Pryor is one of the reasons I pursued an agricultural degree and career in the Salinas Valley produce industry."



Kaari Standard

Kaari Standard, 34
Owner/President
New York Apple Sales, Inc.
Castleton, New York

Standard is a leading apple marketer in New York, representing more than 150 apple growers and marketing for more than eight major packing companies. She has earned the respect of retailers across the country and overseas and is a leading supplier to Wal-Mart.

Assuming control of the business at a young age when her stepfather died, Standard helped the business and industry excel, putting together a year-round program for retailers. "By far the largest challenge I have faced in my produce career was the passing of my stepfather and previous owner of New York Apple Sales. In June 2000, Marty Michaelson passed away due to cancer. At this time I was still very new to the apple industry and had to work very hard to maintain our grower base and grow our customer base," she explains. An investment in people and resources has helped the company more than double its revenue since then.

She credits relationships for the success achieved to date. "Dedication in learning first what it takes to produce an apple allowed me to become a trusted leader in the marketing of their product. Had I not had the experience and taken the time to learn this end of the business, I would have never been able to take over the role of owner and president and continue to have the support of my growers to market their fruit."

She is part of class 12 of UFFVA's leadership program and serves on the board of the US Export Council as a representative from New York. She is also a member of PMA and US Apple.

Since purchasing the remaining shares of the business in the summer of 2005, she has worked to formulate a 5-year strategic plan. Now in the second year of the plan, she is beginning to diversify products and position the company as a yearlong apple supplier by supplementing regional fruit with imports out of Chile and potentially New Zealand. "I am also looking at new varieties to partner with our growers to become the U.S. licensing agent. We have had wonderful growth over the past years and I want to continue it through the investment in people and new products."

Michaelson was her major mentor. Mike Faddis, former part-owner of New York Apple Sales, continues to mentor her today. "Mike has been in the produce business for almost his entire life. Though technology and some business processes have changed over the years, the basics he taught me continue to lead me in the right direction. He gave me the skills and drive to take risks. Not everything has worked out as I would have liked, but he gave me the strength and encouragement to make a decision and see it through."

Mike Stevens, 35
Senior Director, Retail Sales
Earthbound Farm
San Juan Bautista, CA

Stevens led the information technology initiative at Earthbound Farm to redesign the user interface of its sales system. With real-time access to inventory and product information, his work has achieved time savings of as much as two hours per person per day. "It has revolutionized the way we use IT in sales and enabled us to use our information advantage on behalf of our customers," he says.



Mike Stevens

With the support of his team and colleagues, he has grown Earthbound's commodity program

from a sideline to a program standing on its own. "It is now pulling its own weight in balance with our salad program. Now consumers who know our brand from organic salads can discover our organic commodities, too."

Though difficult for the company, the spinach recall in September 2006 drew many Earthbound leaders to the forefront. Stevens played a key tactical role in the mechanics of the product recall, leading the sales team in the tough task of guiding customers through the scary process of pulling product off the shelves, documenting it and returning it. "I don't wish the experience on anyone, but the way our team pulled together and did what needed to be done made me proud of Earthbound Farm's integrity."

Stevens is leading Earthbound's outreach to university internship programs to bring new talent into the agriculture industry, and the relationships he built as a salesman have made him a resource for customers who seek him out as an organics spokesman for panels and discussions. "Whether I'm talking about sales challenges or the mission of bringing organic food to as many people as possible, my message is simply I love what I do. And I'm privileged to be able to do it for a company as inspiring as Earthbound Farm."

Stevens' goal is to continue to lead and get better at doing it. "In the short term, I'm actively mentoring and coaching younger people coming up in the company and building a great sales team at Earthbound Farm. I'm seeking greater exposure outside the company, reaching out to new, creative talent and representing Earthbound Farm's philosophy in the marketplace. And I'm moving away from day-to-day tactical tasks toward strategic management of our sales program to help add value and support organic farming's place in the world."

He is grateful to several people for teaching him what he needed to know. His father Dan Stevens, director of export sales for Nunes Company, is first on his list. "He taught me a love for the industry and for the sales game. He modeled an extreme work ethic that keeps me at the job till the job's done."

His first sales boss, Kris Capurro, now a Partner at Capurro Marketing, LLC, is another mentor. "He may be surprised to be named a mentor but he's the best true FOB commodity salesman I know. He taught me a lot about the mechanics of sales and was the first to point out I shouldn't be afraid of making a mistake. My ability to learn from 'failing forward' is something he helped me develop."

Stevens relies on golf partner and confidant, Todd Kodet, senior vice president of supply at Earthbound Farm, for farming lessons and sage advice. "He's expanded my knowledge of growing and harvesting, improved my golf swing and helped me better understand the farmers who support us all."

Stevens acknowledges Tonya Antle, Earthbound's vice president of organic sales, as a kindred competitive spirit who helped him become a more passionate sales professional and a better person. "Every day she raises the bar over my head and challenges me to clear it. Every day, she reminds me how much fun the sales game still

is. She does nothing halfway, and she inspires me to do the same."



Nancy Stevenson

Nancy Stevenson, 32

Senior Sales Executive/Grower Relations, Apple, Pear, Melon & Organic Product Category Leader Fisher Capespan USA Gloucester City, NJ

In the produce industry since 1998, Stevenson's career has advanced quickly. Fluency in Spanish has enabled her to build relationships with grower/ exporters in Chile, Argentina, Peru and Brazil and successfully procure product and negotiate programs from these areas. "The relationships I have made have remained strong throughout the years and have developed to include additional product lines, additional growers and most of all additional friendships," she states. "I have been able to maintain a reputation of being a person the growers can trust."

She has advanced in category management by taking on numerous commodities, including apples, pears, melons and organics. She leads teammates by detailing market conditions, price structures, volume predictions, etc. and is able to advise them in their individual customer planning processes. As import volumes have increased, so have customer commitments to fixed programs in these categories.

"Customers have been able to turn to me to fill their needs with produce and as an information resource. They count on me to tell them what is happening overseas and with the crops so they may be able to better plan their promotions. I enjoy the challenge of finding out information for clients."

She is currently an events director for Phlock of South Jersey, a not-for-profit social organization that holds charity events for children with cancer, Alzheimer charities, etc. It supports a local senior home during the holidays and programs such as Adopt a Highway. She is also a water aerobics instructor at her local YMCA once a week and assists in training new instructors.

The fast pace of the industry has inspired the realization that this is the only field she can imagine working in. "The movement of a perishable commodity through the system, learning customer specifications and finding the right product for them have all been challenges. However, they are also the inspiration keeping me moving and striving to learn more. Learning about the products, the customers, the industry and the consumer has played a role. When I start to speak about my career, I find myself trying to

teach everyone, including my kids, everything I know about the industry. It has fascinated me from the beginning and I believe it will continue to do so until retirement."

She is a single mother with two daughters, ages 13 and 7. "Through their interest in my work, they have motivated me to work toward learning more and teaching more. It isn't everyday you go to the supermarket with your children and you hear them yell in the produce aisle, 'Hey, Mom! These are the apples you import.' They think it's cool!"

"On the import side of our industry, there are very few women selling or even interacting with growers. This has also been a challenge at times, and as commonly said in this field, you have to have broad shoulders. As a younger generation takes on more responsibilities and positions in the industry, we are also seeing the acceptance of more and more women in the industry, giving me more motivation to succeed."

Many people in the industry have helped her climb the ladder of success. "They gave me a chance to work in the industry, gave me recognition, believed in me and helped build my reputation. These people had confidence in me and in my work ethics and took the time to show me the ropes. They continue to be a valuable resource. Many are past co-workers, and many are customers, growers and fellow industry salespeople. The people who have helped me throughout my years in the industry continue to be a part of my life. And like me, they are all in this industry, because it's a way of life — not just a job."



Michelle Story

Michelle Story, 35

Account Executive Tanimura & Antle Fresh Foods Salinas CA

Story spent four years with Tanimura & Antle as a regional sales manager in Texas and recently returned to California as the account executive for T&A's largest retail customer, Wal-Mart. T&A received Wal-Mart's Western Veg Supplier of the year award and more than doubled its annual sales. This position has given her several opportunities with Wal-Mart leadership, including a position on Wal-Mart's Produce Supplier Task Force.

She participated and graduated from the UFFVA Leadership Program in 2000 and has participated on its leadership selection committee. She is involved in several industry committees and supports various community activities.

Specifically, she continues to give back to her alma mater, Cal Poly, by hosting company tours, guest speaking and recruiting students.

The opportunities of a fast-paced, complex industry challenge her everyday. "I feel fortunate to be working on such a large account and coordinating so many different company and industry initiatives in support of the business," she explains. "Anticipating our customers' needs and facilitating strategic plans to achieve them presents daily challenges as well as rewards."

Working with so many talented people who believe in what they do is a great inspiration.

She hopes to elevate her position within T&A and the produce industry by developing her business management and analytical skills. "Additionally, I plan to focus on my team's development and future leadership opportunities."

She has been fortunate to work beside several industry leaders. "The Tanimura & Antle families have shown me passion and commitment to growing high-quality vegetables. Their enthusiasm and dedication toward the business and their employees are inspiring. They have provided me a dependable environment to work and grow. As a female in a predominantly male industry, I have had the opportunity to experience firsthand support and encouragement from highly knowledgeable and motivated females, ultimately resulting in lasting relationships. I continue to look for opportunities to offer the same support to young women entering the industry."



Greg Verdelli

Greg Verdelli, 28

Procurement Manager
Verdelli Farms Inc.
Harrisburg, PA

Verdelli's accomplishments, mostly in the technology field, have helped take Verdelli Farms into a new era. He created an interactive Web site current with Verdelli's product line of over 200 items and upgraded the entire network infrastructure to create major office efficiencies.

He is implementing an extensive inventory tracking system, enabling tracking of product from the field it was cut in to the customer it was sold to with a few clicks of a mouse. "It will be able to provide more accurate production numbers than anybody in this industry could have ever imagined," he claims. "So far, I have been successful in the majority of this project and am looking to finalizing it this [past] May."

He has also experienced procurement success, playing a major role in reducing costs on

raw product and production. "It can be very difficult at times to research and identify new quality vendors who will actually perform to Verdelli's high-quality standards and also provide a competitive price in the marketplace. It can also be difficult to find transportation meeting delivery deadlines unheard of anywhere else. Once the product arrives, I try to come up with new ideas to process it more efficiently."

The produce industry has offered him more challenges than he ever imagined including food safety, machine efficiency and server stability. "While growing up in a family producing fresh-cut salads for a living, I have had the opportunity to face challenges in various areas of the business, but I gained inspiration from these challenges to make both the product and company better."

Verdelli's biggest challenge to date has been forecasting customer needs and product availability. "This is a challenge nobody will ever be able to completely solve. The short product life of produce makes this challenge much more difficult than any other industry. With the market being its usual crazy self, it is often tough to predict customers' needs. This challenge inspires me to continue improving my forecasting skills. My goal is to one day understand the market well enough people ask me where my crystal ball is hiding. This is how a challenge can inspire you to make you and everyone around you better."

He wants to make his family's business the best value-added produce supplier in the country and beyond. "When I say the best, I don't necessarily mean the most profitable. Rather I'm looking for the company with the best product quality, customer service and price. I am interested in keeping the cost of produce down and the quality high. With the never-ending challenges our industry faces, the cost of product constantly rises. I want to ensure even the people with the smallest means will be able to eat fresh, high-quality produce year-round."

His mentors are his father and grandfather. "They have both showed me the hard work and dedication it takes to be successful in the produce industry. In this industry, there are no holidays. There are no bank hours. The only way to truly be successful is to be committed and dedicated everyday, no matter the circumstances. From an early age, I watched my grandfather unofficially retire, yet to this day, he still arrives to work every morning and helps out the best he can. My father taught me almost everything I know about this business and this industry. I am fortunate enough to work with him everyday and watch him put his own words into practice."

Becky Wilson, 37

Assistant Vice President
Tom Lange Company, Inc.
Springfield, IL

Starting with Tom Lange as a receptionist at age 21, Wilson has worked her way up to assistant vice president of administration. Her responsibilities include PACA issues and disputes, evaluation of credit for shippers and customers, and convention coordination. She also

has many responsibilities related to the 25 satellite offices.



Becky Wilson

Her primary responsibility is marketing initiatives and public relations. She also acts as a counselor to senior management and a corporate liaison between almost 30 offices in the United States and Canada. In addition to her integral role in daily business operations, she is the chairperson for the Tom Lange Charitable Foundation, which supports children's charities.

"As a female in a predominately male organization I am not deterred," she notes. "I have diligently mastered several areas and moved through the ranks of the organization, setting no limits for myself."

Her industry accomplishments include being part of the UFFVA Leadership Program class 12 and being active in education with United Fresh and PMA. She is actively involved with Project Fresh Start in Illinois, working toward adding the state to the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program. "Throughout my community, I am actively involved in the Parent-Educator Organization and Parent Corps, which educates children on the dangers of drugs and alcohol."

She is married and the proud mother of three children. "One day I hope they understand the demands of this business. It is hard to have a driven person like myself in one's life. I find I push myself harder so I can make them proud."

She aspires to become the first female to hold a seat on the Tom Lange board of directors. "I want my predecessors to be assured they have left the company in good hands. They will be a hard act to follow, but I am up for the challenge. Tom Lange Company was built on the philosophy of delivering produce fast, fresh, friendly and fairly priced. Our company is 47 years old and still going strong. I hope my continued education, involvement and objectivity will make me an effective leader, safely guarding the future."

She looks to continue working closely with United Fresh and PMA. "I won't be happy until every school district throughout the country has implemented the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program. John Alm, the former president and chief operating officer of Coca-Cola Enterprises, stated, 'The school system is where you build brand loyalty.' Our industry is missing the boat if we can't build our brand loyalty."

Wilson considers Phil Gumpert, president/CEO of Tom Lange, a mentor. "I am so blessed to be able to witness the passion and drive of this man. On a daily basis, he continues to reinvent

himself and our company. He commands the respect of his peers and employees while continuing to hold his integrity in the highest regard.”

She has learned a great deal from the veteran sales force of Tom Lange. “I have been with this company for 16 years and I have a band of brothers who day after day sell produce against all odds. I feel God placed each one of them in my life to learn a lesson. After losing my father a few years ago to cancer, this band of brothers has been of utmost importance in my life’s journey.”



Gustavo Yentzen Wilson

Gustavo Yentzen Wilson, 36

*General Manager
Yentzen Consulting
Las Condes, Santiago, Chile*

Yentzen Wilson has a degree in business administration engineering from Adolfo Ibañez University, where he specialized in marketing and consumer behavior. He has worked for companies like 3M, CSAV (Chilean shipping company) and San Pedro winery. In 2001, the Chilean Exporters Association (ASOEX), which is responsible for the Chilean fruit global image project, appointed him senior marketing manager. In 2006, he started his own business, Yentzen Consulting (YC), in Santiago, where he focuses on representing and aiding foreign entities that want to do business in the Chilean and Latin American produce markets. He also assists in positioning Chilean companies in North American markets. YC is dedicated to providing value through marketing ideas and plans, searching for synergies and economies of scale. In its first year of operations, YC assisted and represented international trade associations, including PMA, CAC and several trade publications.

Between 2001 and 2006, Yentzen developed and implemented the Chilean fresh fruit industry marketing campaign in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. It included a television campaign, press relations strategy and highly successful “Chilean Fruit, Wine and Salmon” cross-promotion and point-of-sale activities. For five years, he was responsible for coordinating activities related to the “Experience the Flavors of Chile” event at the Chilean booth at PMA’s Fresh Summit.

In 2003, he expanded his marketing activities into Latin America by launching campaigns in Mexico and Colombia. In 2004, he participated in the launching of the 5-A-Day campaign in Chile. In 2005, Gustavo became the first Latin American representative in the UFFVA Leadership Program. In December 2006, YC started

representing PMA in Chile and Peru.

Yentzen came from the wine industry. “It was an industry I loved in part because of the glamour involved,” he states. “As I started working in the produce industry, I realized it had the same glamour, but I also found other dimensions. I discovered an industry revolving around and depending on its people. There is a sense of community involving all its participants around the world, no matter the position in the company or role played in the distribution chain. I found an industry sincerely caring about the final consumer and campaigns encouraging children and people to eat more healthfully, not only for the economic aspect of it but also with the conviction of generating good for society as a whole. I saw dedication in growers, shippers, wholesalers and retailers. Moreover, I encountered an industry welcoming new people, especially young people, to share its new ideas. And I found an industry passionate about produce, but more importantly passionate about life itself.”

He appreciates having met a great number of people who have taught him many things. “I always try to learn from the people I meet and who surround me. I take as a souvenir the very best of each one, not only professionally but also on a human level. These fellow produce people have helped me to be a better professional and a better person. For this, I consider myself a very blessed person.”



Denise Young

Denise Young, 32

*Sales Manager
HMC Marketing
Kingsburg, CA*

Having grown up in the San Joaquin Valley, Young has been involved in the community and agriculture her entire life. As a young girl, she spent her summers working with the family’s local table grape business, Pitts Family Farms. After she graduated from college, she made her way out of the packing shed and into the marketing department of HMC. “Over the years I worked my way up from quality control to sales assistant to sales manager,” she explains.

She has worked on numerous pilot programs that affected the industry. She has been at the forefront to improve working relations between friendly competitors in the marketing arena. She has been a part of the research and task teams developing new product lines and has assisted in developing marketing strategies for brand recognition, improved consumer satisfaction, increased repeat consumer purchases and

increased retail sales. “Mostly, I feel I have assisted in setting a precedent for hard work and diligence based on the respect for a job well done and the perseverance of improving the quality of our industry.”

With six years of sales and marketing experience, Young manages accounts with over \$20 million in sales and oversees marketing of two million boxes of table grapes.

Most of her inspiration is from her family who has farmed table grapes since 1945. “My uncle, Gary Pitts, has always proved hard work, a job well done and a little risk-taking can prove itself worthwhile in the long run.” She also attributes a lot of inspiration to her husband Clint Young.

“I also wouldn’t be where I am today if it weren’t for my employer, Harold McClarty. He has always set forth a strong work ethic and taken the time and patience to guide my career. The motivation I receive on a daily basis from Harold and the encouraging work environment he has established have allowed for me to take on many challenges within the industry and look at them as an opportunity to not only succeed but also make a difference.”

Most of her mentors demonstrate a passion for their work and concern to improve the industry as a whole. “Over the years I have realized there are so many people in our industry who truly care about what they do — I couldn’t imagine them doing anything else. The more I work firsthand with some of the diligent people of this business, the more confident I feel about what it is I do every day.”

She has been married for seven years, has two little boys and is happy to spend as much time as possible playing baseball and soccer and watching NASCAR. She enjoys attending church and volunteering on the advisory board for her college sorority, Kappa Kappa Gamma, through California University, Fresno. She is also involved in Women For Agriculture and works to support the local Valley Children’s Hospital.

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Next year’s nominees must be under the age of 40 as of January 1, 2008 (born after January 1, 1968).

Hot MERCHANDISING *Strategies For Summer Produce*

The most bountiful season has few national holidays, so produce retailers must generate excitement in non-traditional ways.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Merchandising produce during the summer can be a paradox. While there's a bounty of just harvested domestic fruits and vegetables, consumers are drawn away from the supermarket produce department by farm stands and markets, home-grown produce, out-of-town vacations and restaurants that offer a respite from cooking. What's a produce manager to do? Put himself in the customer's mindset and use popular holidays and seasonal activities as a springboard for promotions.

Jim Weber, produce supervisor for Econo Foods, an independent 6-store chain based in Iron Mountain, MI, says, "Summer is when customers expect there to be an abundance, and because of this, the best quality, the best flavor and the best retail. You've got to pull them in. You've got to build big displays, big colorful displays, and build lots of excitement into the produce department."

There may be an abundance of summer produce but there are only two major holidays – Father's Day and Fourth of July – during the quarter so most of the summer merchandising ideas are built around broad themes rather than specific dates.

FATHER'S DAY June 17

According to Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, "The grilling season starts across the nation as soon as the weather turns warm, but it's an especially favorite activity on Father's Day. Capitalize on this by building barbecue theme displays in the produce department and cross-merchandising produce like mushrooms, sweet onions, bell peppers and mini bell

peppers, which are great for skewering and making kabobs, in the meat department."

Brown mushrooms, such as portabellas and baby bellas "have gained a lot of popularity over the last several years," says Joe Caldwell, vice president of Monterey Mushrooms, Inc., Watsonville, CA. "In fact, they now represent 20 percent of mushroom sales nationwide, up from 13 to 14 percent a few years ago. A smaller yet significant trend in the mushroom category is stronger sales for organic brown mushrooms and large retailers, like Wal-Mart and Kroger, stocking these varieties.

"Portabella and baby bellas are especially popular during the summer when people grill outdoors. The portabellas make an ideal meat replacement or addition to a protein like steak," he adds. "The Heirloom Grill-A-Bella we introduced last year is especially good for the grill because it's 30 percent thicker than a regular portabella mushroom. Baby bella mushrooms can be marinated in Italian or other dressing and grilled as a quick, easy recipe idea. Try cross-merchandising baby bellas with dressings to suggest this idea to customers."

Fresh sweet corn is a summertime grilling favorite, says Brad Cook, marketing manager for Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Oviedo, FL. "Promote different ways to grill sweet corn with a variety of spices and encourage its use as a side dish with various proteins.

"Cross-merchandising corn with other items used during the grilling season is a great way to promote this vegetable. Displaying sweet corn with proteins, seasoning items or barbecue sauces can help the consumer formu-



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late a meal solution that utilizes corn as a major part of the equation," he adds.

Remember to promote fresh fruit for the grill, advises Schueller. "The natural sugars in fruits such as pineapple, peaches and nectarines caramelize when grilled. And, instead of bamboo [skewers], we offer sugar cane sticks that can be used as skewers."

This summer, the Reedley, CA-based California Tree Fruit Agreement (CTFA) is offering a media campaign and consumer promotion that highlights grilled peaches, plums and nectarines. "To help fire up the grill, we are partnering with a grilling expert such as up-and-comer Adam Perry

Lang of Daisy May's BBQ in New York. We will use Chef Lang when visiting long-lead publications and for national television outreach. Recently featured on *Oprah*, he will be a draw for magazine editor outreach," says president Sheri Mierau. To support public relations efforts, the CTFA has created a California PPN (peaches, plums and nectarines) grilling brochure.

For consumers, the *Grill'n & Chill'n Sweepstakes* stimulates trial and builds sales by offering consumers new ways to experience California peaches, plums and nectarines. The point-of-sale program includes three grilling recipe takeaways, while the sweepstakes creates excitement, giving

consumers the opportunity to win an imprinted travel cooler, gas grill or backyard kitchen. The latter two will be offered in the form of \$500 and \$5,000 gift cards at Barbeques Galore."

FOURTH OF JULY

July 4

Strawberries, blueberries and whipped cream – these are the fixings for a delicious dessert and a prime produce promotion for the Fourth of July.

The California strawberry crop has rebounded well from the effects of the January freeze, says Chris Christian, director of product marketing for the California Strawberry Commission (CSC), Watsonville, CA. "We have strong production and excellent quality fruit available through August. Retailers should display and promote strawberries throughout the summer to make up for any lost sales from the early spring.

"Maintain multiple end-cap displays with complementary products such as dips, glazes and cakes from July through September," she advises. "Commission research shows strawberry space is often under-allocated in spring and summer; strawberries rank fourth among all fruit categories in dollar sales per square foot of display during these periods. Doubling the space allocation in the July through August time period may generate from 22 to 33 percent more sales dollars per store per week."



Starting Fourth of July and throughout the summer, "Advertise strawberries weekly or as often as volume supports. The ads create momentum and excitement that carries through the entire summer," suggests Michelle Deleissegues, marketing director for Red Blossom Farms, Santa Ynez, CA. "It does help to promote more than one package type, like a 1- and 2-pound. Or have at least two different sizes on display at the same time, even if just one is on ad."

This season, Well-Pict Berries, Inc., Watsonville, CA, introduced a new packaging configuration for its 4-pound strawberry clamshells. The updated design is aimed at improving shipping efficiency by holding 35 percent more product. "The new clamshells will help retailers and consumers alike by achieving cheaper freight rates and reduced fuel usage, without compromise in product volume or safety," according to marketing manager Jim Grabowski.

"Berries should be front and center in the department, along with other variety berries as

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they come into season", says Cindy Jewell, director of marketing for California Giant, Inc., Watsonville, CA. "The addition of other colors and varieties adds to the eye-appeal and to profits. Red-white-and-blue themed promotions with strawberries, blueberries and toppings are popular as are promotions on larger-size containers of berries for picnics and barbecues."

Fifty percent of the New Jersey blueberry crop harvests between the third week of June and third week of July, according to Tim Wetherbee, sales manager for Diamond Blueberry Inc., Hammon- ton, NJ. "Traditionally, we start harvesting right around the beginning of July. The Duke variety allows us to get started sooner and this variety moves into promotional volumes within the first three or four days of harvest. They have allowed retailers to get a jump on their Fourth of July blueberry promotions."

SUMMER SPORTING EVENTS

Summer sporting events are a natural for fresh fruits that can be snacked on out of hand and made into favorite snack dishes.

California peaches, plums and nectarines will be featured at the Major League Baseball All-Star FanFest 2007, July 6-10, in San Francisco, CA. "This high-profile event will be held over a period of five days at the Moscone Center, and offers a tremendous opportunity for showcasing Califor-

Econo Foods' Truckload Sales

Customers eagerly await the summer truckload produce sales held in June and August at Econo Foods, based in Iron Mountain, MI. Produce supervisor Jim Weber explains, "We have a semi-trailer full of 20 pallets of at least 25 different types of fresh produce delivered to each store. Three of us come in at around 4 AM, off-load everything by forklift and set it all up under a tent in the middle of the parking lot. It's very visible. Then we have two to three checkers and baggers set up and we start selling by 8 AM. A local radio station broadcasts live spots from the sale, so there's a real air of excitement, a circus aspect."

In June, Weber orders strawberries, blueberries, cantaloupe, honeydew melons, cucumbers, peppers, head lettuces, carrots, broccoli, mushrooms, onions and potatoes. "Watermelon is a big draw. We'll run seedless watermelon for \$2.49 or \$1.99, down from a regular price of \$4.99. Customers love to take them out to barbecues, picnics, the park."

In August, "Local bi-color sweet corn is the big draw, the big deal," he explains. "We go through 1,000 dozen ears at each store easy. Price isn't an issue. The corn is that popular that the availability sells it." Green beans, zucchini, eggplant and cucumbers are also part of the August sale inventory.

Weber sources his produce from local and regional Midwest growing areas, Texas for watermelon and California for other fruits and vegetables.

How successful are these one-day produce extravaganzas? "Customers buy much more produce than they usually do. Instead of an average \$4 ring, the average is a \$20 ring. That's three days' worth of business in one day from the truckload sale," Weber says, "and on top of this, we're still selling inside for those who don't want to shop the sale."

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nia PPN," says CTFA's Mierau. "In a nutshell, the All-Star FanFest is an interactive baseball theme park created to expand the scope of the All-Star

Game experience to embrace baseball fans from across the country as well as the entire Bay Area community. More than 107,000 people attended



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the 2006 FanFest in Pittsburgh, and more than 110,000 are expected in San Francisco. The event attracts children and adults of all ages, and 65 percent of the attendees spend more than three hours at FanFest.

"The All-Star Bazaar, within the event, is an area dedicated to fan interaction that is ideal for sampling. To complement the California Nectarine Day cards created in 2006, we will create cards for peaches and plums. Additional materials such as our grilling brochure and relevant retail point-of-sale materials will also be available for consumers," she continues.

Hass Avocados from Mexico has teamed with NASCAR for a second summer, following up on the success of last year's promotion. Chris Tully, president of the Garden City, NY-based Preston Tully Group and spokesperson for the Mexican Hass Avocados Importers Association (MHAIA), says, "The general summer theme of casual enter-

taining ties in nicely with avocados. After all, this is what everyone does when it's Super Bowl time, one of the peak times for avocado and guacamole consumption."

One of the MHAIA goals is to develop new markets, especially in the Northeast and Southeast, so entering a Hass Avocado NASCAR racecar to compete in the NASCAR Busch race series is a natural tie-in. The 2007 circuit of six races takes place in Alabama, Virginia, New Hampshire, Delaware, North Carolina and Florida, from April through November. Radio advertising starts two weeks before each race, reaches a listening audience within a 250-mile radius of the race destination, and is available with retail tags for supermarkets in that area.

"We'll be leveraging the fun and speed of NASCAR with a quick, fast recipe for Shrimp Salad," Tully explains. Tear-off recipe pads and racecar themed-stanchions to hold the pads will be available for retailers. "We're also hosting a retail display contest, where we're encouraging stores to use our point-of-sale materials and build a display around these."

The winning store will receive \$5000 and four VIP tickets to a NASCAR Busch Series race, have its logo featured on the racecar during one race and receive a store appearance with the HASScar and driver, NEXTEL Cup celebrity Dave Blaney.

Any summer sporting event is a perfect tie-in

for healthful snack foods for the athletes themselves or healthful snacking for spectators.

To make snack-making easier, Melissa's introduced a Guacamole Kit and a Salsa Kit this spring. "Merchandise the guacamole kit next to the avocado display and the salsa kit next to the tomatoes," suggests Schueller.

LOCALLY GROWN PRODUCE

Freshness, flavor and high quality drive sales of locally or regionally grown produce.

Several retail chains have jumped on this bandwagon, according to Schueller, "by creating in-store displays that look like farmer's markets or farm stands."

Several states have capitalized on this demand by implementing state branding programs that have both quality control and marketing elements.

New Jersey boasts one of the first. The Jersey Fresh Advertising and Promotional Program, administered by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Trenton, NJ, was initiated in 1984. According to a 2002 tracking study, 41 percent of shoppers in the New York-Philadelphia metropolitan region were aware of the Jersey Fresh program, up from 38 percent in 1997. In addition, 54 percent of shoppers surveyed indicated they were more inclined to purchase Jersey

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- June 25 – National Strawberry Parfait Day

JULY

- National Blueberry Month
- July 7 – National Strawberry Sundae Day
- July 11 – National Blueberry Muffin Day
- July 21 – National Peaches & Cream Day

AUGUST

- Harvest Month
- National Peach Month
- Aug. 3 – National Watermelon Day
- Aug. 7 – National Raspberries & Cream Day
- Aug. 24 – National Peach Pie Day

Source: www.foodreference.com

Fresh farm products if these items were labeled as such at the point of purchase. NJDA offers retailers point-of-sale materials such as polyvinyl banners, 7x11-inch blank and commodity specific price cards, twist ties, rubber bands, bin wrap, stickers, posters, aprons and hats to promote the over 60 fruits, vegetables and fresh herbs grown in the state each season.

Georgia Grown is the produce marketing program of the state of Georgia. Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association, LaGrange, GA, claims, "The *Georgia Grown* label offers a real marketing advantage. We've found consumers are willing to pay up to 10 percent more if it's grown locally."

In the summer, Georgia's prime crops include cucumbers, corn, Vidalia onions, peaches, blueberries and Muscadine grapes. "Muscadines are a natural crop for us, a real niche for consumers in the Southeast," Hall says. "Large chains that have stores in Georgia, like Kroger and Publix, do a good job merchandising the Muscadines." This season, he adds, "We hope to get money from the Specialty Crop Block Grant to do more in-store demos. The Muscadines are a natural for this because folks from outside the South really don't

know what they are."

A newer state produce-branding program is *Pick Tennessee*. According to Robert Beets, marketing specialist for Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Nashville, TN, "Major summer products for us include tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet corn, all mixed vegetables, beans and summer squash. July is really the peak season in terms of volume."

SUMMER FRUITS

Melons, tree fruit, grapes, mangos and kiwi are among the fruits customers look for during the summer.

"Melons are a big draw," says Econo Foods' Weber. "In addition to watermelon, cantaloupe and honeydew, in August we'll stock specialty melons such as Casaba, Crenshaw, Santa Claus and Juan Canary. We'll demo the specialty melons, build big end-cap displays and run them all at the same price point to encourage trial."

According to Wendy McManus, director of marketing for the National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL, 38.2 percent of annual national mango sales take place in June, July and August, with June being the peak sales month. "There's so much happening in produce during the summer. We suggest stocking multiple varieties during this time — green skin, red blush and yellow — and building large displays. The colorful nature of this

Metropolitan Market's Peach-O-Rama

From the last week in July through third week in August, Metropolitan Markets, a 5-store chain, based in Seattle, WA, hosts its annual *Peach-O-Rama Promotion*. "We can't compete with the big guys on price, so we try to differentiate ourselves. Our *Peach-O-Rama* is now 11 years old and so well known that customers 50 miles away will call ahead to be sure fruit is available," proclaims produce specialist Ed Laster.

Organic peaches from farms in California and conventional peaches from a farm in Washington are picked for their size, ready-to-eat ripeness and brix level. They are displayed in the front lobby of each store, packed in single-layer boxes, on two to three Euro tables under a 30-foot banner announcing the *Peach-O-Rama* promotion. In-store chefs whip up peach creations for taste sampling and provide the recipes to consumers.

Last year, stores reportedly sold over 100,000 pounds of peaches at \$2.69 per pound. "There wasn't a lot of profit, but that isn't the point. The point is to differentiate ourselves from the competition and to pull people into the store where hopefully they'll buy several other items," according to Laster.

pb

kind of display will just scream summer."

NMB offers retailers two 11x7-inch point-of-sale sign cards. The first is how to choose a ripe mango, highlighted by the theme, *Don't Judge a Mango by its Color*. The second uses three photos to teach consumers how to cut a mango.

"The summer months are a good time for kiwifruit promotions, because the kiwi's flavor is the epitome of summer in the minds of many consumers," says Steve Woodyear-Smith, kiwifruit

category director for the Oppenheimer Group, Vancouver, BC, Canada. "Considering the Zesperi Green crop is arriving two to three weeks earlier than usual, the New Zealand kiwifruit season this year will be strong right from the starting gates in the first part of June, through the summer holidays and on until the end of September for gold, and through the month of October for green."

Volume will be up from the 2006 season, says Woodyear-Smith. "We will receive considerable

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Reader Service # 13

Reader Service # 63

Cherry Season

Fresh cherries are not available year-round, so many consumers consider the domestic crop's arrival on supermarket shelves a sure sign of summer.

California Bing cherries, says Jim Culbertson, director of the California Cherry Advisory Board (CCAB), Lodi, CA, "traditionally peak for promotion during the first two weeks of June.

"By all reports, the crop is back up to normal levels of 5 to 6 million packages, which has not been seen in the past two years because rain during harvest cut supplies to about half of the normal volume," he notes

Retailers need to find room for cherries since their short window of availability does not demand permanent real estate. According to research for CCAB by the Perishables Group Inc., West Dundee, IL, with 200 retail stores on the East Coast and 85 stores on the West Coast, this shelf space can generate some of the highest profits in the pro-

duce department, especially if it is ample.

Chris Zanobini, who oversees marketing programs for CCAB, notes, "In all supermarket chains studied, both on the East and West Coasts, cherries were the top-ranking produce item in the department in terms of sales dollars per square foot during May and June. Cherries beat the competition by a large percentage. During June, stores in the study averaged \$186 per square foot in sales. The closest competitor, melons, averaged less than half the sales dollars generated by cherries."

The problem, he adds, "is retailers do not appear to realize the extent cherries can work as a sales generator. The study also showed cherries ranked at the bottom of the list in retail shelf space allocation. Many other produce items are given much more shelf space, despite the fact they do not generate anywhere near the sales dollars consistently delivered by cherries."

To be specific, the research shows cherries had less than half the shelf space as tree fruit but generated 25 percent more sales dollars. Cherries had 75 percent less shelf space than cut fruit but generated twice the sales dollar and 85 percent less shelf space than citrus with 31 percent more sales dollars.

"We are working hard to inform retailers it doesn't take a lot more space in order for cherries to make big gains in sales," Zanobini explains. "Our research shows that for every additional square foot of display space, cherries can generate an average of over 8 percent in incremental sales dollars."

CCAB is gearing its 2007 marketing program around a *Big Bing Bloom* theme and airing a 'webisode' movie produced by MJR Media of Fresno, CA, on the Internet. It features a wacky scientist who teaches the exponential sales potential of selling cherries via large displays." **pb**

increases with our green volumes up by almost 40 percent, gold volumes up by roughly 20 percent, and green organic up by just under 10 percent."

He advises retailers to increase summer sales of kiwifruit "by moving it to a prominent location.

One West Coast retailer who tried this actually saw a 209 percent increase in kiwi sales without changing their original price point." In addition to offering retailer ads, Oppenheimer will facilitate a number of other summer kiwifruit promotions

such as in-store sampling, produce manager display contests and recipe cooking demonstrations.

Oppenheimer is again implementing its *Zespri Power UP! Campaign*, with elaborate sampling events at stores and community functions in five regions across the country from August to mid-September. "The events serve a dual purpose: as an educational tool, with a focus on the kiwi's unique role as both a nutritional powerhouse and a convenient and delicious snack; and as an interactive promotional device, where consumers can really get excited about the fruit and learn something in the process," Woodyear-Smith explains. The campaign is scheduled for Orange County, CA; New York, NY; Miami, FL; Seattle, WA; and Portland, OR.

Tree fruit — peaches, plums and nectarines — are synonymous with summer.

Unfortunately, a freeze at Easter time wiped out more than half the crop of Georgia peaches, says Al Pearson, owner of Big 6 Farms, Fort Valley, GA, and chairman of the Georgia Peach Commission. "At least we're not zeroed out."

East Coast markets covet Georgia peaches, predominantly yellow-flesh varieties, according to Pearson, "because we can pick, pack and ship them riper. For example, we can pick our peaches on a Monday morning and have them in a warehouse in the Northeast by Tuesday afternoon."

Conversely, says CTFA's Mierau, "A cold winter and warm spring [in California] will give us a crop in the 58-million-box range, with white fleshed peaches and nectarines up by 25 percent."

Don Goforth, director of marketing at Family Tree Farms, Reedley, CA, notes, "Today's consumers are more educated and intrigued by variety and



Acme's Locally-Grown Program

Customers love to buy locally grown produce, says Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division of Acme Markets, a 134-store chain based in Malvern, PA. "They feel it's safe and they like the idea of supporting local farmers and the local economy. Plus, they like the fresh picked quality and flavor."

Acme Markets works with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Trenton, NJ, and local farmers to source what is available at any given time. "We work with the big guys that can deliver right to our warehouse and the farmer two miles down the road from the store who might have just harvested some peppers or green beans, for example, for a store-door delivery," he explains.

"We'll have a full-page locally grown ad in our coupon book for the month and feature pictures of several local farmers at once," Schneider continues. "Then, we'll have half-page ads that rotate through the farmers and their crops each week in our regular circular. At the same time, we'll build breakout displays of four to six or eight feet of just locally grown produce in the front of our stores and sign it as such, often with the name of the specific farm. The *Jersey Fresh* logo, and point-of-sale banners and price cards will also be a prominent part of the display."

Farmer's markets are popular in the state and traditionally draw customers away from supermarkets during the summer. However, says Schneider, "We've found that carrying a large selection of locally grown items and displaying them in a farm market theme is convenient for time-starved consumers. After all, it makes us a one-stop shop, and they can still enjoy purchasing fresh locally grown fruits and vegetables."

pb

flavor. This is why we're seeing a surge in interest for items like white-fleshed peaches and nectarines as well as pluots."

The best time to promote pluots is late July and August, he advises. "That's when the largest variety of flavors is available." Consumer education about pluots and their range of flavors "is ideally accomplished through produce personnel at store level." Family Tree Farms offers its Flavor Tech University, a 2-day hands-on tree-fruit training course for produce managers, held at the company's California farms.

A new educational effort aimed at teaching retail produce personnel, from store-level to management, about California tree fruit is Cal State PPN, launched this spring by CTFA and available at the CTFA Download Center in Power Point for-

mat. "The PPN Network delivers information, marketing expertise and consumer demand-building activities to its constituents, enabling them to more effectively and efficiently sell peaches, plums and nectarines," says Mierau.

This summer, retailers and media will also be able to access the CTFA Download Center for point-of-sale materials, marketing research and targeted promotional tools that they can customize by adding their own logos.

Family Tree Farms hopes to entice kids to eat more tree fruit by packing and shipping four to five pieces each of small sized fruit in 1- to 1½-pound consumer boxes with Nickelodeon's SpongeBob character on the outside and a toy inside. The packs will be shipped in a master carton with pop-up board to call attention to the

product and make for easy display.

Also new this season, Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, WA, will transition 100 percent of its peach and nectarine crops and about half its 220,000 cartons of apricots into organic production, a move that will eventually provide 1.5 million packs of organics to the marketplace. Stemilt will market all its tree fruits being transitioned to organics under the Artisan Naturals label and its fully transitioned organic tree fruit under the Artisan Organics label.

According to marketing director Roger Pepperl, "This move is significant because we see tremendous promise for organic fruits in general, and more specifically for organic peaches, nectarines, apricots and pluots. The move is also important because the 1.5 million packs comprise approximately 70 percent of the total peach, nectarine, apricot and pluot crop produced in Washington state."

Grapes are another summer fruit that excite customers right into the fall. "We have plenty of fresh California grapes available during the summer. Our most recent research shows that promoting grapes three times per month during the summer generates the best volume and dollar lift for the category," suggests Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission (CTGC), headquartered in Fresno, CA.

"Our research shows that in order to obtain optimum sales results, target an average of at least 25 square feet of space devoted to grapes during May through August. Space allocation of more than 25 feet can generate up to 63 percent more dollars per store per year than sets under 18 feet," she adds.

Grapes are most often eaten as a snack, so any occasion that promotes snacking is ideal for promoting grapes, especially in the summer when grape's high water content helps with hydration, says John Pandol, vice president of special projects for Pandol Brothers, Delano, CA.

Concord grapes will be in short supply, especially at the front end of the season in August, predicts Mel Nass, president/treasurer of Venture Vineyards, Lodi, NY. "The Easter freeze in Arkansas destroyed about 80 percent of the crop. That means we won't see any appreciable volume of Concord grapes until western New York and Michigan come in the first week in September.

"Concord grapes add incremental sales to the grape category — and at a good profit," he continues. "For example, retailers will ask me how I expect them to sell Concord for \$2.49 to \$2.99 per pound when the California grapes sell for \$1.19 to \$1.39 per pound. I tell them two ways. One, customers will see the California grapes in comparison as a real deal, and two, there's a customer out there who wants Concord no matter what. They're an upscale fruit, sought after by some."

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Does Seasonal Merchandising Still Matter?

Industry experts weigh in on a time-honored concept.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Year-round, or nearly year-round, is an apt way to describe the availability of many, many items in the produce department today. So, the questions arise — Does seasonal merchandising matter any more? Or is it more important than ever?

Seasonal merchandising is still important, according to Brian Gannon, director of produce and floral for the 49-store Big Y Supermarkets chain, based in Springfield, MA. "It's a way of creating change in the produce department, and merchandising changes are an important strategy of offering customers 'visual' changes so their weekly visits to the produce department are not 'boring!'"

In fact, he continues, "Regular merchandising changes create a new emphasis on product groups and thus create more of variety image in customers' minds. That depth of variety in customers' minds is an important competitive tool to gaining new customers and making your present customers happy to continue shopping with you."

Kathy Means, vice president of government relations, Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE, agrees. "Seasonal merchandising is particularly important because we have year-round supplies. The produce department would be the same-old, same-old without seasonal differences to bring energy, color and excitement to the department.

"Consumers still look for seasonality. Certainly they can, and do, buy watermelon year-round, but there's something about a Fourth of July promotion with a huge display of watermelon that just screams 'summer,'" she adds. "The same goes for root vegetables during the colder seasons and salad greens as spring arrives."

Picking up on this line of thought, Gannon explains, "Traditional spring items, for example, such as berries, artichokes and asparagus, are almost continually available year-round, so the excitement of these items in their 'historical' availability time slot has been diminished. That said, the spring is when people still show more receptivity to purchasing these items. For people reading and responding to food magazines and food TV shows — these information resources will feature these ingredients during this time frame.

"The same comparison is true of say stone fruit in the winter. If we advertised peaches and nectarines in January at a low retail, they would not perform as well as they do at the same retail in the summer when consumers traditionally expect these fruit to be available and look forward to buying them," he continues.

In addition, says Means, "Seasonality is important for retailers working with local suppliers who offer local in-season produce."

Frank Pero, vice president of Pero Vegetable Company, Delray Beach, FL, takes a similar view. "The locally or regionally grown concept is especially important in a northern state, such as New York or New Jersey, for example, where various fruits and vegetables are available for only a short window of time."

Indeed, the 'locally grown' seasonal theme is of big interest to consumers at Acme Markets, a 134-store chain based in Malvern, PA, and a wholly owned subsidiary of Supervalu, Eden Prairie, MN. Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division, relates, "Sure, something like peppers are available year-round. They're a staple. But, customers are smart. When it's July, they'll question you if you don't have Jersey peppers on display. Locally grown produce is important to them. They want and need to feel that seasonal excitement and really anticipate the first-of-the-season fresh Jersey peach or blueberries. That's why seasonal merchandising will always be important. If a retailer doesn't pay attention to this, it loses customers to a store that does."

Across the nation, at Metropolitan Markets, a 6-store chain based in Seattle, WA, produce specialist Ed Laster also praises locally grown. "Local produce is a big draw. For example, customers love the local strawberries and can't wait for them, even though we have California strawberries available for most of the year. The local fruit just has a whole different eating quality. And because of this, we see a real spike in sales of the local berries and it doesn't take a price discount to move the extra volume."

Retailers can lose volume by not taking advantage of seasonal merchandising, notes Joe Comito, chairman of the board, Capital City Fruit, Norwalk, IA. "There used to be a real pent-up demand from customers. Some of that seasonal excitement is lost today, but produce is still a





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backyard an item may come or the farther removed from farm life or a farming community they may be, the greater the chance for disconnect.

Sometimes, says Jim Weber, produce supervisor for Econo Foods, an independent 6-store chain based in Iron Mountain, MI, "It's important to let customers know about the seasonal nature of an item. Apples are a good example. I had a customer ask me the other day for Honeycrisp apples. I told her they were finished for the year. She had a hard time understanding this because she saw apples on the shelves year-round. So it's important to let customers know when something is only seasonally available so they can buy plenty. Vidalias are a good example. The season lasts until Labor Day now, but it's not year-round."

Always one to think outside the box, John

Pandol, vice president of special projects for Pandol Brothers, Delano, CA, comments, "Grapes are in the market year-round. That's because they are always 'in season' somewhere. For example, years ago we used to store domestic grapes after harvest for up to six months. Then, we started importing them from the southern hemisphere and retailers and consumers alike found they tasted better because the imports were fresher."

Highlighting global availability can be a merchandising plus, says Wendy McManus, director of marketing for the National Mango Board, Orlando, FL. "Retailers can refocus the spotlight on mangos as each growing area comes to market. After all, mangos, like many fruits and vegetables retailers sell year-round, have many seasons. There's an opportunity to tell a story with this. In fact, we've developed a new kids' program that teaches geog-

raphy lessons based on all the countries where mangos grow and when they are available.

"There's also an opportunity to build on the consumer's image of mangos as a tropical fruit and play up, in ad circulars and retail displays, a warm weather, summery impression in the middle of winter, especially in states where snow and cold are commonplace," she adds.

"The produce industry has hired category management firms whose researchers tell us we have to have year-round availability. Now we do. But is this best? What it has done is create a seasonal disconnect for many consumers. Add to that high-low pricing that doesn't always change in sync with FOBs and the disconnect gets even greater. I mean, only in the fresh produce business can you call an apple that's 12 months old 'fresh,'" Pandol concludes. **pb**

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Reader Service #6

New Jersey Produce Profile

The Garden State is a fitting nickname.

CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

According to Charles M. Kuperus, Secretary of Agriculture, New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Trenton, NJ, "The state's produce growers annually harvest over \$200 million worth of fresh fruits and vegetables and New Jersey's agricultural and related food industries account for \$84 billion a year in economic activity."

RLB Food Distributors, West Caldwell, NJ, moves 80,000 to 100,000 cases of fresh fruits and vegetables each week to King's Supermarkets, Balducci's, Gourmet Garage, several independents and Fresh Direct, an Internet-based retailer the size of a small chain. In season, much is Jersey grown produce.

Jeff Shilling, RLB vice president of produce procurement, explains, "We have a broker at the Vineland Auction who sources, buys and consolidates product for us. New Jersey farmers grow enough produce to satisfy a large part of our volume during season. Also, the quality is there."

"Over 90 produce items are handled on the auction, primarily brought in by farmers from five Southern New Jersey counties. Some come in with two to four pallet loads, others with trailer loads," says Peter Bylone Sr., general manager, Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction, Vineland, NJ.

Vincent Consalo, president, William Consalo & Sons Farms, Vineland, NJ, explains, "We have three growing seasons. In the spring, we start off with greens like spinach, lettuces such as romaine and iceberg, cucumbers, cabbage, herbs and asparagus. During the heat of the summer, blueberries, peaches, tomatoes and corn come on. Then in the fall and sometimes as late as mid-December, it's back to vegetables, greens and herbs."

BLUEBERRIES

New Jersey ranks first in the nation in fresh market and second in total blueberry production. The 2006 blueberry crop was valued at \$83.7 million.

"The soil in the southern part of the state, where there's most of the blueberry

production, is sandy but rich in organic matter," relates Phil Neary, general manager, Jersey Fruit Cooperative Association, Inc., and director of operations and grower relations for Sunny Valley International, Glassboro, NJ, the Cooperative's exclusive sales agent for blueberries and peaches.

"Blueberries are a year-round business for us, from pruning to pollinating to harvesting," says Art Galleta president and owner, Atlantic Blueberry Co., Inc., Hammonton, NJ. "In the summer, we employ over 1,000 people to harvest and pack the berries. Last year, we produced some 9 million pounds of blueberries. Sales are strong, especially with all the media news about the health benefits of berries."

New Jersey blueberries harvest between mid-June and the first week of August. However, says Tim Wetherbee, sales manager for Diamond Blueberry Inc., Hammonton, NJ, "Traditionally, we started harvesting around the beginning of July. The Duke variety allows us to get started sooner and moves into promotional volumes within the first three or four days of harvest. That has allowed retailers to get a jump on their Fourth of July blueberry promotions. In fact, 50 percent of the New Jersey blueberry crop now harvests between the third week of June and third week of July."

PEACHES

Nationally, New Jersey ranks fourth in volume of peach production. The value of the state's peach production equaled \$35.7 million in 2006.

According to Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division of Acme Markets, a 134-store Malvern, PA-based chain owned by Supervalu, Eden Prairie, MN, "Customers like New Jersey peaches. They can be harvested one day and in store the next so growers can pick a much riper piece of fruit. You just can't do that from California."

Jersey Fruit's Neary agrees. "We pick fruit when it's within one to two days of being tree ripe. Eighty percent of our volume goes to retail chain warehouse buyers and 20 percent goes to wholesalers who then sell to foodservice distributors.

"The lion's share of our crop is yellow flesh. White flesh is about 5 percent currently, but it's growing. White-flesh peaches have a bit narrower window. Instead of early-to-mid-July to end-of-September when yellow flesh is available, white flesh is



Photo courtesy of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture

Organic Farming On The Rise

Organics represent "more than 10 percent of our produce sales," says Jeff Shilling, vice president of produce procurement, RLB Food Distributors, West Caldwell, NJ.

This summer Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager, Acme Markets, Malvern, PA, will be able to source enough New Jersey grown organic produce for a locally grown theme ad. "The demand is there from the customers and farmers are stepping up to the opportunity."

"This is our second season to offer organic vegetables such as squash, peppers and tomatoes," notes Thomas Sheppard, president, Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc., Cedarville, NJ. "It's not easy.

There are certainly growing challenges here on the East Coast, but the demand is there."

Chris Cunnane, director of tomato sales, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., based in Philadelphia, PA, notes, "We continue to expand our organic acreage in New Jersey for cherry, grape and UglyRipe tomatoes."

One Jersey Fruit blueberry grower switched to 100 percent organic production, says Phil Neary, general manager, Jersey Fruit Cooperative Association, Inc., Glassboro, NJ. "About 3 to 4 percent of the blueberries we ship out of the Cooperative are organic. East Coast growers for the most part, including those in New Jersey, haven't felt it

worthwhile to grow peaches organically."

In 2006, the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, Trenton, NJ, implemented an Organic Certification Program within the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJGDA), Trenton, NJ, by establishing rules and regulations to carry out the certification process and use of the Jersey Organic logo, a component of NJDA's overall *Jersey Fresh* marketing program.

In March, NJDA and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey, Pennington, NJ, sponsored workshops to assist farmers seeking organic certification. The certification process can take four to six months. **pb**

available only from the end of July to just after Labor Day. About 6 to 8 percent of our volume is yellow-fleshed nectarines. Their window is similar to the white-flesh peaches," he adds.

TOMATOES

New Jersey ranks 9th in the nation for tomato production; the state's beefsteak variety is known globally for its flavor.

Chris Cunnane, director of tomato sales, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., Philadelphia,

PA, explains, "The sandy acidic soil gives tomatoes grown in New Jersey their flavor. Over the years, production has geared toward increased yields and extended shelf life, but there's breeding research at Rutgers University to preserve the state's traditional beefsteak variety."

Procacci is known for its UglyRipe tomatoes, which are grown during the summer in New Jersey, in addition to vine ripe, roma and Santa Sweet grape tomatoes. UglyRipes and Santa Sweets grown in the state enjoy

nationwide distribution, while vine ripers and romas are sold throughout the East Coast.

Demand "reaches a crescendo one week before Memorial Day through a week after the Fourth of July," says Cunnane. "Then it falls off during vacation time and when backyard tomatoes start coming in."

OTHER VEGETABLES

In addition to mainstream vegetable varieties, the state's growers have picked up on opportunities to grow ethnic vegetables and

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Al Murray, NJDA assistant secretary, notes, "We are an extremely multi-ethnic state. Our farmers grow over 350 varieties of vegetables, many of which target Asian and Hispanic customers. There are farmers who grow a variety of Chinese greens such as bok choy and napa cabbage and others who grow four or five varieties of hot peppers."

Thomas Sheppard, president, Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc., and vice president of Sheppard Farms Inc., Cedarville, NJ, has observed the same trend. "We work with a farm up in Hightstown that grows four or five acres of habanero peppers, a key ingredient in Jamaican jerk seasoning.

"This will be our first season growing white asparagus, but we had a call for it from one foodservice deal," he adds

Cilantro, says David Arena, president, Frank Donio, Inc., Hammonton, NJ, "is off the charts now in terms of the volume of production farmers are growing."

The state's farmers are uniquely positioned in terms of their proximity to market. "Sixteen percent of the nation's population lives in the northeast corridor," notes Murray.

This translates into a freight advantage, says Sheppard. "Delivery costs for us, for example, can be \$1 a box compared to \$3 to \$4 a box for produce from California."

NEW JERSEY FARMERS

Farming is a way of life in New Jersey, says Donio's Arena. "It's not something you can just start from scratch these days. My grandfather started the company by selling surplus produce at the Newark Farmer's Market during the Depression."

Today, the third generation runs the company, which now warehouses, sells and distributes products from 15 blueberry growers and over 100 vegetable growers in addition to its own 300 acres of blueberries. Donio has diversified into a year-round operation and uses its warehouse space and proximity to ports in Wilmington and Philadelphia to import and sell southern hemisphere produce during the winter.

New Jersey farmers have survived and thrived through progressive moves in areas such as packaging and product development.

For example, says Neary, "We did zero percent specialty packs four to five years ago. Today, one of our packinghouses does as much as one-third special packs, with the average from all packinghouses at about 25 percent. This includes two-layer trays and clamshells. This year we expect to see special packs expand by another 5 to 10 percent."

Eastern Fresh's Sheppard can trace his family's farming days back to the 1600s, but he is well aware that today's time-starved

consumers are on the look-out for convenience. "That's why last year we introduced our New Jersey asparagus pre-trimmed, washed and packaged in a microwavable 10-ounce pouch." He received \$30,000 to launch this new fresh-cut product through a USDA Rural Development Grant awarded in 2006.

In the grant presentation, USDA Under Secretary Thomas Dorr, said, "In New Jersey, gross domestic production on farms is about \$500 million. We have to do a better job at capturing that wealth at the farm level by enabling our producers to embark on a number of value-added development strategies. That is what the value-added development program is about. That's what these grants are about."

FOOD SAFETY

New Jersey farmers take a safe food supply seriously. Consalo's Consalo says, "Our growers are either third-party audited or in the process of becoming so."

The Produce Safety Task Force was formed at the end of 2006 after outbreaks of *E. coli* in California spinach impacted New Jersey growers. Kuperus heads the Task Force, which includes academic and agricultural representatives from governmental agencies and the private sector. Its charge is to assist the state's produce growers to enact new food-safety protocols and to emphasize bringing small family farms up to speed on food safety issues and ensure safe produce.

"As of the end of April, over 500 farmers have successfully completed the USDA-NJDA Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices Third Party Audits. This is a voluntary program, operated in conjunction with USDA, that allows growers, packers and shippers of fresh produce in the state to verify to buyers that they are growing, harvesting, packing and shipping their product in a safe and sanitary manner," says NJDA's Murray.

A focus on food safety is not a new concept for New Jersey Farmers. "We at the Jersey Fruit Cooperative put together a food safety program back in 1998 and continued to update it under Sunny Valley," explains Neary. "As part of this, we've encouraged our peach and blueberry growers to become licensed as part of the *Jersey Fresh* Quality Grading Program," which licenses growers to use the *Jersey Fresh* logo on their packages. The logo indicates the contents have been inspected and meet the highest quality standards. The program had 265 participants for the 2006 growing season.

The state's farmers continually work to upgrade their facilities for both food safety and quality control. "We've added 175,000 square feet of cooler space," says Donio's Arena. "This allows us to work with our



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smaller growers, who can't implement this kind of infrastructure because of economies of scale, to offer the most effective post-harvest cooling and storage. Whether we pack or repack their product, we also can offer them fully computerized traceability. In fact, I can tell exactly what grower, what day and what part of the field a product came from."

JERSEY FRESH

The *Jersey Fresh* program promotes state-grown fresh fruits and vegetables, says Acme's Schneider. "The logo has great brand recognition and has become synonymous

with freshness and quality. Customers also like to buy locally grown produce because they like the idea of supporting local farmers and the local economy."

Schneider works with NJDA and local farmers to source the produce. "We work with the big guys that can deliver right to our warehouse and the farmer two miles down the road from the store who might have just harvested some peppers or green beans, for example, for a store-door delivery."

Farmer's markets traditionally draw customers away from supermarkets during the summer. But, says Schneider, "We've found

Restaurants Serve Jersey Fresh

Jersey grown fruits, vegetables and fresh herbs take center stage at Tre Piani Ristorante, Princeton, NJ. Executive chef/owner, Jim Weaver says, "We have a standard menu that changes four times a year. We also have a number of daily specials, which is how we usually feature fresh seasonal produce. For example, this spring, asparagus, a variety of lettuces, spinach and peas were among the vegetables incorporated into lunch and dinner dishes."

Tre Piani offers fresh mozzarella and Jersey tomato salad, locally grown Bibb lettuce and Jersey tomato salad, and Garden State seafood panzanella salad featuring state-harvested seafood, Jersey tomatoes, cucumbers and basil.

Weaver and Tre Piani co-owners Jeanne McNulty and John Micalizzi put on a farmer's market event each year. "Local farmers set up indoors and sell their fresh produce. We'll have tables that feature New Jersey poultry, cheese, eggs, bakery products and wine. There will be tastings through the day and we'll have prepared food for sale made from locally grown ingredients," Weaver says.

The impetus to showcase *Jersey Grown* produce on restaurant menus and make the connection between farm and fork got a big boost last year when the 12,000-member New Jersey Restaurant Association passed a resolution pledging to work with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Trenton, NJ, to offer customers state-grown produce and seafood when available. NJDA produced a sign saying, "This restaurant is proud to serve New Jersey produced and harvested products when in season."

The signs were distributed at the beginning of last summer. The first sign was placed in The Frog and The Peach in New Brunswick. Owner Betsy Alger says, "New Jersey has a heritage of local farms that provide a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, from our delicious peaches, blueberries and cranberries to our famed beefsteak tomatoes and corn. Our customers appreciate the quality and just-picked freshness of the local products we use on our menu."

At the end of 2006, 350 restaurants were displaying the sign. **pb**

that carrying a large selection of locally grown items and displaying them in a farm market theme is convenient for time-starved consumers. It makes us a one-stop shop." **pb**

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Building Stone Fruit Sales

How to push year-round sales.

BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN

Consumers do not have to be convinced to buy peaches, plums, nectarines and apricots, which is good news for retailers. The in-store challenge is to merchandise stone fruit throughout the year in ways that will encourage consumers to purchase more fruit more often.

According to research compiled by the California Tree Fruit Agreement (CTFA), Reedley, CA, the key to category success is knowing the answers to common consumer questions about California peaches, plums and nectarines. The California PPN [peaches, plums and nectarines] Network, the marketing arm of CTFA, researches consumer buying patterns to help growers and retailers better understand consumer purchasing and consumption habits.

HIGHLIGHT SEASONALITY

California growers produce more than 600 varieties of peaches, plums and nectarines, according to CTFA, allowing retailers to merchandise a constant flow of stone fruit varieties throughout the season.

Justin Parnagian, tree fruit sales manager of Fowler Packing in Fresno, CA, notes, "The Elegant Lady peach is ready around mid-July and the O'Henry is a mid- to late-season peach. Spring Bright nectarines are great to promote because of their full color, great size and large volume — and they ship well. And, of course, they're good eating." He says Spring Brights typically become available around the third week in June.

According to CTFA, there are more than 200 plum varieties.

Parnagian of Fowler Packing says retailers really go for the Primetime, a proprietary plum grown exclusively by Fowler and its grower partners. The purple/black plum with pink to red meat is ready around the first week in July and peak sizes range from 20 to 30. The typical peak size for most plum varieties is around 40 to 50.

Consumers buying pluits as healthful



Stone fruit is a draw year-round, but summer stone fruit is highly sought after.

and fun snacks for their families appreciate the novelty and sweet tastes of pluots, a hybrid stone fruit. Created by crossing plums and apricots, pluots are gaining popularity. According to marketing coordinator Dovey Plain, Family Tree Farms in Reedley, CA, the company offers nearly 30 pluot varieties. Sporting a color range from pale green to dappled red, Flavor Safari pluots have a high sugar content and are available from June through September.

Exclusivity and taste fuel the consumer demand for fresh apricots. Savvy retailers will celebrate the arrival of fragile but flavorful apricots and hope the supply is enough to satisfy consumers. "There's a certain sexiness to apricots," states Tom Wolfe, tree fruit sales manager of D.J. Forry Company, Inc., Novato, CA. "They are delicate and smooth and not around all summer like peaches."

Popycots and Earlicots start around Mother's Day; the apricot varieties to follow include Katy, Tri Gem and Castlebrite. The largest volume of apricots has traditionally been Castlebrites, which are usually available from late May to mid-June. Wolfe claims one of the best eating apricots is Golden

Sweet, usually available for two to three weeks starting around the first of June.

Jim Stewart, president of WesPak Sales, Inc., a grower/shipper/packer in Dinuba, CA, says the company's apricot program includes fruit grown as far south as the grapevine region in the southern San Joaquin Valley and as far north as the Delta region southwest of Sacramento. Apricots shipped under the WesPak label include Poppy, Helena, Pattersons and Tri-Gem. Acknowledging the brief window, Stewart calculates apricot shipping to end around the middle of June.

According to Justin Bedwell, marketing director, Z&S Fresh, Fresno, CA, his California tree fruit program, which includes white- and yellow-flesh peaches and nectarines, plums, pluots and cherries, is available from the end of April until mid-October. Then the Chilean program begins. "There used to be a bit of a gap to give everyone a chance to clean up, but not any more," he notes.

OFFER VARYING RIPENESS

Taking cues from other categories, such

as avocados, retailers should offer stone fruit in various stages of ripeness. A consumer purchasing peaches for tomorrow's picnic and facing a display of unripe fruit is likely to forego the purchase. Ready-to-eat equals convenience to many shoppers and convenience equals instant sales for retailers. Signage indicating fruit is ripe now or in a few days gives the choice to the consumers.

Wayne Brandt, owner of Brandt Farms, a grower/packer/shipper in Reedley, CA, says his niche is selling high-maturity, ready-to-eat fruit directly to retailers. Occasional sales go to wholesalers, but Brandt says his tree fruit is ideal for retailers looking to offer their customers ripe, full-flavored peaches, plums and nectarines.

According to CTFA findings, consumers look for fruit in varying stages of ripeness. Since more than 80 percent of consumers say they try to buy a little fruit for immedi-

Ready-to-eat equals convenience to many shoppers and convenience equals instant sales for retailers.

ate eating plus fruit to eat later, retailers will want to build stone fruit displays with fruit in various stages of ripeness.

CTFA encourages retailers to educate consumers about ripening fruit at home, using room temperature, and then refrigerating the fruit. Retailers can download POS material from the PPN Network as participants in the CTFA program.

Because all fruit on a tree does not ripen at the same time, maturity management is needed to help finish the fruit and make it taste better. Taste involves many elements including sweetness, juiciness and texture or firmness. The conditioning or finishing process involves temperature and humidity control and can take eight to 36 hours. During this time, acidity and fruit sugar levels are monitored as is internal pressure, an indicator of the flesh firmness.

Bedwell explains Z&S has a conditioning program called Just Ripe that is "a hybrid conditioning program because we don't reheat prior to packaging." The fruit is ready-to-eat and, he believes, offers the consumer a good value.

Summeripe Worldwide, Inc. of Dinuba, CA, has an alliance of quality tree fruit shippers that distribute premium ready-to-eat peaches, plums, nectarines and pluots. The natural conditioning process the alliance members use involves ripening the tree

fruit in humidity and temperature-controlled rooms.

CTFA research reports: "When choosing peaches, plums and nectarines in the store, the majority of consumers look for fruit that is firm or has just a little give. About two-thirds of consumers say they buy less if the fruit they find on offer is hard or soft."

"Consumers are turned off by stone fruits when the eating experience isn't there," says Wolfe. Forry recently introduced a maturity-managed upscale pack featuring a combination of tree-ripened and conditioned stone fruit packed in a 1-layer Euro carton.

"By offering retailers our premium Sweet Diamonds brand, we are offering the most consistent eating stone fruit. It's taking the best of what the tree offers and the best of what science teaches us about the best practices in post harvest handling," he explains. The post harvest conditioning process allows the fruit to finish. He admits a lot of fruit will not qualify to be included in the Sweet Diamonds program because the brand presents only high-graded fruit.

MERCHANDISE FOR MOVEMENT

Don Spain, vice president of sales and marketing, Kingsburg Orchards, Kingsburg, CA, stresses the need for retailers to differentiate themselves from the competition and believes this can be accomplished by offering consumers unique stone fruit that are not available in every chain. "We have 37 unique varieties that we encourage retailers to offer so their consumers have more choices."

The unique varieties include, among others, plum/apricot, peach/plum, cherry/plum — called a cherum — and even nectarine/apricot/plum — called a nectacotum — crosses. "They add a few unique flavors and products while making the displays more colorful," notes Spain. "We think of ourselves as high-end boutique on about one third of our items. We always have something unique. Something comes available every week. We can send out samples to retailers enrolled on our Sugar Tree program."

The program covers Kingsburg's unique items as well as its large-size fruit. One example is the Raspberry Jewel pluot. "It eats like candy," he explains. "It's available for about a week at the end of June, beginning of July. We have only a small quantity on some items, so customers need to book ahead."

Kid-sized fruit is the big push behind the Summeripe Ready to Eat tree fruit program utilizing the popularity of Nickelodeon's SpongeBob SquarePants and Dora The Explorer. Six commodities will be sold in 1.2-pound consumer packs placed in Euro master display cartons with UPC codes. Condi-

tioned yellow and white peaches and nectarines, plums and plumcots will draw consumers to the stone fruit display. According to Pat Steider, Summeripe president, the organization has a multi-year licensing agreement with Nickelodeon.

Using licensed characters may be controversial to some, but the colorful and recognizable displays create excitement in the produce department. "Incremental sales increase when the licensed characters are used," concurs Doug LaCroix, commodity manager with Family Tree Farms, a Summeripe member. He believes retailers appreciate the convenient packaging and display opportunities that increase sales.

Stewart of WesPak also speaks enthusiastically about the Nickelodeon kid-sized fruit program, saying, "We have customers ready to start with us."

Assisting and coordinating effective ways to advertise the stone fruit category is a valuable connection suppliers can build with retailers. Dave Parker, director of marketing for Fruit Patch Sales LLC, a produce/distributor in Dinuba, CA, offers suggestions to his retail customers based on older but valid category management research. "They don't always believe me, but when retailers merchandise yellow peaches with white peaches and yellow nectarines with white nectarines, they get more lift across the category. The results are more lift in units and significantly greater lift in dollars than units," Parker reveals. "It would seem those combinations give consumers the idea that all of the display is on sale.

"The beauty is you don't have to discount a plum the way you do with peaches and nectarines to get the same lift in units. Retailers are able to keep margins higher on plums," he continues. "Open-minded retailers will see numbers go up."

According to key consumer insights from CTFA, "Sixty percent or more of heavy users of peaches, plums or nectarines are also heavy users of one or more of the other category fruits."

Parker says surprised retailers always report back to him with success stories after they follow his suggestion to merchandise yellow peaches with cantaloupes. "There's something about that combination that works with consumers."

PRESENT PACKAGING OPTIONS

As the clamshell craze spills into the stone fruit category, retailers are attempting to accommodate customers by offering peaches, plums and nectarines in a variety of packages. From custom bubble packs to 4-pound club packs, retailers are asking sup-

“Now that’s a basket of healthy food.”



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pliers to develop packaging to entice customers and increase stone fruit profits.

Plain says Family Tree's white flesh Saturn-style peaches and nectarines are available packaged on an angle in a 6-across clamshell. Ideal for showing off the fruit's flat round shape, the clamshell encourages a multi-piece purchase and protects the fruit from bruising.

"Two years ago, we switched to a single-layer Euro box," says Brandt of Brandt Farms. The switch was an economically sound decision that retailers appreciated. Prone to bruising, the high-maturity fruit is well protected during shipping in the single layer carton.

Many shippers are willing to customize packaging styles to fit retailers' needs if the order is substantial and the commitment for a continued program is valid. Unfortunately for suppliers, there are many stories related to corporate policies switching to previous pack styles and leaving suppliers with warehouses full of dead inventory.

"I think the No. 1 way to promote stone fruit and other produce department items is to have someone out on the floor selling the products to the consumers."

**— Tom Wolfe
D.J. Forry
Produce Distributors**

PROMOTE OFTEN

A key CTFA finding indicates peaches, plums and nectarines are most frequently eaten during mid-afternoon or evening. Retailers are encouraged to promote ways to add stone fruit to morning and noontime meals. Grab-and-go sections could cross-merchandise stone fruits with bananas and promote the combo as a grab-and-go breakfast. Whole or precut stone fruit can be cross-merchandised with salad kits and toppings.

A new organization called FreshSense was recently formed to focus on promotion and build demand for fresh produce — beyond traditional industry sales and marketing measures currently in place. Blair Richardson, one of the founding principals, is serving as president and CEO. "We are

working on putting together the foundation for the 2008 program and we are managing the Ripe n' Ready brand owned by FreshSense," he explains "One area of focus for FreshSense is building produce brands — not just loyalty to a label." The venture is comprised of seven California companies all actively growing, selling or distributing fresh produce.

Plain of Family Tree Farms describes the success last year of a summer-long pluot promotion in one Mid-Atlantic store where large custom signage included the Pluot Variety Chart. "More pluot varieties were in the display and there was an 85 percent sales increase from the previous pluot season." She says the impressive display included the company's POS material that offers consumer recipes, nutritional information and a website address.

"I think the No. 1 way to promote stone fruit and other produce department items is to have someone out on the floor selling the products to the consumers," says Forry's Wolfe. "A lot of people like to be sold." He believes some retailers may not recognize the value in paying for the sales labor but thinks retailers should experiment with this sales approach and think of the labor as an investment.

Making a produce department associate available to direct shoppers, answer questions and promote product may be feasible. Some industry people compare its value to in-store tasting as a successful example of an in-store sales approach.

John Hein, partner and sales manager of Crown Jewels Marketing, Fresno, CA, believes in-store demos consistently prove profitable, especially when POS material is distributed with the fruit samples. Shippers may offer to work with retailers on specific in-store demos and promotions by providing fruit and POS materials.

CTFA's *Grill'n and Chill'n Summer Sweepstakes* promotion encourages consumers to enjoy California peaches, plums and nectarines by grilling them. Takeaway grilling recipes are available and consumers have opportunities to win prizes. The promotion, designed to be hassle-free for retailers, includes easy-to-download support material available through the PPN Network Web site. The June-through-September promotion promises to stimulate peach, plum and nectarine sales. The PPN Network is releasing grilling recipes to food editors.

EDUCATE CONSUMERS

CTFA information shows consumers feel more confident about their ability to select a good peach or nectarine than a plum. Retailers can boost consumer confidence by offer-

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ing education about the various colors, flavors and textures of different plum varieties. The research also shows consumers appreciate being offered a range of sizes. Savvy retailers will merchandise accordingly to meet this preference and build repeat sales.

Produce managers should be prepared to answer questions about organic stone fruit and organic displays should be clearly marked with appropriate signage. Questions related to stone fruit food safety may arise and retailers will want to have ready answers. In addition to offering the store's food safety policy produce, clerks might direct consumers to Websites found on packaging or display boxes.

Plain of Family Tree Farms says consumers actively use the company's Web site and hints they usually are not reserved

when submitting feedback. The Web site has a food safety section and the company contracts with Guardian Harvest, Inc., of Kingsburg, CA, a food safety and ag practices monitoring company.

MAKE DISPLAYS YEAR-ROUND

When California product is no longer available, retailers welcome the arrival of Chilean fruit with great fanfare to maintain the produce department's stone fruit momentum.

This approach may not always be appropriate for retailers, according to John Pandol, vice president special projects, Pandol Brothers, Inc., Delano, CA. He has seen good tasting years and years where flavor was not on target. "Chilean stone fruit — I

don't know why, but it has just not delivered the eating quality, which is why it has not grown," he claims. Pandol believes structural weaknesses in the Chilean business model have caused difficulties in the past.

To build interest when Chilean imports arrive, retailers can emphasize its southern hemisphere origin with fun signage and geographical trivia. Including maps of Chile next to stone fruit displays will show shoppers where Chile is located and just how far retailers go to please their customers. Many consumers are familiar with wines from Chile but might not know it exports stone fruit during the winter.

In-store sampling could help introduce Chilean products and remind consumers to continue their stone fruit purchases 12 months a year. **pb**

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California Tomatoes Deliver Sourcing Depth

Heightened emphasis on food safety and quality offers continued and strong assurances to buyers.

BY DUANE CRAIG

California produces about a third of all fresh tomatoes sold in the United States and nearly three quarters of those crops are grown in Fresno, Merced and San Joaquin counties.

"We supply about 300,000 cartons of tomatoes every day," says Ed Beckman, president of the newly formed Fresno, CA-based California Tomato Farmers (CTF) and former president of the recently closed California Tomato Commission (CTC). "We have a consistency in volume and quality that comes with the scale of our operations. You don't necessarily find that scale when you move across the country. Retailers are able to source the category from one group of farmers who are producing the majority of tomato types. So it's the ability to fulfill your category needs and get the same basic standards in terms of production, in terms of food safety and in terms of quality."

According to CTC information, fresh tomatoes account for more than 7.5 percent of total produce department sales in the United States and Canada; tomatoes are picked up by 46 percent of consumers every week. In a typical year nearly everybody, 92 percent, buys tomatoes.

"The return per linear foot for tomatoes is among the highest in the department in terms of dollar sales on the vegetable side," says Beckman. "A lot of people buy tomatoes, but they don't all buy the same tomato."

For stores with significant and growing Hispanic demographics, paying attention to the types of tomatoes stocked is one example of matching the tomato to the customer. According to CTC, Hispanic and Latino customers select different types of fresh tomatoes for different uses. Consequently, regular round and Roma tomatoes

find their way into the baskets of more than three quarters of these customers. Hispanics and Latinos prefer field-grown tomatoes to hothouse grown. They are also picky about color, with 60 percent preferring a medium red tomato and 37 percent a pale or light red color. Hispanic consumers eat or use fresh tomatoes 2.6 times per week more than their non-Hispanic counterparts.

Consumer and sales studies usually yield general statistics about which tomatoes consumers prefer at a particular point in time, but those numbers have to be viewed from the perspective of the customer demographics that shop at a particular store.

Greenhouse tomatoes-on-the-vine, grape tomatoes and field rounds were the dollar category leaders in 2006, notes Beckman. The greatest gainers in volume were grape tomatoes and field rounds. Those two, along with Romas, accounted for 65 percent of total pound sales and close to 71 percent of dollar sales for the category.

Behind these category leaders trails a mind-boggling selection of fast movers and wannabes. There are cherry, yellow, orange, strawberry, beefsteak and heirloom — and each is further identified by its particular growing techniques and stage of ripeness when picked. So the dilemma for the retailer becomes what to stock.

"We know this category is continuing to grow in terms of PLUs," explains Beckman. "Everybody's coming out with a new tomato every year, but consumer demand is really focused on just a few. If your category leaders are generating \$7 out of every \$10 in sales and you add tomatoes-on-the-vine to the mix, there's not a lot left. So when you look at all the new PLUs, you have to ask if you are trading off space from those items that generate a greater share of retail dollars for those that may bring some attention but don't necessarily generate the volume of sales to justify the shelf space. That's where consumer demographics need to be taken into consideration. Granted there are neighborhoods and store formats that will support a very broad display, but



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there are others that simply won't."

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Where the customer base warrants, CTF's Beckman suggests thinking about tomatoes in new ways. Taking a lesson from leafy greens — consumers found new tastes by blending various offerings — he says tomatoes also can offer a variety of flavors and textures when combined in a salad. "When you encourage a shopper to do the same with tomatoes as they do with lettuces, you're talking about increasing sales frequency and encouraging them to explore the different PLUs. It's not so much about cannibalization as it is about increasing sales."

He believes another key to handling additional PLUs is to suggest tomatoes as an item for other day parts. "It's critical we start merchandising for snacks and breakfasts

because, again, when you look at the statistics right now, there are many new PLUs coming into the produce department. Pound sales have not increased nearly in proportion to the introduction of the PLUs. We find we're simply trading off one tomato for another and when you do that, you often times risk alienating your customer."

Mike McGuire, director of produce for Demoulas Supermarkets, Inc., a 58-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA, offers upward of 20 different tomato varieties in each store. "There are a lot of new varieties in tomatoes and a lot of them are upscale. They're not for every store but they do sell and they help the entire tomato category. The variety is tremendous."

While variety offers new sales opportunities, there are indications the tomato could use some help with its reputation. In CTC-

commissioned consumer surveys, 65 percent of customers were completely satisfied with their round tomato purchase and 53 percent were completely satisfied with their hothouse or greenhouse tomato.

"Often when a consumer buys a store product, they are comparing it to a tomato that was grown in Grandma's garden, their parents' garden or their own backyard," says Beckman. "Nobody's going to compare with that because they have their own sweat equity in that product."

SEED SELECTION

"As an industry, we have made some great strides in improving the quality and flavor of our tomatoes but I think we still have a long way to go," says Mark Munger, vice president of marketing for Andrew & Williamson in San Diego, CA. "If you talk to seed companies, many of them still view the grower as the customer and yet the reality is that we are all beholden to the consumer. If we're growing the tomatoes to be red, have big production and ship well, those may be our priorities but the consumer's priority is to get a tomato that tastes good. As an industry we are still falling short of accomplishing that goal."

In his analysis of seed company selection criteria, Munger has found several instances where flavor was not even on the list. He emphasizes flavor as a driving factor for the items that have shown significant growth in the category. Among those he includes are grape, specialty and heirloom tomatoes. Some of these, such as the heirlooms, have their own special challenges.

Dave Cook, sales manager, Deardorff Family Farms, Oxnard, CA, specialists in vine-ripe round and Romas, says heirlooms fit some markets. "They have to be hard to deal with from a wholesale and a retail point of view because it looks like there's so much shrink to them. But in some markets, in some areas, they sell like hotcakes."

Lee Reynolds, produce director for Hagen, Inc., based in Bellingham, WA, a 32-store chain that includes the Top Food and Drug banner, acknowledges the taste is there but sees his customer slow to accept other heirloom traits. "We've had limited success with the product. Customers are used to hard tomatoes. They think if something is squishy, it's bad. You have to get it into their mouths and have them taste it. It's getting better but you buy with your eyes and your hands, and to get them to change will be a long process. I love to sell heirlooms because I think they're great tomatoes."

FOOD SAFETY EFFORTS

All players in the quality chain play a

California Tomato Farmers

The California Tomato Farmers (CTF), based in Fresno, CA) is a cooperative of like-minded individuals who plan to continue to advance the California fresh tomato industry as it consists of our grower members and it is a commitment they have made. They've taken a very aggressive approach to food safety, quality and social accountability, and they're taking a non-status-quo view to marketing," says Ed Beckman, president.

CTF appears to be taking on many of the activities of the California Tomato Commission (CTC) for its members. CTC closed its doors this year as the result of a referendum by the growers. CTF is not overseen by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Sacramento, CA, as was CTC.

Food safety tops the list of CTF priorities. CTF members must agree to mandatory U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspections of their practices both in the field and in the packinghouses. One way the organization is addressing quality is by setting and maintaining quality standards. The third hallmark is social responsibility.

"We look at production of tomatoes from an integrated perspective," says Beckman. "Food safety goes hand in hand with quality. Also the farm worker labor issue, which is getting more and more attention today, is very much integrated into the issue of quality and food safety."

Marketing initiatives are beginning with U.S. market research and with expanding export markets. Beckman sees research as

crucially important to helping retailers better understand the customers who purchase their tomatoes. The organization is looking to partner with retailers in research efforts.

"We are looking for retail partners who are willing to work with us in taking some of the research efforts into the stores," he explains. "We want to create some panels, do some experimentation and change merchandising strategies that haven't been employed in the past few years. For example, how do we help to get more kids eating tomatoes?"

Another initiative lies in opening up additional export markets. "We have seen a significant easing of import policy by the U.S. government, especially on tomatoes coming in from some of the Central American countries," says Beckman. "The problem is that access for California tomatoes into a number of those countries remains somewhat restricted. So right now we are in the process of taking a look at a number of potential export countries and determining whether or not there are phytosanitary or other barriers to trade that must be addressed in order to go ahead and create new market opportunities."

"We see the tomato category as a huge dollar generator for the produce department but when you see pound sales somewhat stagnant, or in some cases dropping, that requires action and working with retailers in talking about developing partnerships, playing an aggressive role in helping to manage the category, focusing on quality and seeking answers to everyone's questions as to how to boost our sales," adds Beckman. **pb**

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part in the reputation of supermarket tomatoes. Proper handling not only can maintain tomato flavor but can also ward off food safety issues.

"Without a doubt, the standards are going up at the grower/shipper level," says CTF's Beckman. "Refrigeration is extremely detrimental to tomato flavor. It shuts off the enzymes that generate the flavor and what you get is not an ideal eating experience. Consumers make their first purchase based on color and appearance but they come back for flavor. They want texture. It is so important that retailers rework those tomato

displays and pay special attention to stem punctures. Any time there's a break in the tomato skin, it can provide an entry for bacteria and decay and, as most retailers know, if you have one tomato that is decaying, the one right next to it is going to be affected."

In keeping with their long history of fostering good agricultural practices, many California tomato growers banded together as members of the CTF to ensure compliance with those practices.

"We are on the cutting edge of food safety," says Caesar Muratore, sales manager for DiMare Company in Newman, CA, a wholly

owned subsidiary of DiMare, Inc., Boston, MA. "We've been on it in the past but I think now we are bringing it to a whole new level."

That new level means growers must participate in mandatory U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) audits of field and packinghouse practices. With a membership that produces nine out of every 10 fresh market tomatoes grown in the state, adherence to the standards will go deep within the industry.

Retailers can source the world but tomatoes are a challenge to handle because of their sensitivities. Deardorff's Cook lists temperature, staged deliveries and contract purchasing at the top of his list of recommendations for making profits with tomatoes. He also sees repackers or wholesalers as crucial when dealing with a grower or shipper that does not offer those services.

"Tomatoes are a special item. It's a really broad category with a lot of different items and there are wholesalers that specialize in tomatoes," he explains. "It's very, very difficult for a shipper to deliver tomatoes consistently to a chain store. You have to have a good wholesaler or warehouseman to take care of some of this for you. They get them in, look at them, sort the colors, and if any tomatoes need to be rerun, they rerun them, then they send them right out. They ship the right color to the stores at the right time."

Bill Wilber, president of Oceanside Produce, Inc., in Oceanside, CA, a grower of vine-ripened tomatoes, says his company focuses on the particular needs of a customer and works directly not only with retailers but also with wholesalers, repackers and brokers. "We try to accommodate our different partners and see what works best for them, whether it is sizing or color or delivery systems – all of those things."

CTC recommends highlighting the health benefits of tomatoes by using POS signs and displaying them with complementary products to suggest use. Keeping in mind that tomatoes will be ruined at temperatures below 55° F, retailers can place them nearby bacon along with lettuce and highlighted with good signage to suggest bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches.

Beckman points to the resurgence in cooking at home and continuing infatuation with salsa as other opportunities for complementary sales. "It would be very easy to put an extender adjacent to the cold rack and essentially create a do-it-yourself salsa display – Roma tomatoes, avocados, onions and cilantro under refrigeration – but keep the tomatoes away from refrigeration."

Grocers within California can participate in the California Grown marketing campaign and take advantage of positive price points and availability.

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Using Grapes To Generate Sales And Traffic

Grapes offer year-round profit opportunities for retailers willing to do what it takes to drive increased purchases.

BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN

Americans eat nearly eight pounds of grapes per capita annually. Consumers enjoy grapes throughout the year both at home and in restaurants, as part of appetizers, salads, entrées, desserts and as out-of-hand snacks. Retailers are watching the numbers and boosting displays, thus increasing grape demand and capturing sales.

Not long ago, grapes were a sign of summer. Now, with Chile and other southern hemisphere countries supplying grapes throughout the winter, consumers have continuous supply year-round. The North American grape season starts in the spring with Mexican grapes from the Sonora region of Mexico. This year's season started around May 7 with a crop estimated at nearly 18 million boxes and an availability predicted to last six to eight weeks. Varieties include Perlette, Flame, Sugraone and Red Globe.

Grapes from California's Coachella Valley become available in mid-May and launch the state's 7-month grape season. Statistical information published by the California Table Grape Commission (CTGC), Fresno, CA, shows 98 percent of the fresh grapes grown in the United States are produced in California.

Scott Boyajian, director of sales for Sunview Marketing International, Delano, CA, one of the state's largest family-owned and operated table grape vineyards, predicts a large grape crop this season. Marketing only what it grows, the company ships grapes under the Sunview label. Boyajian says 80 percent of North American sales go to retailers and 20 percent go to jobbers through wholesalers. Sunview's season featuring reds, whites and blacks will run from the end of June until Christmas.

Premium table grapes grown and packed by Royal Madera Vineyards, Fresno, CA, are shipped under the Cheryl label. The family company has been growing and shipping



Champagne grapes are a variety that tends to draw an upscale consumer.

table grapes since 1970. Steve Cerniglia, sales, says the company's season runs from mid-July to the end of October.

VARIETIES AND COLORS

CTGC indicates more than 60 varieties of grapes are grown in California. The first varieties of green grapes, sometimes called white grapes, available include Perlette, Sugraone, Princess, Thompson Seedless and Calmeria. Red varieties include Flame Seedless, Red Globe, Ruby Seedless, Crimson Seedless, Christmas Rose and Rouge. Black grapes, which are actually very deep purple, start with Beauty Seedless, Sugrathirteen, Fantasy Seedless, Niabell and Autumn Royal.

The names will vary and retailers may find that some growers and suppliers offer their own named grapes, but typically the product is based on a known grape varietal.

Fancy Petite Grapes marketed under the Sweet Memories label and shipped by Balantine Produce Co., Reedley, CA, are also known as Zante Currants, Black Corinth or Champagne Grapes. Sabrina Mak, director of trade marketing, describes the sweet, small

grape clusters as fun and versatile. Retailers can encourage consumers to eat them out of hand or use the petite clusters to garnish party foods and wine or champagne glasses. She is enthusiastic about the merchandising opportunities, saying Fancy Petite Grapes attract upscale consumers when retailers promote them with wedding cakes, party foods and special occasion spreads.

Late season varieties are also important. "We have Lindy Black, a seedless grape available around the first of August," says Randy Parnagian, treasurer, Fowler Packing, Fowler, CA. "It dovetails nicely into Autumn Royals around the end of November." He says retailers are always on the lookout for products that will carry them through the Thanksgiving holiday.

In August, D.J. Forry Copany, Inc., Novato, CA, offers a Sweet Scarlett varietal called Tuscany Rose, says Laurie Rinard, grape sales manager. "It comes in between Flames and Crimsons. The taste is similar to the Muscat grape, so we say the Tuscany Rose is a new grape with old-world flavor."

Because shortages can occur, flexibility is

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key when retailers have to deal with a supply fluctuation. "Last year, retailers bought Red Globes when seedless were short," reveals Brian Crettol, sales manager with Castle Rock Vineyards in Delano, CA. "We also have Flames, Thompsons, Princess, Autumn Royal, Crimson and Red Globes."

Grape sizes are standard but grape color is often difficult to describe because people have their own color interpretations. For example, glassy green is not the same color to everyone.

Jim Pandol, president, Pandol Associates Marketing, inc., Delano, CA, often e-mails digital photos of the grapes he is selling to buyers. "I send one or two pictures accompanied with a correct description, showing the type of box or bag. In the photo I also include a recognizable coin such as a quarter to help the buyer see the true grape size," he explains. Not all buyers need the photos but many appreciate the attention, making the visual service a valuable sales tool.

The Fine Art of Grapes poster created by Ballantine is a reference guide to explain the color and harvest stages most likely to ship and store the best. The poster includes information on which stages have the best flavor, which color stages will satisfy most consumers and which are likely to disappoint. A Ballantine description of the poster

says, "We have focused on defining important words used to describe the color, flavor, levels of maturity, and the shipping and storage qualities of the six stages of green seedless table grapes." A convenient, pocket-sized field guide accompanies the poster. Mak says the free marketing and educational tool is popular with retailers and other s.



Ballantine's pocket-sized field guide

PACKAGING

Whether retailers use zip-top plastic bags, plain packs or clamshells, premium product demands premium packaging.

Sunview's Boyajian believes retailers are better organized today and sees them making intensive efforts, noting, "Retailers are trying to be different from each other." Sun-

view offers private labeling services and several packaging styles include clamshells, slider bags and club packs.

Forry has introduced Sweet Diamonds brand for its premium-packed product. The pack features fruit uniform in color and consists of high-graded 12/16s and larger. According to Rinard, the premium brand was developed for upscale retailers and is available in an 8x2 clamshell configuration.

Castle Rock packs 4-pound clamshells for Costco and more typically packages grapes in zipper/slider bags for retail customers, says Crettol. The company also prepares tri-pack and bi-pack 2-pound clamshells for retailers.

According to Royal Madera's Cerniglia, retailers continually express interest in the Euro box because of its display capabilities. The company also ships grapes in bags, clamshells, Styrofoam, 18- and 19-pound boxes and, during late market grape availability, 16-pound laydown boxes. "We'll work with retailers who normally use bags but want to try clamshells when putting grapes on ad for a week," he explains.

"With us, packaging is an art in itself," proclaims Fowler's Parnagian. "It all starts in the field where we set up an intensive segregation program separating the berries. Berry size matters because there can be a \$1 dif-

Organic Grapes

Anthony Vineyards, Bakersfield, CA, began farming organically in 2002 and is currently producing 20 percent of its grape crop under certified organic conditions. President Domenick "Cookie" Bianco says organic grapes will soon make up 30 percent of the annual crop. Green, red and black seedless varieties as well as seeded Red Globes are usually available starting in August. Bianco believes when retailers return to their stores after touring Anthony Vineyards, they are able to answer many possible questions about food safety and organic grape production.

Scott Boyajian, director of sales for Sunview Marketing International in Delano, CA, mentions the availability of several organic grape varieties including Flame Seedless from June through September and Crimson Seedless from late September through December. The grower has produced organic grapes for nearly 15 years. **pb**

ference in sizes." Fowler's packaging options include 19-pound bags and 4-pound clamshells for club stores.

PRICING

CTGC statistics show "up to 46 percent of shoppers look at store ads and/or specials before they go shopping."

"Grape pricing could range from \$1.29 to \$1.49 per pound but at 79¢ per pound consumers might become suspicious," Pandol explains. He believes an extreme low price could backfire and cause consumers to question fruit quality and or assume the store is trying to get rid of the grapes in a hurry.

Grape pricing is typically determined by season, availability and holiday promotion. Retailers should work with suppliers in advance to get ad pricing. Crettol says Castle Rock is not always able to meet a retailer's request for a specific price. "Sometimes they set ad pricing during a time period when they may promote 99¢ per pound or \$1.25 per pound. Sometimes I can't do it."

DISPLAY AND PROMOTE

According to CTGC *Quick Facts*, "When grapes are displayed on the front page of grocery advertising circulars, they generate a 68 percent increase in sales as opposed to back-page placements, which generate a 19.7 percent increase." CTGC research concludes consumers perceive grapes "to be a

healthy snack and an important alternative to other snacking alternatives, especially for children." Outdoor advertising, radio and in-store signage produced by CTGC will meet and enforce those consumer perceptions.

Dave Parker, director of marketing, Fruit Patch Sales LLC, Dinuba, CA, believes retailers should put one grape variety on ad every week. He suggests retailers follow through with a prominent grape display that is kept fresh by detailed attention to rotation. This continuity will build credibility for the ad and continued desire for quality grapes.

CTGC research shows the more space retailers allot for grape displays, the more planned and impulse sales occur. The research also indicates during the early season, May through August, 25-square-foot displays can generate 5.5 percent more dollars per store than displays smaller than 18 feet. Further, the studies show when more than 25 feet is allotted, up to 63 percent more dollars per store can be generated.

Promoting the health benefits, taste and convenience of grapes is not difficult. Ballantine encourages retail customers to utilize POS material developed by CTGC because of



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its high quality and the information is backed up by research, according to Mak.

"I think people want to be satisfied. They want an experience. They deserve selection and taste," relates Pandol Associates' Pandol, who supports interesting signage boasting fun factoids about the fruit's origin. He sees learning while purchasing as a part of the experience consumers desire and deserve.

Sunview's Boyajian has category management arrangements in place with some supermarket chains. Display space is analyzed, and thorough evaluation monitors allotment of space for different colors and varieties as well as other merchandising elements. He suggests retailers offer club packs along with regular packs because this display strategy often sparks a bump in sales.

To mix or not to mix is a common merchandising question. "Don't worry about mixed origin. Having whites and Red Globes from Mexico and reds and blacks from California during July is fine and even desirable," states John Pandol, vice president, special projects, Pandol Brothers, Inc., Delano, CA. "If you ask consumers, they will report they support local products but that is not their behavior. The feedback I've seen is more than 90 percent of customers are unconcerned about origin." When appropriate, store personnel should be able to explain an origin substitution was made because it is a better supply option for that week, he believes.

LEARN FROM CHANGES

Boyajian has learned a lot in his 18 years with Sunview. "The industry has grown quite a bit and there is not as much phone conversation as in the past. For example, when selling to some chains, we are managing the sales instead of getting the sale."

Royal Madera's Cerniglia believes in his grandfather's motto of maintaining the connection with customers. "As long as you have good product, the product won't lie."

Domenick "Cookie" Bianco, president, is proud of Anthony Vineyards, Bakersfield, CA. He believes the focus on quality, food safety and availability honors the original dream of the family company.

Retailers can implement industry lessons to maintain year-round grape sales. Keep the connection with consumers during the California grape season and when Chilean product arrives. Rotate displays and pay attention to temperature — or do whatever it takes to provide consumers with quality product. Help consumers understand food safety and proper storage measures so they will continue to enjoy quality fruit. Retailers who monitor industry changes and apply well-learned lessons are more likely to build profits and maintain a reputable legacy. **pb**



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Reader Service #25

Fruit Frenzy — Industry Braces For Soaring Sales Demand

Fresh-cut fruit sales surge in response to the introduction of more healthful menu choices by nation's fast-food giants

BY MAURCIA DELEAN HOUCK

When Oak Brook, IL-based McDonald's, introduced Apple Dippers in 2005 as an alternative to french fries in its kids Happy Meal, the impact on fresh-cut fruit industry was huge. In less than two years, McDonald's demand for fresh apples has reached 34 million pounds a year for its dippers and salads. Another 20 million pounds are used in its apple pies and juice drinks.

That is good news for an industry, which, according to the U.S. Apple Association, Vienna, VA, had estimated losses of nearly \$1.7 billion between 1998 and 2001. Sluggish apple sales, which were blamed, in part, to stagnant domestic consumption during those years, have rebounded considerably since fast-food restaurants — Subway has now entered the apple arena — began offering fresh-cut apple slices as an alternative to their more traditional fast-food menu choices.

Fresh-cut fruit options are a growing consumer category — with a 23 percent increase in just the last 52 weeks — according to Steve Dickstein, formerly vice president of marketing, Ready Pac, Irwindale, CA. "Consumer trends are showing a significant growth in premium fruit packaging in multi-serve sizes," he says.

"Fresh-cut apple slices have been around for nearly 20 years," adds Jeff Patterson, assistant vice president of produce and floral for BJ's Wholesale Clubs, Natick, MA, "but it took the acceptance by consumers on the fast-food level to bring it home."

Industry experts agree convenience and packaging seem to be the driving forces behind the recent fresh-cut fruit surge. "People have talked about eating more healthfully for years," explains Kevin Kane, public relations spokesman for Subway, Milford,

CT, "and they really do when given the choice." On March 12, Subway introduced its own fruit sides as part of a nationwide Fresh Fit Meals campaign, designed to offer customers more healthful food options, including prepackaged apple slices and raisins.

The decision to offer these new choices came after a brief test program in California last spring. "The program just took off," Kane says. "Our customers clearly wanted more healthful fruit options on our menu, and we responded by giving it to them."

McDonald's USA spokesperson Danya Proud agrees that offering fresh fruit to the fast-food customer has made making more healthful eating choices easier. "We've certainly been able to make eating fruit easy and more convenient for the customer to eat on the go," she says.

In response to the high demand for its Apple Dippers, McDonald's has also added a fruit and walnut salad, as well as a fruit and yogurt parfait to the menu. Although no immediate plans are underway to offer additional fresh fruit options, Proud stresses that the food chain "always listens to its guests and strives to provide them with the food choices they want."

In response to the consumer demand for on-the-go fresh fruit, these national restaurant chains have helped pave the way for fresh fruit producers to add their own lines of quick and easy packaged options.

"We have seen substantial growth in the



Offering a variety of options — from grab-and-go to family-size — draws a variety of consumers.

processed fruit category in recent years," reports Patterson. "The grab-and-go product area is our fastest growing produce sales category. As more exotic fruit options become more widely available and packaging innovations continue to expand, as well as the technology to increase product quality and freshness, consumers will continue to demand even more options. There's nowhere for this trend to go but up."

Richard Stiles, produce director for Redner's Markets Inc., Reading, PA, agrees, citing a spike in sales that he credits, in large part, to new, innovative packaging aimed at kids. "We're seeing more and more cut fruit producers packaging products with children in mind," he explains. "Where once mothers only had the option of sending a packaged pudding to school in a child's lunchbox, they now have the option of sending easy-to-open fresh fruit that is sealed and ready to

eat without any peeling, pitting or cutting.”

THE IMPACT OF BULK BUYERS

When Apple Dippers were first introduced, industry forecasters said bulk buyers would drastically influence the entire market — in terms of availability for the average consumer, price and even the varieties to be grown in the future. With nearly 150 million individual pieces of fruit being grown specifically for McDonald's, retailers feared apple growers would be forced to change their growing practices — to include more of the crisper and more flavorful Cameo and Pink Ladies varieties — in order to meet the high demands of bulk buyers, while foregoing production on the more popular varieties supermarket consumers expect.

The opposite has happened. Retailers all over the country are reporting all-time highs in availability, despite orders being placed by bulk buyers. “We have seen absolutely no shortages at all,” stresses Dan Storey III, owner of Storey's Fruit and Produce Center, Philadelphia, PA, which specializes in providing fill-in service to local restaurants and fruit retailers in the Philadelphia region. “The supply chain is so diversified right now that it is virtually impossible not to find what you need somewhere.”

As for initial claims that high bulk buyers would cause a change in what fruit varieties growers would produce, that, too, has proven false, according to Shannon Schaffer, manager of communication for the U.S. Apple Association.

The Association estimates that the red delicious apple — which is generally not used for prepackaged apples — remains the most grown apple variety in the United States, with a whopping 62 million bushels harvested in 2005. Cameo production rose 58 percent in the first year after the Apple Dippers were introduced, but it did not affect the production of other varieties, which are also on the rise, assures Schaffer.

One reason may be the new flavors and varieties sparking consumer interest. “The American consumer wants more variety,” he adds. “They don't just want an apple anymore. They want a Gala, a Fuji or a Zestar! This is creating a significant change in the varietal mix of our growers. They are looking for the next generation of apples.”

According to Ali Leon, Ready Pac director of fruits and vegetables, consumer interest in a more premium flavor experience is steering growing trends for the future more than anything else, including demands by bulk buyers. “Today's consumer wants a more consistent and flavorful eating experience. Right now the hot fruits on the market

are mango and pineapple. The demand for melon is flat and declining. This may be due in part to inconsistencies in climate, which can affect taste,” she explains.

“Flavor is everything. At Ready Pac we are constantly analyzing data to identify new trends and demands in the industry in order to allow our growers to catch up with consumer interests,” Leon adds.

Growing cycles, too, have a dramatic impact on commercial production, despite any single buyer's wish for a significant industry switch. “Given the nature of the fresh-cut fruit industry, it is very difficult

for any buyer — even a high-yield buyer — to institute any instant changes,” insists Schaffer. “It takes five years after it has been planted for a new tree to produce fruit, which in itself makes change slow in the growing industry.”

Like most retailers nationwide, Redner's has found that most customers want to choose from a variety of fruit selections. “Right now we offer 12 varieties of apples alone,” says Stiles. “That number will only increase as the apple season hits its peak. Basically, we have found availability is high in all fresh fruit offerings.” **pb**

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Maximizing Sales Of Dried Plums

Health benefits, convenience and great taste — what more can consumers ask for?

BY HEATHER CROW

The dried plum, the fruit formerly known as the prune, has undergone a public relations makeover. The antiquated image of prunes as a staple in the diets of old ladies is no more. Dried plums have made a comeback and are now considered one of the most healthful and convenient snacks around.

According to Rich Peterson, executive director of the California Dried Plum Board (CDPB), headquartered in Sacramento, CA, "The name change to dried plums has been well received by consumers who find the fresh plum origin more descriptive and positive. The California Dried Plum Board's ongoing nutrition research will provide more reasons why consumers should eat nutritious, delicious and convenient California dried plums."

Dried plums have received quite a bit of media attention, thanks to the increased emphasis on healthful eating across the country and because they are seen as healthful additions to a balanced diet. In addition to being a convenient snack to eat out of hand, dried plums are being widely used in baking, salads, cooking with meats, and in everything from beverages to savory dishes. Dried plums have also become a chic menu ingredient at top restaurants across the country.

Besides their health benefits, dried plums are convenient snacks that are easy to add to the diet of the average on-the-go family.

Most dried plums sold are pitted, which makes them easy to eat. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the percentage of pitted dried plums sold for consumption was only about 2 percent in 1961, compared to 86 percent by 2004. It

takes three pounds of fresh plums to make one pound of dried plums, according to the CDPB. That decrease in space and weight is important, because it means that it takes only 1/4 cup of dried plums to equal one serving of fruit.

Dried plum sales are on the rise. According to information supplied by Glenn Schaffner, director of national sales for the Mariani Company, Vacaville, CA, "The largest benefit of stocking dried plums is the significant sales associated with this category. Looking at the latest IRI ending 03/24/07, dried plums over the last 52 weeks represent \$79,853,790 in dollars, growing at 3.4 percent. Dollar sales per point of distribution are almost \$800,000 with 99.1 percent distribution nationally."

CONSUMERS DEMAND HEALTHFUL

With the mainstream media focusing on the healthful aspects of fruits and nuts, it is no wonder sales of these products are strong. Dried plums fit perfectly into this trend because they taste good as well as being healthful and convenient.

The health benefits of dried plums fall into several categories. First, dried plums have long been known to add fiber to the diet. Medical professionals recognize the positive effects of these fruits on the digestive tract and digestive health. The presence of sorbitol, a sugar alcohol, and fiber in the fruit are likely the contributing factors to this positive benefit, according to CDPB.

Dried plums are also high in antioxidants, which fight free radicals and the damaging effects of oxidation on cells in the body, can help fight cancer and heart disease, lower cholesterol, and fight aging. The



Dried plums appeal to consumers looking for health benefits, convenience and taste.

USDA scores fruits on a scale referred to as ORAC (oxygen radical absorbance capacity), which measures antioxidant capacity. USDA researchers at Tufts University, Medford, MA, have given dried plums a score that is more than double that of raisins and blueberries, making them one of the best available antioxidant sources. Dried plums are

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Consumers looking for convenient sources of healthful foods find dried plums also satisfy their sweet tooth. Jeff McLemore, produce manager for Sunsweet Growers, headquartered in Yuba City, CA, agrees, saying consumers like dried plums for the “convenient and healthy snacking.”

MERCHANDISING DRIED PLUMS

Dried plums are a great addition to the produce department because they have a long shelf life, which translates to low shrink. According to McLemore, “The shelf life of a dried plum is 18 months, much longer than fresh, and the convenience factor is a definite positive.”

There are also more options available than were a few years ago, ranging from individually wrapped to orange- and other flavor-added dried plums. Retailers can take advantage of this variety to entice customers to try a new product.

Mariani's Schaffner points out, “Plums are generally merchandised off the shelf but during key selling periods [the 1st and 4th quarters], many accounts will do stand-alone pallet drops. Dried plums are general-

Plum Interesting

- The California Dried Plum Board (CDPB), Sacramento, CA, reports 80,000 acres of plum trees in the area produce 99 percent of the U.S. dried plum supply and 70 percent of the world supply. One tree can produce up to 300 pounds of raw fruit.
- It takes three pounds of fresh fruit to make one pound of dried plums.
- Researchers at Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, have discovered dried plums have antimicrobial abilities with the potential to improve the safety of meat products.
- Dried plums stack up well when compared to other fruit. According to Sunsweet Growers, Yuba City, CA, dried plums contain 38 percent more antioxidants than blueberries, 100 percent more potassium than bananas, and 170 percent more fiber than apples.
- Plums, unlike many other tree fruits, can ripen fully on the tree without beginning the fermentation process around the pit, making them very sweet.
- In 1905, says CDPB, Martin Seely brought 500 monkeys to California from Panama to pick plums as cheap labor. While the monkeys reportedly picked well, they ate up most of the profits! Today the picking is mostly mechanized.
- Consumers are seeing dried plums more often. In addition to national ad campaigns launched by both CDPB and growers, California hosts the Dried Plum Festival, which is attended by over 30,000 visitors, in Yuba City.

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ly a stand-alone item versus cross-merchandised,” he adds although he has seen dried plums tied in “with yogurt where the challenge is properly merchandising any sizeable display near the refrigerated section.”

McLemore has several additional recommendations. “One good idea is to cross-merchandise with salads and baking. Cross-merchandising is great because there’s basically no shrink. Produce retailers can also use dried plums to fill in the seasonality gaps in fresh produce, especially in the spring and fall.” He also advocates using freestanding displays to capitalize on recent trends and national ad campaigns. “Our new freestanding displays can be used to help highlight the product. The new displays are modernized, with chic packaging and a sleek new look with individually packaged fruit.”

With today’s consumers upping the ante in the health food arena, a wise retailer supplies dried fruits and nuts with consistent availability and eye-catching displays. Because items like dried plums are often impulse buys, most consumers will not search them out if they are in an obscure area of the store. Placing these items in an easy-to-see location can make a big difference in sales. As McLemore points out, “The profit margin is pretty healthy, up to 50 points, which is great for the bottom line.”

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Engineer A Stunning Floral Display

The right display should have impact, intrigue and sell the blooms — in less than five seconds. Can you lay the foundation for that kind of magic?

BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

Part 1 of a 2-part series

Many supermarkets are cutting back on salespeople, so displays have to sell themselves to an on-the-run consumer who may know little to nothing about flowers. It is a daunting and difficult task, so floral departments should make displays as powerful and effective as possible.

The first step is to have a good foundation for the display, which includes planning, the right tools to present and accent the product, good signage, a little imagination — and planning.

“Some people are already planning for 2008,” explains Noam Temkin, vice president of sales and marketing for Temkin International Inc., Payson, UT.

According to Tom Lavagetto, president of the Floral Consulting Group (FCG) in Spokane, WA, to make a “killer” display, “You can’t wing it. You must plan ahead. Growers, vendors and suppliers must have the items you need. Pre-planning is absolutely paramount.” He suggests a minimum of six months advance planning, but a year would be preferable because it gives the grower time to have the right product at the right maturation level for the display.

Planning a good display requires time and should take into consideration the store and the department.

Julie Anderson, president of Julie Anderson Consulting in Albuquerque, NM, points out it is essential to work with the flowers procured by the chain or those that work in the demographic of a store. At store level, “The store designer or floral associate must know the customer and pick product to meet the demographic.”



Photo courtesy of Floratech

An effective floral display has a multitude of components.

Michael Wetzel, president and CEO of the Floratech division of Air Innovations Inc. of Syracuse, NY, stresses the importance of considering traffic flow so the display points toward the greatest number of oncoming customers. “You need a good visual smack, so you should angle the displays for impact.”

An effective display has a multitude of components. Beautiful blooms and fabulous foliage can drive sales, but when put in the right fixture, properly coordinated and effectively signed, a great display makes the customers excited about buying flowers.

THE FLOWERS

There really is only one simple rule to follow. “You have to have quality product,”

states Anderson.

According to Kerry Herndon, owner of Kerry’s Bromeliad Nursery in Homestead, FL, consumers are often torn between desire and fear when it comes to flowers. “They want the flowers but are afraid they are going to go home and the flowers will fall apart.” He suggests stores offer a 7-day guarantee on flowers to alleviate this fear. Even better would be freshness codes, along the lines of sell-by dates for perishables. “That would be Nirvana,” he adds.

Using the right flower for the right season and display is also important. Much like produce, certain flowers are freshest during certain times of the year, and particular flowers have a particular appeal at different times of

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the year. For example, tropical foliage plants are available in the summer and effective displays can market them with a seasonal theme. An autumn theme could showcase chrysanthemums and bouquets of dried or fresh flowers in warm seasonal colors.

For spring, Lavagetto suggests a bulb theme. With spring, many people are thinking of planting, so with bulbs, "People can put them into the ground or hold onto them [for fall planting]." An example of an effective bulb display would be a European garden; include a few different types of flowers in the same pot, such as daffodils, tulips and hyacinths, which bloom at different times and, therefore, create long-term customer satisfaction. Spring-themed bulbs would include gladiola and lilies.

THE DISPLAYS

Once retailers have the flowers, they need a place to put them.

"Cases and fixtures are merchandisers," explains Marcy Britigan, president of MEI, LaGrange, IL. "If you set up the product on a fixture with a nice, clean look, it adds value." A beautiful display with the right fixtures enhances the product so customers can see how the product might look in their own home. And, she adds, of the fixture, "Even if there are only a few products, it still looks good!"

"Fixtures are very important to the overall department impression and to the ability to have flexible merchandising," explains Megan Buchanan, public relations at FTD Group Inc. in Downers Grove IL.

"Fixtures that are perfect for holiday and spring merchandising may be too big for slower sales periods or summer selling. Fixtures that are too large and do not have depth and dimension are more difficult for average store personnel to merchandise without a particular planogram," Buchanan continues. Tiered or stepped fixtures create automatic depth and dimension, which help display the merchandise more effectively.

Fixtures and cases have several goals, according to Wetzel of Floratech. "They must protect the product but drive impulse sales." Cases can protect the product by reducing shrink through proper maintenance of temperature, airflow and humidity, as well as sustaining the product long after the consumer purchases it, thus raising consumer satisfaction.

"If you're doing a home setting, it is important to show how to use [the flowers] in a home," notes Louise Strutner, company representative for Nurserymen's Exchange, Half Moon Bay, CA. "Furniture, such as dining tables, end tables and windowsills allow a customer to actually imagine how to best

Pretty Packages

Bouquets come in sleeves, potted plants have wrappers, and arrangements work in vases. While the flower is the centerpiece and the selling point, what it comes in not only helps sell the product but can also ring up additional floral department sales.

"You want packaging that really accents the flowers," states Noam Temkin, vice president of sales and marketing for Temkin International Inc., Payson, UT. Proper packaging can bring out the color, shape or style of a bloom. It can also create unity in a floral department or through a chain with branding. "Each supermarket wants its own identity. Bouquets can match the consumer bunches, which can match the plants. Some stores include product information and some have guarantees on the packaging."

The colors and patterns used in packaging are important to the effectiveness and harmony of a display. Wraps and sleeves can coordinate with a color-blocked display for a stronger impact. On the other hand, neutral colors or classic green can make colorful blooms stand out.

Three general tips for effective use of packing are:

- Keep it simple.
- If you are going to have multiple designs, choose designs that work well together and with the flowers.
- If you are going to have multiple colors, choose colors that work well together and with the flowers.

The types of flowers need to be considered when choosing the packaging. "Different flowers require different schools of thoughts,"

Temkin explains. "Some show well with color coordination to the blooms; others don't. A mixed bouquet, for example, needs simple packaging because you have a lot going on in the bouquet. An orchid needs a different type of wrap than a mum. The beauty and simplicity of an orchid matches well with an elegant and simple wrap. With a mum, you can go a little crazier, use a little more cutting edge design. You need the right package for the right product."

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use the product."

Fixtures should be flexible and easily adjustable to suit different sizes of flowers, hold pails for consumer bouquets, display vases of arrangements or showcase an assortment of potted plants. "If a display is not aesthetically pleasing, it will turn off the customer," says Wetzel.

Easy cleaning is also crucial. "If a display is dirty, it lowers the perceptions of the product," he explains. The fixtures need to make it simple to wipe down, change water and wash the surfaces.

Lighting is another important consideration. "You need great lighting to make the merchandise pop," notes Britigan. "You could have a great display, but if it is in the dark, it won't 'pop' — it's not as effective."

Wetzel suggests lighting be part of the store or the department, not necessarily part of the fixture or display. "In a fixture, lights can create hot spots and shadows. Lighting fixtures at the ceiling level give you an enormous range of possibilities. It floods the display more evenly and leaves the heat


at the ceiling."

SIGNAGE CONSIDERATIONS

If there are so many signs the product is blocked, there is too much signage. However, most stores do not have enough signs. Signs explain what the product is, why it is valuable or desirable and how to properly care for it. A problem when selling flowers is the intimidation factor; proper signage can alleviate consumer anxiety.

"Signage explains how easy a plant is to care for and enjoy," says Strutner, who cites examples. "For a flowering plant, 'Easy care: Water twice a week. Keep in a bright place with no direct sun on plant.' For Lucky Bamboo, 'Very easy care: Likes bright or dark room. Keep water level at top of pot.'"

FTD's Buchanan advises, "Use suggestive selling signage and show usage ideas to help customers learn more about the product or visualize the way the product could be used in a home or office. With less and less labor in stores, signs need to convey the message and intent of the product or promotion." **pb**



Changing the way our children eat - one bite at a time!

Produce for Better Health Foundation announces the Campaign for Children's Health.

It's estimated that $\frac{1}{3}$ of the children in the U.S. are overweight or obese - and the number continues to increase. It's a figure so alarming that scientists are beginning to recognize that today's children may be the first generation in history to actually have a shorter life-span than their parents!

Scientific literature continues to support the critical role that diet plays in healthy lifestyles and disease prevention.

While other organizations and campaigns are addressing key topics such as health insurance for children, increasing physical education requirements in schools and improving school nutrition programs, Produce for Better Health Foundation believes the missing link is a concerted effort to improve the diet of our nation's children through fruits and vegetables; an information network to serve as the "go to" resource for parents and other caregivers.

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The Campaign for Children's Health will work to fill that gap.

Contributions to the campaign will support several activities designed to make a real impact in the health of America's children. The consumer web site that serves as a "go to" resource for moms and children, will have real-world tips to make consuming more fruits and vegetables easy; consumer research to best target moms and their children; and the development of educational materials that promote teacher-student and parent-child interaction to motivate families to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables and lead healthier lifestyles.

You can get involved.

We need everyone's help to make this mission a reality. To learn more about how you can make a difference, contact Claudia Wenzing at Produce for Better Health Foundation at (302) 235-2329, or visit www.pbhfoundation.org/childrenshealth

We can't afford to continue to lose the health of our future generations . . . the future of America.



Packaging Decisions

In a recent article concerning produce packaging, a packaging manufacturer stated, "Ultimately packaging decisions lie with the retailer. However, it can only be successful if everyone along the chain buys into it. The packinghouse must accept the option as well as the retailer and the consumer."

Only a week earlier, I had visited with a supplier whom I first met when I was just beginning my supermarket procurement experience. Like me, he was a young kid just starting his career. He was a small grower learning to market his storage crop. Outside of growing, he had little marketing experience and limited educational background, little more than a high school education.

But he had qualities many lack. To improve, he was willing to listen to others taking risks using new methods. Initially he had sold his apple crop in bulk bushels. Over 50 years ago, there were still many independent retailers who liked buying bulk store/door delivered and doing their own bagging using inexpensive labor. But even the relatively large number of independents made his a task with limited growth.

His next step was to approach one of the supermarket distribution warehouses in the area. The buyer, who would soon be retiring and whom I would attempt to replace in several months, told him the only way he would purchase his apples was bagged in consumer units.

Although the grower had never previously performed this function, he went to a local bag supplier, returned home and with his wife spent the night hand-packing sufficient product for a small truckload to be delivered the following afternoon to the chain's warehouse. After intense scrutiny by the inspector and buyer, the response was, "We'll take another 125 cases tomorrow." And so packing the hard way, he finished out the season and then acquired the necessary equipment for the coming year.

This was just the beginning of growth that over a half century would transform 15 acres of production into multiple hundreds and a packinghouse operation that markets for growers covering a radius of 300 miles or more. Along the way, whether it was taking the lead in controlled-atmosphere storage advancements, upgrading packing equipment or using new types of labeling, he has always stayed on the cutting edge — with the results validating the decisions.

The decisions have been made to satisfy the retail component, when it appears those objectives relate to greater consumer sales. A perfect example of this successful responsiveness occurred two seasons ago when a major chain's research identified a particular type of mesh bag that would stimulate additional apple sales.

The only problem was that the necessary equipment was unavailable through normal supplier sources. However, using wider industry information channels, one packing line of equipment that had never been put into use was available, although it was located several thousand miles away.

Consumers confirmed the retailer's decision and the ability to quickly respond to the need led to sufficient additional business to warrant the purchase of more equipment directly from the European manufacturer and to at least double production capacity.

In over 50 years, my friend's response to business opportunities has not changed. The formula seems quite simple. Evaluate the soundness of your customer's decisions, and if you recognize potential for increasing consumer sales, move and move quickly, always

with quality product. Just another approach to the concept of value added, while encountering a certain degree of inevitable risk.

Now an article in the *McKinsey Quarterly* by Jim Brennan and Scott Liles outlines how consumer goods manufacturers are using simulation technology to test in-store marketing ideas more quickly.

For example, a manufacturer wanted to test numerous marketing techniques and tactics in order to understand the range of opportunities for influencing various consumer segments. Traditional marketing measures would have required months of in-store research.

By developing online interactive-shopping simulation to analyze individual and collective impact of various programs, real life participants were able to browse through a virtual store aisle, examine product and make purchasing decisions.

While the simulations can't test all marketing tactics, they can gauge interest while eliminating bias that often confounds results of traditional research. Not only is money saved but time is also drastically shortened, helping producers work more closely with retailers to develop beneficial marketing approaches.

Given the size of the produce industry, it may be difficult for individual operators to implement this technique. However, in conjunction with produce associations or the produce industry as a whole, packaging manufacturers and various retailers may be involved with similar approaches offering enhanced opportunities for identifying and developing appropriate decisions in response to rapidly changing consumer needs and desires. Then packaging development decisions and other marketing programs will belong to everyone in the distribution chain, not just the retailer as some currently believe.

Evaluate the soundness of your customer's decisions, and if you recognize potential for increasing consumer sales, move and move quickly, always with quality product.

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Global Warming's Shameful Marketing Attempts

[Editor's note — As Robert Zwartkruis has taken a medical leave of absence, we have asked Marc DeNaeyer, managing partner of Netherlands-based import firm TROFI, to fill in during Robert's convalescence. This month, we excerpt a piece from Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, April 26, 2007]

Our April 25 Perishable Pundit piece — *Carbon Footprinting Gone Wild!* — brought a letter from Marc DeNaeyer, who is experiencing this issue on a level Americans don't even approach:

The largest share of CO₂ emissions is produced by the SUVs that the consumers drive to the supermarket to pick up their locally grown, Fairtrade, CO₂-neutral, ethically responsible, guaranteed-no-child-labor-involved fresh produce, ideally packed in tons of non-degradable plastic...

I am no scientist, but someone offered the following idea the other day: What if we were to put all the glass houses in Holland along the highways? A) They would be a great sound barrier, and B) We could channel all CO₂ emissions from cars into the hothouses, where the plants thrive on extracting CO₂ out of the air...

Second: When considering paying €16.00 carbon tax on your next airplane ride — for some scheme to offset "your" transatlantic CO₂ emission — do some investigating and find that only (!) €4.85 goes to planting new trees...

The bottom line: We need to bring hysteria and fearmongering out of the debate.

Every little bit helps, but let the consumer make his/her own decision based on sound facts and not just based on some fancy marketing tools — who is really going green here in fresh produce?

Are we going to turn global warming into some fancy marketing gimmick or a competitive tool (just like food safety to some extent), or are we just going to go do something REAL and get it done without fuss?

And are we going to take our responsibility to leave this planet in better shape for our children and grandchildren? Tackling global warming is more than a scheme or project: It will fundamentally change the way we work and live. It will be driven through massive amounts of local projects. It will be a TRUE grassroots success. It will be a composition of ALL kinds of alternative energy, including (!) fossil energy.

We spend hours and hours writing about this... because it opens up exciting new possibilities also for our industry. That's what we need to look at!

Marc is referencing a study done for the U.K government that found commercial transport — which typically involves large quantities traveling together, as in trailers, railcars or ships — is rather efficient in terms of CO₂ emissions per pound of product. What is very inefficient is consumers running to the market and picking up a few items and driving home.

An obvious implication here is that if a consumer drives a half

hour out of his way to go to a farmer's market that sells exclusively locally grown produce, because he is "saving" highly efficient commercial transport miles and replacing them with highly inefficient consumer miles, he is as likely to do harm as good.

Global warming is an enormously complicated issue. Not every scientist believes it is happening, and even if it is happening, it is not 100 percent clear that mankind has much to do with it. We know there was an Ice Age and it was followed by global warming without any help from our man-made carbon emissions.

Even if we knew it was happening and knew it was caused by man, it is not obvious that it is bad. It would certainly be bad for some people in some places but probably good for other people in other places. Finally, even if we know it is happening, know it is caused by man and know it is bad, we don't know at this point if we can change it in any way. It might be too late.

To overlay this complexity with a simple-minded marketing message — don't eat produce flown on a plane — is bizarre. It is an attempt by retailers to position themselves marketing-wise with total disregard to the actual issue at hand.

In this particular case, where much of the produce flown into British supermarkets is from impoverished African nations, it is, without reason, an elevation of one particular value

— reducing carbon emissions — over every other value, such as helping poor people.

Our piece spoke to still another point — the CO₂ numbers being bandied about are inaccurate and meaningless. We gave an example of a transport backhaul as contributing little to carbon emissions. Only highly complex studies on each individual item could tell us anything useful and, even then, unless you know what will happen in the future as a consequence of one's actions, it doesn't tell you much.

If a developing country sees its markets close in the United Kingdom, maybe it will fly the product to a more distant market and increase carbon emissions. Or, maybe, people left in poverty by having their markets caught off will not be able to pay for centrally generated electricity and will burn animal dung and the local trees to cook with. So perhaps the environmental impact of this is worse than flying some produce to London.

This is not about the environment; this is marketing, pure and simple, and it is a shame.

Many thanks to Marc for his thoughtful letter.

Global warming is too serious an issue to not be able to have a constructive debate about it.



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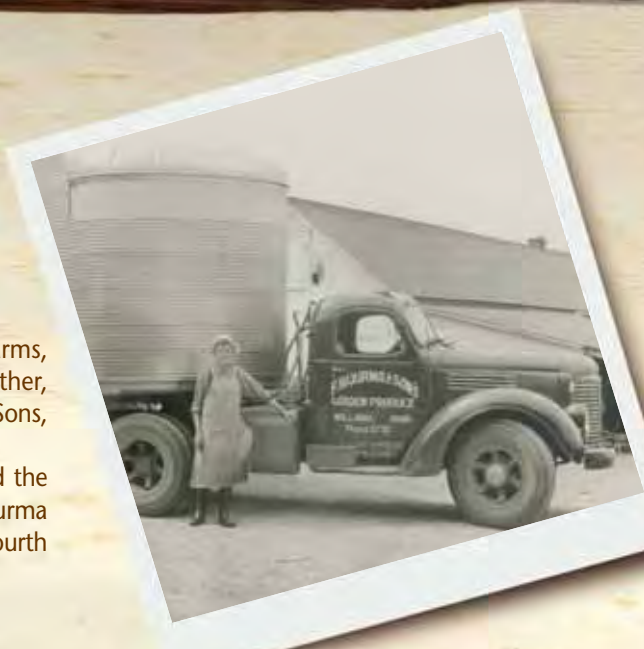
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Blast from the Past

This photo, submitted by Loren Buurma, treasurer of Buurma Farms, Inc., Willard OH, was taken in 1945. It shows his great grandfather, Frank Buurma, the owner of what was then called F. Buurma and Sons, standing proudly next to a new 1945 International truck.

Frank's four sons took over their father's business and changed the name to Buurma Brothers. In 1982, the company incorporated to become Buurma Farms, Inc. Today a variety of brothers, nephews and cousins make up the fourth and fifth generation of family farmers.



The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail ProduceBusiness@PhoenixMediaNet.com

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Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	47	13	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Blue Book Services	91	4	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
California Tomato Farmers	69	44	559-261-2630	559-261-9804
California Tree Fruit Agreement	67	8	559-638-8260	559-638-8842
Canadian Produce Marketing Association	28	58	613-226-4187	613-226-2984
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	47	18	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
CF Fresh	46	33	360-855-0566	360-855-2430
Champ's Mushrooms	54	55	866-Champs1	604-607-0787
William Consalo & Sons Farms, Inc.	60	26	856-691-3377	856-691-0164
Cryovac Division (W.R. Grace & Co.- Conn.)	22-23	48	800-845-3456	
Curry & Company	47	63	503-393-6033	503-393-6085
Del Monte Fresh Produce	96	17	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	7	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
dProduce Man Software	58	36	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	95	10	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc.	56	28	856-447-3563	856-447-4227
Family Tree Farms	79	25	866-FLAVOR-1	559-595-7795
Five Crowns Maarketing	66	45	760-344-1930	760-344-5442
Fordel, Inc.	66	53	559-655-3237	559-655-3895
Fresh Partners AB	28	20	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
FTD	87	12	800-788-9000	630-724-6022
Giorgio Fresh Co.	54	6	800-330-5711	610-939-0296
Inline Plastics Corp.	81	46	800-826-5567	203-924-0370
Jasmine Vineyards, Inc.	76	14	661-792-2141	661-792-6365
Kingsburg Orchards	65	31	559-897-2986	559-897-4532
Lighthouse Foods, Inc.	41	1	800-669-3169	208-263-7821
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	60	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand	78	57	559-665-9710	559-665-9714
Mariani Packing Co.	84	3	707-452-2800	707-453-8334

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
Mediterranean Pleasures	15	59	800-491-VITA	856-467-2638
Mexican Hass Avocado Importers' Assoc	50-51	34	410-877-3142	
The Mixtec Group	26	40	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
Monterey Mushrooms	53	41	800-333-MUSH	831-763-2300
Mooney Farms	72	61	530-899-2661	530-899-7746
National Watermelon Promotion Board	45	62	407-657-0261	407-657-2213
New Jersey Blueberry Industry Council	59	39	609-292-8853	609-984-2508
New Jersey Department of Agriculture	57	37	609-292-8853	609-292-2508
Old El Paso Fresh	64	42	800-467-0788	559-432-2888
Pacific Tomato Growers/Pacific Triple E	73	47	209-835-7500	209-835-7956
Paganini Foods	15	59	800-491-VITA	856-467-2638
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	75	29	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	78	30	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Pappas & Company	66	51	559-655-4277	559-655-4841
Pennsylvania Exotic Mushroom Sales, Inc.	54	23	610-444-0275	610-444-5751
Produce for Better Health Foundation	89	19	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
The Produce Marketing Association	35	15	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	93	16	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	42	24	805-981-1839	805-693-0032
Rosemont Farms Corporation	5	21	877-877-8017	561-999-0241
Sambrailo Packaging	77	43	800-563-4467	831-724-1403
The Sample Dome	26	22	800-596-3676	403-936-5868
Simonian Fruit Co.	63	38	559-834-5307	559-834-2363
Sun World International	7	52	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sun World International	79	54	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sunsweet Growers Inc.	83	50	800-227-2658	925-463-7492
Tennessee Dept. of Agriculture	44	35	615-837-5517	615-837-5194
Trinity Fruit Sales	79	56	559-433-3777	559-433-3790
Vineland Co-op Produce Auction, Inc.	56	27	856-691-0721	856-794-2301
Well-Pict Berries	43	2	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
Z&S Distributing Co., Inc.	64	42	800-467-0788	559-432-2888

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