

# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

**25**  
YEARS  
INITIATING  
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# Passion For Produce

The industry acknowledges these leaders of tomorrow for their passion and inspiration to others.

**INSIDE:**

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT WAL-MART'S PRICING STRATEGY  
 LOCAL VS. LOCALE MARKETING • SUMMER MERCHANDISING  
 GEORGIA GROWN • NEW JERSEY PRODUCE • MERCHANDISING GRAPES  
 DRIED PLUMS • CHINESE NEW YEAR IN THE FLORAL DEPARTMENT  
 FLORAL EQUIPMENT • INTERVIEW WITH WINN-DIXIE'S  
 FLORAL DIRECTOR, WALT GROSSMAN





# GRILLING SEASON



It's time to Go Bananas After Dark. Encourage customers to pick up a bunch (or two) of DOLE Bananas and visit [Dole.com/bananas](http://Dole.com/bananas) for delicious banana recipes, ranging from desserts to cocktails to cooking on the grill. Our recipes are bound to make bananas the official fruit of summer!



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Scan the Dole Bananas QR code or text  
"trade" to 47170 for instant recipes.  
standard msg & data rates may apply







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 Chinese New Year 2012 may bring good fortune for retailers who plan in advance, book floral orders now and creatively implement store-wide, cross-merchandising programs.
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 Whether staged as a lifestyle area or presented as a store within a store, retailers will want to use the right equipment and lighting to make the floral department inviting.

## THIS MONTH'S WINNER



**Katie Leed**  
**Logistics Account Representative**  
**Sunrise Logistics**  
**Ephrata, PA**

Katie Leed joined the team at Sunrise Logistics four-and-a-half years ago. In her position, she works with wholesalers, retailers and a few importers who need consolidation, delivery and repackaging of their goods. "We have a handful of customers that we do LTL deliveries for. We pick up product for them, consolidate it and get it out the next day. We have 80 trucks that belong to our own fleet and a full packing department. If the product is not up to par, we get it back and will rework it."

Prior to joining Sunrise, she was involved with logistics and trucking dispatch, but for frozen products. Now that Katie has made the jump to fresh produce, she realizes, "There is never a dull moment. It is so fast paced, everything is always changing. I learn a lot about produce just by working here, not just the trucking agency."

While Katie has only recently started reading *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, she already sees the value in it. "It's nice to see my own customers that I deal with regularly and learn more about them. It also gives me leads for new customers and opportunities to make some sales calls. **pb**

**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.

### WIN A SUNTRACKING BEACH CHAIR

The only folding beach chair on the market that swivels 360° and allows you to follow the sun wherever it goes. The chair reclines to three positions and includes a removable pillow and integrated canopy, which can flip behind the chair for maximum sunbathing potential. Includes a cup holder and integrated carrying strap.



### QUESTIONS FOR THE JUNE ISSUE

- 1) When will the Knock Out Cancer fundraising event take place? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) How many pounds of avocados are in the U.S. market? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) When are New Jersey blueberries available? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) How many commodities does Ocean Mist market? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is the name of the family that runs Sun Valley Orchards? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) What is the booth number for The USA Bouquet Co. at the International Floriculture Expo? \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_  
 Company \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:  
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**JUNE 2011 • VOL. 27 • NO. 06 • \$9.90**  
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*PRODUCE BUSINESS* is published by Phoenix Media Network, Inc. James E. Prevora, Chairman of the Board  
 P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425.  
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# IMMIGRATION PLAN MUST FOCUS ON MORE THAN JUST ENFORCEMENT

By Robert Guenther  
Senior Vice President of Public Policy  
United Fresh Produce Association

As we speak, the produce industry is facing a labor crisis, and if voices from each segment of the produce chain don't speak up, Congress is poised to make decisions that would almost certainly metastasize what is an already troublesome situation.

According to the National Council of Agricultural Employers, there are nearly 1.6 million workers in labor-intensive agriculture. Compounding that number are the two to three jobs that each of those field worker jobs supports in related agricultural sectors such as processing, transportation, inputs and marketing. The federal government's H-2A guest worker program provides fewer than 10 percent of these workers, and estimates currently place the number of non-H-2A workers that are falsely documented at nearly 75 to 80 percent; an unsustainable model by any metric.

Currently, the House of Representatives is considering drafting and voting on legislation to mandate a nationwide E-Verify program. The details of such a proposal have yet to be finalized, but the current thinking is that the measure would focus only on pursuing the documentation of workers, with little or no changes to the H-2A program. This is an equally unsustainable scenario.

Such an action could result in a shortfall of more than 800,000 workers. The ramifications of nearly a million missing farm workers would be felt by every single American in the form of a shockwave that starts behind the wheel of the planter and rolls right across the dinner table.

While some express skepticism, there is talk from leadership sources in the House that the House Judiciary Committee could vote on a mandatory E-Verify bill sometime in June

and that such a proposal could pass the House on a bipartisan basis. While the momentum for action is greater in the House, similar Senate action cannot be ruled out, nor can the signing of a bill into law by President Obama in the near future.

Clearly, members of Congress are feeling considerable, well-publicized pressure from constituents unaware of the concerns of the industry that produces the food they eat every

**CONGRESS MUST ENACT LEGISLATION THAT IS AS MUCH ABOUT MAKING A MEANINGFUL REFORM TO THE SYSTEM OF ALLOWING PEOPLE INTO THIS COUNTRY TO WORK TEMPORARILY AS IT IS ABOUT CRACKING DOWN ON ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS.**

day. Members of Congress and their staffs both at home and in Washington have been inundated with messages about cracking down on illegal immigrants. While it is important to note that no one in the produce industry is arguing against proper and appropriate enforcement of immigration laws, legislation that focuses exclusively on enforcement ultimately serves only to punish those legal workers and producers whose livelihoods are so dependent on the work of laborers in the field. For the sake of maintaining an abundant supply of fresh fruits and vegetables, it is critical that Congress understands the consequences of passing enforcement-only legislation. It is equally critical, however, that the produce industry ensures that policymakers under-

stand that such an action will threaten the viability of businesses in their congressional districts and states.

Ours is a nationwide industry, affecting every dinner table and — perhaps more cynically — every voting constituent in the country. It is incumbent on the men and women that lead the produce industry to reinforce to their elected officials that the long-term success of our businesses, and by extension, the employees and communities that depend on them, hinges on a strong, viable and dependable workforce. It bears noting that United's Washington Public Policy Conference provides an optimal place for just such reinforcement.

At a time when America's economic recovery is still in a delicate balance and high unemployment rates plague so many congressional districts, especially those in rural production regions, enacting a measure that will undermine the job security of even legally-documented workers is a potentially disastrous move for Congress to make.

If we are to strike the right balance between enforcing the law and ensuring a capable, available workforce, Congress must enact legislation that is as much about making a meaningful reform to the system of allowing people into this country to work temporarily as it is about cracking down on illegal immigrants.

As an industry that is so vital to the health and well being of each and every American, the produce industry needs to send a clear and strong message to our senators and representatives that an overly-simplistic, "enforcement-only" immigration strategy is not the way to go.



**TRANSITIONS**

**TO-JO MUSHROOMS  
AVONDALE, PA**

Peter Wilder has joined the company as director of business development. In this role, Peter will be responsible for developing national and emerging restaurant chain sales for the company's lines of fresh and value-added mushroom products. Prior to joining To-Jo, Wilder was with the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) as business development, sponsorship and advertising sales manager. Prior to that, Wilder spent 15 years as director of business development for the McDonald's LPGA Championship.



**AUGUSTINEIDEAS  
ROSEVILLE, CA**

Gary Caloroso has joined the AugustineIdeas team as a vice president. Caloroso will help lead the team, cultivate new business and provide strategic counsel to help grow the integrated communications and marketing agency. Caloroso has more than 15 years of experience in public relations, crisis management and marketing specializing in food and retail. He is fluent in Spanish and will be based out of Tampa, Florida. His leadership will allow the firm to continue its concentration in the produce industry.



**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**PURE HOTHOUSE WINS UNITED'S  
"BEST NEW VEGETABLE PRODUCT"**

Ontario, Canada-based Pure Hothouse Foods was a big winner in the Big Easy at United Fresh's New Product Awards competition. With more entries and finalists than ever before, Pure Hothouse Foods came out on top with its Pure Flavor Grill Ready Vegetable Mix. Pure Hothouse is a year-round grower, shipper and marketer with a full line of greenhouse grown products.



**HOLLANDIA INTRODUCES  
CLAMSHELL REDESIGN**

A grower/shipper of Live Gourmet living lettuces and leafy greens, Carpinteria, CA-based Hollandia Produce LLC introduces its new space-saving Squircle clamshell design. Redesigned and re-structured to better utilize the available interior and exterior areas of the package, the new Squircle clamshell incorporates the best features of a square and a circle, eliminating excess space and allowing for a 20 percent increase in sellable units per pallet. Additionally, the new Squircle clamshell design uses 15 percent less plastic to make each clamshell.



**STRATEGIC ALLIANCE FORMED**

Chatsworth, CA-based Fusion Marketing and Sonoma, CA-based U.S. Marketing Services have formed a strategic alliance to launch an in-store marketing solutions service specifically for the produce industry. The service, which is tailored for sales and marketing organizations, measures and analyzes the impact and performance of in-store retail activities such as display size, actual in-store price, ripeness and quality of fruit/vegetable, effect of POS materials and other key attributes to deliver information that addresses a wide array of in-store sales and marketing challenges.



**ETHYLENE CONTROL CELEBRATES  
25TH ANNIVERSARY**

Selma, CA-based Ethylene Control celebrates 25 years in business. The company's products remove the ethylene gas from the atmosphere in a storage room or shipping container, allowing the fruit, vegetables and floral products to be held longer without becoming decayed. Today, there are thousands of Ethylene Control products in packing facilities, food service, retail distribution centers and cut flower operations scattered around the world.



**VIDALIA ONION MUSEUM  
OFFICIALLY OPENS**

The Vidalia, GA-based Vidalia Onion Committee recently celebrated the grand opening of the Vidalia Onion Museum. More than 200 people attended the historic event that included a speech by Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black, ribbon-cutting ceremony and lunch from an all-star team of chefs. The 1,300-square-foot space, owned by the City of Vidalia and housed in the same building as the Vidalia Onion Committee, is filled with an array of educational exhibits that highlight the sweet onion's economic, cultural and culinary significance.



**TESTA OPENS "GREEN"  
DISTRIBUTION CENTER**

Chicago, IL-based Testa Produce recently cut the ribbon on its new distribution center, a 91,000-square-foot, \$20-million facility, located in the Chicago Stockyards Industrial Park. According to Testa, the company is on track to become the first foodservice distribution facility in the nation to gain LEED Platinum certification, the highest rating available from the U.S. Green Building Council. Pictured are Peter Testa, president and CEO of Testa Produce, along with City of Chicago dignitaries.



**OPPENHEIMER DEEPENS OCEAN  
SPRAY BLUEBERRY PROGRAM**

Ocean Spray fresh blueberries will be available a month earlier than usual this year, thanks to British Columbia-based Oppenheimer Group. The Carolina Blueberry Association of Garland, NC, has teamed up with Ocean Spray, of Lakeville-Middleboro, MA, and Oppenheimer to enhance its branded fresh blueberry program, which also includes fruit from Argentina, Chile, New Jersey and British Columbia. The North Carolina blueberry season begins in mid-May and extends through mid-July. It will dovetail into production from New Jersey in June and British Columbia in July, enabling retailers to carry Ocean Spray fresh blueberries from mid-May through September.



**TO-JO MUSHROOMS  
ANNOUNCES NEW QR CODE**

Avondale, PA-based To-Jo Mushrooms announced completion of a new label design for selected fresh mushroom packs that incorporates a Quick Response (QR) Code. Consumers can scan the code with their Smartphones to be immediately redirected to a webpage where they will find a rotating menu of recipes and an overview of To-Jo and its products. It is the innovative and cutting-edge technology, enabling both producers and retailers to connect with their customers through their products at store level.



**CORRECTIONS:** In the April issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine, Vicente Foods was spelled incorrectly. The address is 12027 San Vicente Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049.

In the April issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS, Sorma was left out of the United Fresh Booth Review. It should have read: For almost 30 years, Sorma Group has been expanding in the U.S. by offering the most extensive range of machinery and material in the produce industry. Sorma will introduce a new bagger and a new version of Vertbag, our popular consumer bag for onions, citrus, potatoes, stone fruit, cherries and more.

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



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## JUNE 1 - 3, 2011

### ALIMENTARIA MEXICO

Visiting the trade fair will allow you to sample the very latest in the sector, find out where the market is heading and establish business relations directly, with no middle-men.

**Conference Venue:** Centro Banamex, Mexico City, Mexico

**Conference Management:** E.J. Krause & Associates Inc., Bethesda, MD

**Phone:** 301-493-5500 • **Fax:** 301-493-5705

**Email:** swagart@ejkrause.com

**Website:** www.alimentaria-mexico.com

## June 5 - 6, 2011

### DAIRY-DELI-BAKE

The largest show in the world serving these categories.

**Conference Venue:** Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA

**Conference Management:** International Dairy Deli Bakery Association, Madison, WI

**Phone:** 608-310-5000 • **Fax:** 608-238-6330

**Email:** IDDBA@iddba.org • **Website:** www.iddba.org

## June 14 - 17, 2011

### IFE 2011

International Floriculture Expo (formerly The Super Floral Show) is the only U.S. venue where people from every aspect of the floriculture industry will converge under one roof.

**Conference Venue:** Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami, FL  
**Conference Management:** Diversified Business Communications, Portland, ME

**Phone:** 207-842-5424 • **Fax:** 207-842-5505

**Email:** floriexpo@divcom.com

**Website:** www.floriexpo.com

## JULY 10 - 12, 2011

### NASFT SUMMER FANCY FOOD SHOW

North America's largest specialty food and beverage event.

**Conference Venue:** Walter E. Washington Convention Center, Washington D.C.

**Conference Management:** NASFT, New York, NY

**Phone:** 212-482-6440 • **Fax:** 212-482-6459

**Website:** www.fancyfoodshows.com

## July 13 - 16, 2011

### FRESH PRODUCE & FLORAL COUNCIL SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EXPO

**Conference Venue:** Disneyland Hotel, Anaheim, CA

**Conference Management:** Fresh Produce & Floral Council, La Mirada, CA

**Phone:** 714-739-0177 • **Fax:** 714-739-0226

**Email:** carissa@fpfc.org

**Website:** www.fpfc.org

## July 29 - 31, 2011

### PMA FOODSERVICE CONFERENCE TOURS & EXPO

The PMA Foodservice Conference and Exposition is the only event focused exclusively on fresh produce in foodservice and is widely rated by attendees as one of the industry's best values for learning and networking.

**Conference Venue:** Portola Plaza Hotel, Monterey, CA

**Conference Management:** Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

**Phone:** 302-738-7100 • **Fax:** 302-731-2409

**Email:** solutionctr@pma.com

**Website:** www.pma.com

## AUGUST 17 - 19, 2011

### TEXAS PRODUCE CONVENTION

**Conference Venue:** Isla Grand Beach Hotel & Resort, South Padre Island, TX

**Conference Management:** Texas Produce Association, Mission, TX

**Phone:** 956-581-8632 • **Fax:** 956-581-3912

**Email:** johnmclung@msn.com

**Website:** www.texasproduceassociation.com

## August 18 - 19, 2011

### APPLE CROP OUTLOOK AND MARKETING CONFERENCE

Sponsored by the U.S. Apple Association, this conference offers an insider's view on the upcoming apple season.

**Conference Venue:** Ritz Carlton, Chicago, IL

**Conference Management:** U.S. Apple Association, Vienna, VA

**Phone:** 703-442-8850 • **Fax:** 703-790-0845

**Email:** info@usapple.org

**Website:** www.usapple.org

## August 31 - September 2, 2011

### SIAL MERCOSUR

The 9th International Food and Beverage Exhibition of the Mercosur

**Conference Venue:** Centro Costa Salguero, Buenos Aires, Argentina

**Conference Management:** IMEX Management, Inc., Charlotte, NC

**Phone:** 704-365-0041 • **Fax:** 704-365-8426

**Email:** EricH@ImexManagement.com

**Website:** www.imexmtg.com

## SEPTEMBER 6 - 9, 2011

### JOINT TOMATO CONFERENCE

### 35TH JOINT TOMATO CONFERENCE

During the conference, key tomato industry leaders meet to review the past year and to share projects for the forthcoming campaign.

**Conference Venue:** Ritz Carlton, Naples, FL

**Conference Management:** Florida Tomato Committee, Maitland, FL

**Phone:** 407-660-1949 • **Fax:** 407-660-1656

**Email:** samantha@floridatomatoes.org

**Website:** www.floridatomatoes.org

## September 18 - 20, 2011

### FLORIDA FRUIT & VEGETABLE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION

**Conference Venue:** Ritz Carlton, Palm Beach, FL

**Conference Management:** Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association

**Phone:** 321-214-5200 • **Fax:** 321-214-0210

**Email:** information@ffva.com

**Website:** www.ffva.com

## September 20 - 23, 2011

### FOOD & HOTEL MALAYSIA MALAYSIA'S OFFICIAL FOOD & HOTEL SHOW

**Conference Venue:** Kuala Lumpur Convention Center (KLCC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Conference Management:** Oak Overseas, Concord, NC

**Phone:** 704-837-1980

**Email:** enquiry@mesallworld.com

**Website:** www.foodandhotel.com

## September 21-24, 2011

### NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO EAST

**Conference Venue:** Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, MD

**Conference Management:** New Hope Natural Media, Boulder, CO

**Phone:** 303-939-8440 • **Fax:** 303-939-9559

**Email:** info@newhope.com

**Website:** www.newhope.com

## September 22 - 24, 2011

### SEPC FALL CONFERENCE 2011 2011 ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE

**Conference Venue:** Gaylord Opryland Hotel, Nashville, TN

**Conference Management:** Southeast Produce Council, Inc., Sun City Center, FL

**Phone:** 813-633-5556 • **Fax:** 813-653-4479

**Email:** info@seproducecouncil.com

**Website:** www.seproducecouncil.com

To submit events to our Forward Thinking calendar, please email info@producebusiness.com



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# WAL-MART'S LOW PRICE STRUGGLE

By James Prevor

President & Editor-in-Chief



**“W**e have lost our customer confidence ... in having the lowest price...” So acknowledged Duncan MacNaughton, chief merchandising officer at Wal-Mart, in a startling admission during an interview with The Associated Press.

The enormity of this problem for Wal-Mart cannot be over-estimated. The value of a business is not solely or even primarily the value of its physical assets — in Wal-Mart’s case the stores, trucks and warehouses, etc. One could argue that the name and formula of Coca-Cola is more valuable than all the bottling companies, etc. Why? Because it is the intellectual property that entitles the vendor to shelf space in stores around the world.

So with Wal-Mart, it is the value perception of consumers that makes it the go-to spot for a good deal. To lose this consumer perception is to lose something more vital than a physical asset... and it is to lose something that, once lost, is incredibly difficult to regain.

Wal-Mart is moving to recapture what it has lost. Some of the initiatives, such as restocking its “Action Alley” with bargains and widening assortment by once again stocking items that had been removed from the store despite customer demand, are no-brainers. These actions are attempts to rectify management mistakes. It boggles the mind to think that a retailer such as Wal-Mart made these kinds of changes out of Target-envy without carefully testing them with its own customers.

The core value at Wal-Mart, though, is price, and here, although professing understanding of the problem, Wal-Mart executives have choked, relying on marketing gimmicks rather than substance in addressing the Wal-Mart value proposition.

The centerpiece of the program is what Wal-Mart is calling the “Strongest Ad Match Policy in the Market.” In the press release announcing the program, Wal-Mart defines it this way: “Wal-Mart will match the price of any local competitor’s printed ad for an identical product.” In separate documentation, Wal-Mart lays out all kinds of caveats, such as that Wal-Mart will honor a Buy One Get One Free promotion only if the ad gives a price. Crucially, Wal-Mart will not honor private label price promotions. On produce and meat, Wal-Mart will honor the match only if Wal-Mart sells in the same unit as the competitor — say by the pound or by the each.

The first problem is that it is not clear that the ad match is an advance for consumers. It was under Sam Walton’s watch that Wal-Mart instituted a program in which Wal-Mart would “match” any advertised price and “beat” any everyday price. The new program mentions nothing about beating competitor’s everyday prices, so the whole program seems a step backward for consumers — and for Wal-Mart’s low price image.

A second issue is that Wal-Mart’s explanation of how the program will work just doesn’t make sense. In its press release, Wal-Mart explains, “Customers do not have to bring in a competitor’s advertisement. If customers find a lower advertised price, we’ll match it at the register.” This seems like a recipe for disaster. How are the cashiers supposed to know everyone’s advertised price on the enormous assortment that Wal-Mart sells? One imagines long lines while managers are called and research is done to verify these claims.

Third, there is a logical fallacy in the way in which Wal-Mart is positioning this policy. Wal-Mart explains in its press release that this policy “...is the most competitive in the market, eliminating the need to shop around to save money.” In reality, the ad match policy is the exact opposite. The ad match policy does absolutely nothing for any consumer who does not shop around. The whole point is that the consumer needs to shop around so he can tell the cashier that someone else is offering a lower price.

Back in the Sam Walton days and for a long time after, not only did Wal-Mart have its “match” and “beat” price program but Wal-Mart circulated a “never be beat” list composed of hundreds of items, and the job of the store manager was to make sure that Wal-Mart was always cheapest on those items. Although there is a vague reference made by Wal-Mart to “checking the competition more often,” there is no reference to any commitment by Wal-Mart to not be underpriced.

There is a clear desire by Wal-Mart executives to see Wal-Mart once again perceived by customers as the low price leader; there is little indication that Wal-Mart executives actually have decided to be the low price leader.

Wal-Mart has started doing some test marketing. It is inserting a folder in local Sunday newspapers that has a printed message: “Bring the ads from this paper to Walmart, and we’ll match their price.” Someone thinks this clever. In reality, it just broadcasts the message that if one is not going to shop around and do a lot of work, one will overpay at Wal-Mart.

With gas prices high, Wal-Mart has an opportunity to sell consumers on one-stop shopping. To do so, it just needs to assure people that Wal-Mart has checked around and its prices are low. It doesn’t have to beat every special, but if someone buys bread... or bananas... or bagged salad... or grapes 52 weeks a year at Wal-Mart, over the course of the year consumers should pay less than had they bought those products anywhere else. Then, of course, the products have to be of good quality.

The executives in Bentonville once knew this. They placed on every store these words: “We Sell for Less” and “Satisfaction Guaranteed.” If Wal-Mart’s executives want to win back a consumer perception of value, they just have to put those words on the storefront once more... and let the store managers and associates know that they really mean it.

**Do Wal-Mart’s executives have what it takes to once again be the low price leader?**



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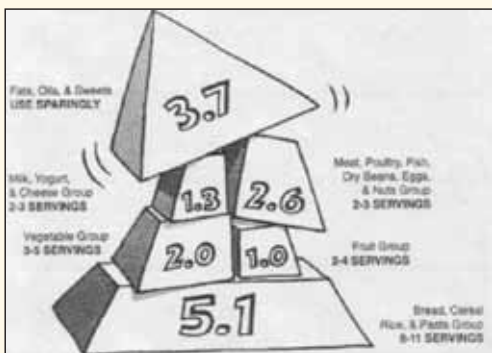
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# How Do Consumers Respond to Advertising Programs for Fruits and Vegetables?

BY BRAD RICKARD, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, CHARLES H. DYSON SCHOOL OF APPLIED ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT, CORNELL UNIVERSITY

**F**ruit and vegetable consumption rates in the United States are significantly lower than what is recommended by nutritionists and health experts. Of the six groups traditionally included in the food recommendation pyramids, fruits and vegetables are significantly under-consumed (Figure 1). Figure 2 shows that fruits and vegetables receive very low levels of advertising funding relative to the other food groups. Therefore, we examine the role of advertising as a way to influence the consumption of fruits and vegetables.



## Fruit And Vegetable Marketing

With few exceptions, promotional efforts for fruits and vegetables have been very small, commodity-specific and generic, given the limited number of brands for fresh produce. There have been recent discussions in the United States about implementing a mandatory “broad-based” promotion program for all fruits and vegetables, and this issue was fiercely debated in 2009. In the United States, broad-based campaigns for fruits and vegetables, such as the “Fruit & Veggies: More Matters” campaign, have been supported by voluntary donations and have had much less media expo-

sure than their counterparts in other countries.

Advocates suggest that commodity-specific programs compete for consumption share and that a large broad-based program may increase demand for the entire fruit and vegetable category. Opponents argue that broad-based messages simply emphasize a well-known fact — that eating fruits and vegetables is good for you — and do not believe they will influence consumer choice. Among those questioning the efficacy of broad-based campaigns, there are also concerns about the distributive implications across fruits and vegetables; a broad-based effort might only provide benefits for particular fruit and/or vegetables, rather than increase demand for all fruits and vegetables.

## Experimental Design

To shed some new light on this issue, we designed an experiment that showed samples of promotional efforts for fruits and vegetables to research participants. We recruited 271 adult subjects and asked them to participate in several computerized auctions and to submit bids that reflect their maximum willingness to pay for one pound of selected fruit and vegetable products. Subjects were placed into one of six treatments, and the treatments varied according to the advertisement shown to the participants. Each treatment was comprised of three 90-second video clips of the popular animated television series, *The Simpsons*, interspersed with up to two minutes of advertisements for fruits and vegetables. Advertisements for fruits and vegetables were either commodity-specific, broad-based, or a mixed approach that included commodity-specific and broad-based efforts.

## Effects of Broad-Based And Commodity-Specific Advertising

Table 1 shows the average price subjects were willing to pay for the eight fruits and vegetables (apples, oranges, grapes, bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots and bell peppers) under each treatment. Here we see that the

average bid was \$0.74 per pound in the control group (no advertisements), and did not exceed this level in the treatments showing commodity-specific advertisements. However, in the three treatments that include broad-based advertising, we see a significant increase in price that consumers were willing to pay.

Our results show that the average willingness to pay across the eight fruits and vegetables was 41 percent higher among subjects in the broad-based group compared to the control group. Our treatment that combines potato advertising and a broad-based campaign provides evidence that a mixed advertising strategy may also lead to a significant increase in the average willingness to pay for fruits and vegetables. However, the increase in demand associated with this mixed strategy is very similar to the shift in demand associated with adoption of a broad-based program.

## Industry Implications

Our study provides support for the advocates of a broad-based promotional campaign who argue that such advertising would raise overall demand for fruits and vegetables. In fact, we find that the fruit and vegetable industry may be better off without any commodity-specific advertising. For these reasons, a cooperative strategy whereby producers of fruits and vegetables pool their advertising funds and promote their products generically is apt to be more profitable than a series of competing commodity-specific messages.

TABLE 1: RESULTS FROM OUR EXPERIMENT

Treatments	Willingness to Pay (\$/lb)
Control	0.741
Broad-Based Ads	0.836
Apple Ads	0.692
Broad-Based & Apple Ads	0.832
Potato Ads	0.740
Broad-Based & Potato Ads	0.814



The Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University is internationally renowned in the areas of food and agricultural economics, management science, environmental and resource economics and international and development economics.



# Intriguing Start For Future Studies

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

**T**he design of this study is truly ingenious and the industry really owes a debt to Professor Rickard, his associates and Cornell for attempting to inject some rigor into a debate that often has depended more on superstition than science.

As is typical with ground-breaking research, the study raises many questions that only time and more research will be able to answer. For example, one question deals with the long term impact of advertising on purchase and consumption patterns. It is plausible to believe that effective advertising might boost the short-term value perception on a given item or range of items. So in a burst of enthusiasm after seeing an ad, research subjects may well bid higher to get fresh fruits and vegetables.

Typically, though, the question to be addressed in running such a campaign is a financial one. Even if such a campaign were to be run by government as a promoter of public health, there would be an examination to ascertain the costs and benefits of such an effort. This would involve many elements, but a crucial one would be the ability of the advertisements to foster behavioral change over long periods.

Another intriguing issue for future exploration would be the degree to which this result would change in the competitive media environment that we live in. Today, an ad promoting fresh produce on television is highly likely to be preceded by an ad for beer and followed by an ad for ice cream. Possibly this study actually examines a "media monopoly" effect, and if those ads had been for beef, chicken or baked goods, those categories might have found a similar effect.

Another question is to further explore the issue of value perception vs. purchase propensity. One might be willing to pay more for a given item without necessarily wanting to buy more of that item.

Indeed, one wonders if we could adapt this type of research to determine optimal pricing at retail, meaning the price level that

would produce the highest dollar value for the crop at retail.

Of course, as is always true in research, the answer you get depends on the question you ask. Even if we were to accept this study as definitive proof that a generic promotion program would increase produce consumption, that doesn't make it a slam dunk that the industry would or should be willing to pay to conduct such a program.

Increasing consumption may be a worthwhile public health goal, but for individual produce producers the issue with an investment in generic promotion is the same as with any other investment — what is the return on the investment?

On the one hand, you have great division between growers of different crops. Some tree crops take many years to grow and so, presumably, if there was a sudden increase in demand, these producers would enjoy a windfall of profits at least until production could be increased many years later. On the other hand, many row crops can be increased in production almost immediately, so there would be less likelihood of a price increase from generic marketing.

Given this, the ability to benefit from an increase in consumption varies by type of company. A large marketer might benefit from an increase in consumption by growing its business, representing more acreage, etc. Some producers or family businesses, though, grow a fixed amount of acreage or stop the growth of their businesses based on the capacity of family members to handle business. If this family grows 500 acres of zucchini, and consumption of this item increases 20 percent and production increases 20 percent, it is not obvious that this family farmer will benefit in any way from increased consumption of his crop — yet he will be paying for the generic promotion program. This means, of course, that he will be poorer, even if the program succeeds in its goal of increasing consumption of his items.

In fact, there is no guarantee that a successful program will be successful for every

crop. Indeed, it would be interesting to see this research expanded to ascertain how the value perception of individual items is changed by a generic promotion. Does it matter, for example, if a particular item is pictured in the ad?

Another issue is how to spread costs throughout the marketing chain. If the expectation here was that the effort will lift produce prices at the farm, it would make sense to say that growers should pay for the effort — they are the ones who would benefit. This issue was raised, however, in the context of an effort to increase consumption. As such, the expectation was that

**The study raises many questions that only time and more research will be able to answer.**

produce production would increase and prices would not go up. So the win for any individual produce company had to be the ability to sell more volume. Yet if this is the case, it is not clear why producers should pay the bill.

Wouldn't a wholesaler benefit from the doubling of its business as much as a producer? What about retailers or restaurants that would get to sell more produce?

One assumes that these retailers and restaurants would object. After all, would increased consumption of produce actually increase their sales or would it simply switch business from another department? Perhaps a future research study from Professor Rickard, his associates and Cornell will give us the answer.



# Wal-Mart Needs to Jump-Start A Virtuous Cycle And Stop Putting Onus On Shoppers To Find Lower Prices

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT  
05.24.2011

When Wal-Mart first began rolling out supercenters, the supermarket industry was panicked. It wasn't just that a new competitor was coming to town, or that Wal-Mart possessed operating efficiencies supermarkets would find tough to match that worried CEOs at supermarket chains. It was the recognition that general merchandise carried rich profit margins compared to food.

In theory, Wal-Mart could sell food at break-even or even use it as a loss-leader to attract consumers into the store where Wal-Mart would profit by selling general merchandise at rich margins.

Of course, now Wal-Mart's first quarter earnings come out, showing overall profits up but same-store sales down in the U.S. The business has changed so much that the food tail is now wagging the general-merchandise dog, so *The New York Times* is running pieces with headlines such as "Wal-Mart Frets as U.S. Shoppers Buy Food and Little Else."

One gets the distinct impression that Wal-Mart executives don't really understand why same-stores sales are down — now for eight consecutive quarters.

At different times and in different places, Wal-Mart executives have pointed to various issues to explain the problem:

- To their credit they have recognized that the decision to limit assortment was a mistake. As we wrote in a January 28, 2009, article entitled, "Aldi Challenges Wal-Mart As Low-Price Leader," what works for Aldi simply makes no sense for a supercenter whose competitive advantage is, specifically, variety. Yet Wal-Mart knew this was a mistake over a year ago. True, it is a big ship and not easy to turn on a dime. Still, at the old Saturday morning meetings, if a problem was identified at the meeting, the team used to present a solution before the meeting was out. It seems odd that to a substantial

extent the problem couldn't be rectified by now. Of course, it seems odd that Wal-Mart would have pulled all that assortment without testing its effect on consumers in the first place.

- Now executives are pointing out that the economy is really impacting Wal-Mart shoppers, and that its customers are indicating through their shopping patterns that they are running out of money before the end of the month. So much so that Wal-Mart is offering some items in smaller package sizes, and consumers are responding by buying them at the end of their pay periods, even though these items are more expensive per ounce, just to make it through until their next check. This poor-economy argument doesn't make 100 percent sense. If Neiman-Marcus or Hermes made this argument that its customers were feeling a pinch financially, one could accept it. After all, it is not as if there are even richer people who could now slum it and shop at these high-end stores. For Wal-Mart, however, there is a stratum just economically above the core Wal-Mart shopper, and if times are tough, one would expect these consumers to migrate to Wal-Mart.

- The latest argument is that because of high gas prices, consumers are reluctant to get in the car and go to Wal-Mart. This makes little sense. Traditionally, Wal-Mart benefited from high gas prices because its massive supercenters offered one-stop shopping for so many items.

We would like to suggest that Wal-Mart's problems relate to both substance and marketing that is reminding consumers of its substantive problem.

On the substance side, *The Street* published a piece built on research by Customer Growth Partners titled, "Who Has It Cheaper? Wal-Mart vs. Target," which was not what Wal-Mart would want to hear:

*According to pricing studies con-*



*ducted by Customer Growth Partners, a consumer research firm, January, February and March all revealed Target's prices were lower than Wal-Mart's. The monthly study, which is conducted in four states, compares products across segments, including 30 fresh, frozen and non-perishable groceries, eight household chemicals, paper and other consumables like detergent, seven health and beauty aids like shampoo and counter medicines and 10 general merchandise items like apparel and toys.*

*In CGP's analysis for the first three months of the year, Target held a 0.6 percent price differential over Wal-Mart. This was the first time since the firm began conducting these studies in 2006 that Target displayed lower prices. In the past, Wal-Mart has typically maintained a 2 to 4 percent advantage over Target, says CGP President Craig Johnson.*

In fact, the situation may be worse for Wal-Mart:

*If you then factor in Target's new*





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Peppers



Watermelon



*Redcard loyalty program, which offers users a 5 percent discount, that price difference widens. Of course, not all of Target's customers are Redcard holders. Johnson estimates that the loyalty program makes up about 13 to 16 percent of sales.*

*But the usage and penetration of the Redcard appears to be increasing, as it provides shoppers at least a 5 percent discount on new, higher cost, but generally undiscounted consumer electronics items like Apple's new iPad 2 and Nintendo's 3DS.*

*Wal-Mart does not offer a similar program, which could put the company at a further disadvantage moving forward.*

Now Pundit sister publication PRODUCE

*While Target has grown its P-Fresh assortment by leaps and bounds, Wal-Mart continues to dominate the sector. About half of all of Wal-Mart's merchandise falls under the groceries segment, while CGP estimates that 15 to 20 percent of Target's merchandise are groceries.*

*According to the Kantar study, Wal-Mart was cheaper in edible grocery items by about 1 percent and has a 3.4 percent advantage over Target with non-grocery items.*

*Kantar purchased a basket of 13 edible items, finding price differentiations like a tub of Land 'O Lake butter for \$3.48 at Wal-Mart and \$4.39 at Target. It is also worth noting, that five of the*

clear winner.

This is more serious than just losing customers for a month; it is about losing positioning. As the article points out:

*Wal-Mart has been struggling with its image among core shoppers since it removed thousands of items it deemed unprofitable from its shelves starting in 2009. While it is currently restocking some of this merchandise, the process is slow, and has left a sour taste among some customers.*

*But an even bigger concern has been the perception among shoppers that Wal-Mart does not offer the same savings it always had. "We believe that the price leadership perception, in fact, is a greater issue for Wal-Mart than destocking the fifth or sixth brands in a particular category," Johnson says.*

In *The New York Times* piece, Wal-Mart's leadership speaks aggressively:

*In the United States, Wal-Mart has been making a number of changes to revive same-store sales. Michael T. Duke, chief executive of Wal-Mart, said on Tuesday that, "Comp sales growth remains the greatest priority for me and the entire Wal-Mart U.S. team."*

We think the actions of Wal-Mart's executives make us think that enhancing short-term profits is a still higher priority. If they don't fix this, Wal-Mart will lose its most precious asset — the perception of consumers that it offers the right price.

Wal-Mart's 'Match It!' marketing campaign is really not a good idea.

Although Wal-Mart has long had a policy of matching prices, it never needed to promote it when it was perceived as the low-price leader. Making customers feel like they have to be detectives and researchers to get the lowest price is exactly the opposite of the experience shoppers want from Wal-Mart. They want Wal-Mart to do the research and Wal-Mart to make sure they are not overcharged.

Note that the campaign does not include any Wal-Mart promise to lower its price if someone points out that a competitor is less expensive on an item. Only the particular person complaining gets anything — and then just a match. This whole campaign basically advertises to consumers that at Wal-Mart you will be overcharged unless you are a super sleuth. What a comedown for a chain that used to advertise: "Always the low price. Always."

## Making customers feel like they have to be detectives and researchers to get the lowest price is exactly the opposite of the experience shoppers want from Wal-Mart. They want Wal-Mart to do the research and Wal-Mart to make sure they are not overcharged.

BUSINESS has run a comparative analysis of produce pricing between Wal-Mart and other retailers for 10 years, and we find Wal-Mart to consistently be less expensive on fresh produce.

The article also points out that this is still true of food generally:

*In a separate study conducted in January by Kantar Retail of just one Wal-Mart and one Target store in Massachusetts, it found that Target's prices were about 2.8 percent lower than Wal-Mart's. But the research firm noted that Target's low prices are more dependent on temporary sales. This means shoppers need to be willing to change brands based upon the promotions being offered in order to really notice a few extra bucks in their wallets.*

*Two categories, in particular, where Wal-Mart remains a price leader are groceries and non-perishable home good like paper towels and light bulbs.*

*items Kantar studied in the category were on sale that week at Target, while just one item at Wal-Mart was a special. If these items were not on sale, Wal-Mart would have been cheaper by 6.2 percent.*

The problem, of course, is that Target is not the toughest competition. What about dollar stores, Aldi, Save-a-Lot and various other deep discounters?

The truth is that every quarter Wal-Mart has been pointing to higher profits and lower same store sales. What it needs to do, of course, is invest some of its profit margin into lowering prices. This would jump start a virtuous cycle in which lower prices lead to higher sales per square foot, which would result in fewer costs per dollar sold, which could allow for lower prices ad infinitum.

In the CGP study, Wal-Mart bounced back to beat Target on prices in April — but not if one takes the 5 percent Redcard discount — in which case, Target is the





## Activist Scrutiny Is Not Going Away

I thought Jim Prevor's May editorial "Pesticide Usage Under Attack Again," regarding a recent study that suggests a link between maternal exposure to pesticides and the IQ of offspring, was insightful. Mr. Prevor raised some good questions about the science in that study and was on target when suggesting activists have a renewed interest in pesticide use on food crops.

Mr. Prevor's takeaways hit the mark as well: Does mainstream media really care to distinguish good science from bad science, and is it realistic to suggest we can feed a growing world population without the judicious use of pesticides?

I think we'd agree that in both cases, the answer is a resounding "No." So for the produce industry, it's a matter of how to respond.

Direct responses such as Jim's editorial are important. Pundits should publicly challenge research whenever the methodologies or conclusions are suspect. But without disputing the veracity of one study or another, I think it's equally important for the produce buyer and retailer to acknowledge that activist scrutiny, as Jim spotlights, is not going away. Nor is the mainstream media's propensity to focus on the sensational. It seems the more sensational the better.

One way for the produce value chain to proactively address both pesticide residue and food productivity issues is through the use of biopesticides. In Europe, where pesticide residues on produce garner far more attention than in the domestic market, biopesticide use is soaring. Since most biopesticides have zero residues and are exempt from tolerance in most cases, biopesticides are being widely adopted — especially by growers who supply the new breed of retailer (Tesco, Wal-Mart, etc.) that dictate what kind of crop protection products can be used, and when. Today, most U.S. farmers growing for export markets are including biopesticides in their programs for this very reason.

Moreover, advances in technology mean that more and more biopesticide products with efficacy comparable to conventional pesticides have entered into the market. This has allowed growers to integrate



biopesticides into programs alongside conventional products, often in the form of late season applications that speak directly to the need for retailers to provide residue-free produce, without sacrificing quality.

Food safety will always be a focus of consumer advocacy groups. Justifiably so. But as Mr. Prevor suggests, society needs to embrace the fact that the production of safe food and the use of pesticides in a highly productive system are not mutually exclusive propositions.

Biopesticides provide a clear path to achieve both ends.

Bill Stoneman  
Executive Director  
Biopesticide Industry Alliance  
McFarland, WI

## Feeding The World — Sustainably

I just finished reading Jim Prevor's March 2011 Fruits of Thought column, "Food Prices At Core Of Middle East Unrest," about the rising costs of food and its global implications. I was in total agreement with him right up until the end, when he declared that synthetic fertilizers, GMOs and large-scale industrialized agriculture are the solution.

Not that thoroughly debunked old saw again! Study after study has shown that, in fact, sustainable agricultural practices can — and I believe will — feed the world. Most recently, the December, 2010, report to the UN General Assembly very clearly and firmly states that sustainable farming systems that "mimic nature instead of industry" raise productivity significantly, reduce rural poverty, increase genetic diversity, improve nutrition in local populations, serve to build a resilient food system in the face of climate change,

utilize fewer and more locally available resources, including a reduced need for petroleum, empower farmers and create jobs.

Yes, ecological farming methods are typically more labor-intensive, and there are costs associated with labor. But there are also benefits to maintaining a healthy, long-term job market in the agricultural sector, particularly in developing countries. "Creation of employment in rural areas in developing countries, where underemployment is currently massive, and demographic growth remains high," states the report, "may constitute an advantage rather than a liability and may slow down rural-urban migration."

It's not just labor either — lots of research is being done on improving sustainable and organic farming methods, which is producing amazing advances in both yields and our understanding of agriculture as it fits into the greater ecological picture. Mr. Prevor's characterization of organic and sustainable agriculture as anti-science is, at the very, least woefully outdated.

As Mr. Prevor states, consumers who support organic agriculture are "sufficiently rich that [they] can elect to support other values with [their] money." Well, yes. Thank goodness for that. But as Mr. Prevor is certainly aware, conventional agriculture is thoroughly subsidized to the point where the prices of these foods do not accurately represent the cost of their production.

If the externalized environmental and social costs related to the industrialization of our agricultural system [were fully measured]— the destruction of local food economies, diminished soil fertility, waterways polluted by chemical run-off, medical problems associated with exposure to synthetic chemical inputs, the proliferation of antibiotic-resistant bacteria due to the overuse of antibiotics in meat production, and the huge dependence on petroleum for everything from fuel to fertilizers, to name just a few — the products of chemically-dependent large-scale industrial agriculture would be too expensive for any of us to buy.

A final point I would make is that a larger issue in the fight against global food insecurity are the inequalities in the distribution of food supplies. There is enough food produced around the world to feed everyone, if everyone had equal access to



it. But the reality of our global economy is such that even while an epidemic of obesity and other diseases related to overconsumption ravages the U.S. and other Western countries, poor people in Egypt and Tunisia and Bangladesh struggle to feed their children. As Mr. Prevor says in the column, “These countries are rich enough that if wheat is more expensive, they will just pay more.”

As a lowly produce industry worker, I don’t know what the solution to this global problem is, but I DO know that pointing fingers at the sustainable agriculture movement won’t solve it. I’m not a fan of the green revolution and its legacy of chemical-intensive agriculture (I bet you guessed that!), but the real obstacle to feeding the world’s hungry is not how the food is produced, but how we as a global community decide who gets to eat it.

Addie Pobst  
Import Coordinator  
CF Fresh  
Sedro Wooley, WI

### Mr. Prevor’s Response

I appreciate the time Ms. Pobst took to write and applaud the sincerity with which she seeks solutions to the problem of global hunger. Alas, well-meaning though she doubtless is, I would suggest extreme caution in relying on “study after study” rather than the real life experience of farmers in deciding what is and is not feasible. The United Nations is a political and not an economic or agricultural body, and its recommendations are likely to mirror what is politically correct.

The report Ms. Pobst refers to, *Agroecology and the Right to Food*, submitted by Olivier De Schutter, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, suggests

that through agro-ecology we can have it all — that we can maximize food production while also maximizing lots of social goods. These things are easy to assert, but the truth is that we have a highly competitive food sector, and the reasons farmers all over the world are pushing to grow genetically modified seed is because it lowers costs while it increases production.

Indeed if, in fact, low-input agriculture can less expensively produce more food, then the world will not require any UN reports to adopt it. The reason farmers like to use high-tech irrigation systems, the newest seeds and the most modern pesticides and fungicides is because this produces the highest return for the farmer. UN reports notwithstanding.

To set the record clear, I never wrote that a decision to either produce organically or consume only organic foods is anti-science; we said that, “...when we promote organic items and things of that sort, we are promoting an option for affluent people — we are not propagating a serious response to the world’s need for food. In fact, many of the limitations on food production in poor countries around the world are caused because land reform laws have kept average farm size too small-scale, because they don’t use synthetic fertilizers, and they reject GMOs out of ignorance and fear.” This remains the case.

Ms. Pobst makes a good point — one I have often made in my columns — that subsidies can and do distort the market for agricultural and other products. We are opposed to such subsidies. However, her claim that if such externalities were accounted for, then “the products of chemically dependent large-scale industrial agriculture would be too expensive for any of us to buy” is but an assertion, one supported by no evidence and one that seems quite unlikely.

A Canadian study done for Canadian dairy farmers, which was specifically done to prove how heavily subsidized U.S. agriculture is, claimed that in 2009 total agricultural subsidies from all levels of government equaled \$180.8 billion a year. Though a sizeable sum, that still works out to less than \$600 a person per year in the United States and makes no allowance for the fact that a lot of food gets exported. Although there are other externalities, such as the impact of water use, etc., it is not at

all obvious that such externalities don’t exist with other forms of agriculture. For example, organic producers are allowed to use petroleum oil and soaps, synthetic pheromones, copper and sulfur compounds, etc.

Besides, many of the issues relate to yield. If organics produce lower yields, more land and water may be required to produce the same volume of food, and land requirements might result in increased externalities all by itself — say clearing biologically diverse forests to use for food production.

I agree fully with Ms. Pobst that the issue of famine in the world is typically related to non-production issues. Famine is often a creation of politics, in which a government or tribe intentionally seeks to prevent enemies from getting food. This being said, we would hesitate to call the distribution of food inequitable and object to the implication that if only the West would eat less, then poor nations could eat more.

Food is produced on the assumption that there is a market ready, willing and able to buy the food at a profit for the producer. If the West suddenly reduced its food consumption, food production would drop as well. Nobody would produce food if the only markets were poor countries unable or unwilling to pay a price at which the producers could make a profit.

One can be a fan or not of the “green revolution,” but the reality is that the spreading of agricultural technology that it represented is what allowed food production to increase and feed the world’s population. To argue against it is to argue against the one thing that has sustained billions of people. There is no plausible claim that something else could have been done that would have also sustained these billions.

Part of my objection to Ms. Pobst’s conclusion is moral and legal. I don’t think the “global community” can or should decide to take money from some people to give it to others. An eminent Congressman known to history as Davy Crockett put it this way: “We have the right, as individuals, to give away as much of our own money as we please in charity; but as members of Congress we have no right so to appropriate a dollar of the public money.”

There is a practical objection as well. It would show great ignorance of history and politics to think that the counsel of nations





actually protects the weak and the poor. These nations need to step up for themselves; this includes being open to all ideas that might increase the volume of food production while reducing the cost.

If the UN or others can demonstrate that agro-ecology is the path to do this, then let the evidence show it and allow the strongest argument to prevail. But to reject, *a priori*, well-established ideas such as the use of pesticides, genetically modified seeds, etc., would be a self-improving act.

*Jim Prevor*  
Editor-In-Chief  
PRODUCE BUSINESS  
Boca Raton, FL

## The Future Of Produce

Given the focus of this 40-Under-Forty issue, it's a perfect time to acknowledge the hard work and passion that goes into bringing the best the land has to offer to consumers across the country. So much of that depends on finding the best and brightest up-and-comers to lead the produce industry into the next era.

When I get the opportunity to share our world with a group of young wide-eyed college students, I just jump at the chance. Recently, I contacted Chris Puentes, president of Interfresh, who graciously hosted my Cal Poly class to the Los Angeles Terminal Market for a day-in-the-life view of a terminal market jobber, two highly successful produce distributors, a retail store visit and a tour of one of the top state-of-the-art retail distribution centers in the country.

Our day began with a 2 a.m. departure to give the students a taste of the demanding hours that are required for a successful career in produce. Upon arrival, we walked the new market, just across the street from

the 7th Street market, where I got my start 30-plus years ago with Frieda's. We were greeted by John Corsaro of Giumarra Companies, who spoke to the class about family legacy, the importance of having passion for your job, a commitment to growers and servicing customers with premium fruit from around the world. Our next stop was a visit to Jeff Miller and Bill Brooks of Westlake Produce Company, where the themes of hard work, the need for young new talent, commitment, passion and industry involvement shined through their messages. From there, Chris shared his company's story, highlighting their successes and challenges as an established company with over 25 years in the produce industry. Chris stressed the importance of having product knowledge and using his expertise and experience to foster long lasting relationships with his customers.

Next we were off to see Northgate Markets, a 32-store Hispanic retail chain. We were all amazed and certainly impressed by the store's beautiful and bountiful displays of fresh produce, with envy that our hometowns were without such a fine establishment. Alfonso Cano, assistant director of produce, gave us a personal tour of the store and then a tour of Northgate Markets' brand new DC facility in Anaheim. We were treated warmly by Alfonso's entire buying staff, each of whom shared stories of their personal career paths. It was obvious to the students why Northgate Markets is such a successful operation in the Southern California market. The team provided an amazing lunch and then gave a warm farewell as we made our way back to campus.

The bus was buzzing all the way home with praise and admiration for the day's hosts and speakers and the anecdotes

they shared. The students were truly impressed with our dynamic and hardworking industry and most importantly, could picture themselves succeeding in our fast-paced world.

Cal Poly's "Learn By Doing" philosophy rang true that day by allowing the students to experience our extremely passionate and hardworking industry, even if it was just for a day. By showing my students firsthand the hardworking people of our industry, their interests were piqued to the point of sincerely vowing to follow up with each company to secure either an internship or entry-level job with one of these impressive organizations. I'm certain many of them will be honored in your magazine's 40-Under-Forty in the years to come.

With over 30 years devoted to the produce industry, it has become my true passion to share the determination it takes to feed America healthy fresh fruits and vegetables. To my fellow produce industry members, I urge you to take the time out of your busy day to invite a local college Ag class to your business soon. It is an experience that will energize your team and provide a chance to reminisce when you were their age, eager to share your fresh ideas with the world.

*Tonya Antle*  
Adjunct Professor, Ag. Business Marketing  
Cal Polytechnic State University  
San Luis Obispo, CA

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Boca Raton, FL 33481  
or email: [info@producebusiness.com](mailto:info@producebusiness.com)



# México

ADVERTISEMENT

## AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO

The World's First is also the World's Finest



Avocados from Mexico are grown year-round in Michoacán, Mexico, the place where avocados originated and the only place in the world where trees bloom naturally four times a year, resulting in consistent avocado production year-round in a variety of grades and sizes.

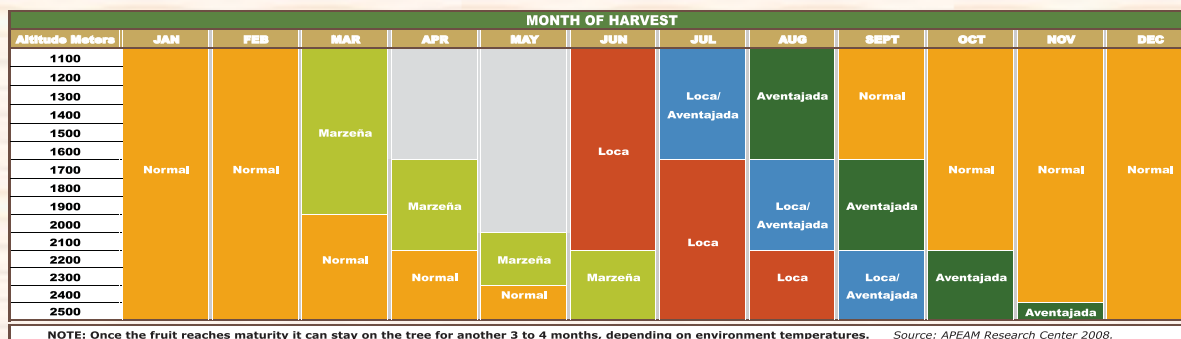
The combination of ideal climate, rich volcanic soil and generations of expert cultivation ensures a consistent quality, flavor and texture that is distinctly delicious. And because Avoca-

dos from Mexico are handpicked from the groves and shipped to the U.S. market within 3 to 4 days, they are always fresh.

As the largest producer and exporter of avocados to the U.S., Avocados from Mexico continues to provide the category with volume to grow on. During the 2010-2011 season (July '10 – June '11), Mexico is expected to ship nearly 620 million lbs. of avocados to the U.S., accounting for more than 50% of the market share.

### AVAILABLE YEAR-ROUND

Avocados from Mexico are available year round. In fact, Mexico remains the only place in the world where avocado trees naturally bloom four times a year to produce quality fruit consistently throughout the year in a variety of grades and sizes.



### THE AVOCADO CATEGORY IS ON THE RISE

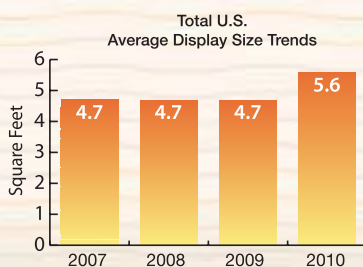
As a category, avocados enjoyed an impressive 22.2% increase in unit sales last year—beating the performance of the other top 20 fruits, nuts and vegetables in the produce department! As the reigning category leader, Avocados from Mexico is continually driving retail sales through aggressive marketing programs that ensure brand momentum and category growth.

Avocado Sales Continue to Rise		
Year	Dollars	Volume
2009	511,861,415	428,385,482
2010	552,072,577	523,623,826
<b>Total Increase</b>	<b>+7.9%</b>	<b>+22.2%</b>

Source: Avocados from Mexico with data from Perishables FreshFacts® Powered by Nielsen, 52 weeks ending 12/25/10, total U.S.

### MAKE SURE SHELF SPACE IS GROWING WITH THE CATEGORY

Increased display space adds up to incremental sales. Turn today's significantly greater consumer demand for avocados into significantly greater sales and profits by increasing the number and size of your displays to better showcase multiple sizes of avocados.



Source: Avocados from Mexico with data from U.S. Marketing Service 2007-2011

### SIZE UP NEW PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Expand the category by stocking the top 3 items and stock bagged avocados to increase multiples and promote increased usage!

Hass Avocados Top Items			
Size	Vol (000,000)	Top 3 Item % Total	ACV
4225 (Lg.)	300	} 89%	85
4046 (Sm.)	158		72
4770 (XLg.)	37		19

Source: Avocados from Mexico with data from Perishables Group FreshFacts® Powered by Nielsen, 52 weeks ending 12/25/10



## HELPING RETAILERS PROMOTE AND PROFIT

Avocado should be promoted year round on a consistent basis. Avocados from Mexico contracted with the Perishables Group to gain insights on best practices for promotions. Highlights of the findings for developed avocado markets are as follows:

- Best practice research indicates that avocados should be promoted up to 40 times/year in developed markets.
- Promote avocados 7 to 9 times in third and fourth quarters and 10 to 11 times in first and second quarters to achieve optimal sales.
- Run promotion discounts from 11% to 30% to optimize dollars and volume.
- Occasionally feature multiple avocado items in the same promotion—like small and large size avocados at different price points.
- Whenever possible combine circular promotions with in-store price reductions.

## USE AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO TOOLS AND PROGRAMS

There are a variety of resources available to help retailers increase consumer purchase frequency and market demand for Avocados from Mexico.

- Merchandising Materials can be set up throughout the store to encourage impulse sales and are available year-round. POS materials include secondary displays, POS cards, bin wrap, posters and more.
- The S.M.A.R.T. Kit (Storing Merchandising Arranging Ripening Training) is a hands-on training program for produce managers to learn about the latest in best practices for handling and merchandising avocados.
- Category management data helps retailers develop successful selling strategies and increase sales.
- Integrated marketing programs keep avocados top of mind with consumers and includes impactful television advertising and radio spots in select markets, online advertising, national print ads, consumer promotions, public relations, social media and in-store merchandising.

## INSIGHT FROM MEXICO

*An interview with Emiliano Escobedo, Marketing Director for APEAM (Michoacán, Mexico)*

**Q:** How are growers/exporters demonstrating their commitment to quality and safety?

**A:** To ensure maximum quality, avocado producers and packers adhere to the toughest world-class standards for food safety, including leading-edge food safety technology, timely fruit trace-back based on fruit coding and harvest data, handpicked fruit that never touches the ground and independently certified packers. Our orchards abide by strict guidelines for food safety, sanitary standards and product quality, and our growers follow high standards for imports set by export markets.

**Q:** Are exports from Mexico increasing?

**A:** Consumers are discovering more everyday usage ideas for avocados and finding that adding Avocados from Mexico makes good food better. As avocado demand continues to rise, Avocados from Mexico shipments to the US will continue to grow. This season, volume should remain at the same strong levels as last with Mexico expected to ship nearly 620 million lbs. of avocados to the U.S., accounting for more than 50% of the market share. Next season, 2011-2012, Avocados from Mexico is expecting to see volume go up by more than 7% with a projected 660 million lbs. of avocados being shipped into the U.S.

**Q:** How does the Latino population in the United States impact avocado exports from Mexico?

**A:** According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the Latino population in the United States grew by 43% in the last decade, with Latinos now making up 16% of the nation's population. Latinos are quickly becoming the mainstream and are expected to become the majority in California and Texas within the next decade. The U.S. Latino population rise provides retailers with valuable marketing opportunities particularly in regards to better marketing Avocados from Mexico to the Latino consumer. After all, research shows that avocados are a food staple in Latino households and Latinos prefer Avocados from Mexico!

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

**A:** Avocados from Mexico are available year round from APEAM U.S. certified packers in the state of Michoacán, the heart of Mexico's main avocado growing region. A list of exporters is available on our website: [www.avocadosfrommexico.com/trade](http://www.avocadosfrommexico.com/trade).

**Q:** What is your industry doing to better serve retailers?

**A:** Avocados from Mexico continuously invests in aggressive integrated marketing initiatives to build the category and drive consumer demand. Our sales building integrated marketing program has the largest budget of any avocado association in the U.S. and will deliver more than 400 million impressions in the fall alone. Outreach efforts include television, radio, online marketing, national print advertising, public relations, promotions, and social media programs that keep Avocados from Mexico top of mind amongst consumers and reinforce multiple usage ideas that are engaging the target audience. Avocados from Mexico also continues to invest in category management and works with retailers to develop customized programs that help build their avocado sales. Merchandising support including customized display contests is also available so that retailers can promote avocados in store year-round.

**Q:** What is the most important thing for a buyer to know about your industry?

**A:** Despite low volume during the 2010-2011 season for the total category, sales of avocados continued to outpace the total produce category in 2010. This is in large part due to the wide expansion in avocado appeal across many behavior stages and lifestyles. Next season, Mexico will have increased supply available for the U.S. market. If trends continue, and we see no reason for them not to, Avocados from Mexico will continue to build the category, gain market share and provide the U.S. with the volume to grow on.

For more information on Avocados from Mexico please visit [www.avocadosfrommexico.com](http://www.avocadosfrommexico.com) or email [info@avocadosfrommexico.com](mailto:info@avocadosfrommexico.com)

### TRADE AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES:

For more information on trade and business opportunities with Mexico, please contact the Agricultural Office at the Embassy of Mexico:



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# NEW ENGLAND PRODUCE PERSON OF THE YEAR AWARD

PRESENTED AT THE NEW ENGLAND PRODUCE CONFERENCE ON APRIL 27, 2011  
BY PRODUCE BUSINESS AND THE NEPC

## BOB MCGOWAN

*Excerpt from the speech  
by Ken Whitacre, publisher  
and editorial director of  
PRODUCE BUSINESS*



**A** willingness to work hard. A knack for putting people together. A commitment to tackle the tough jobs by jumping in feet first... and coming up head first.

These are just a few of the ways colleagues, co-workers and even competitors describe this year's 7th annual PRODUCE BUSINESS/New England Produce Council Produce Person of the Year. This is an honoree that you – the members of the New England Produce Council – have chosen, and that PRODUCE BUSINESS is pleased to award today.

Like the first six recipients of this award – Paul Kneeland, Jack Salamon, Domenic D'Antuono, Will Wedge, Mike Giza and Mike Maguire – this year's honoree showed his love of the produce industry at an early age. While other grade-schoolers were watching cartoons, our award recipient tuned into the TV show, *Modern Farmer*, at daybreak on Saturday mornings.

His produce career didn't take off until adulthood, but his work ethic showed itself early. High school classmates pegged him as the kind of guy to 'have his name on the door.'

Doors did open quickly for our honoree. He started his career as a broker with Swift & Co. After that, he never had to send out a resume.

Chiquita tapped him, and his subsequent move to Ohio prompted the captain of the Wellesley men's baseball team to show up on the family's doorstep one evening to see if it was really true ... that his hit-em-out-of-the-park slugger was indeed moving.

While baseball was a childhood passion, and one that our honoree may have played professionally if his career had taken a different path, it was produce that brought him back to New England.

Morris Alper recruited him, and then his geographic area of responsibility increasingly expanded as he moved to Eastern Sales & Marketing, and finally on to his current company.

Customers such as Dole moved with our honoree, "because there is that much trust in him," says a colleague. Dole and Del Monte have both named him 'Buyer of the Year.'

In the past year, our award recipient has regularly made 12-hour round-trip commutes to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He does this, says a colleague, "due to his allegiance to the customer and desire to keep a sense of continuity."

This particular retail account hasn't been all fun and games. As the head of perishables for this chain jokes, "Don't ask him about bulk natural snacks. It's a line that tortured him – every road block that could come up did – but he made it happen for us. That's how good he is."

The route from Massachusetts to Pennsylvania is one that our honoree knows well. There's a running joke in the industry that he's memorized the location of every rest stop along the way. That's because it's here he pulls off to participate in the conference calls he's known to rarely miss. Many of these calls have nothing to do with his direct business, but instead are part of his vast volunteer work.

Indeed, our honoree is a volunteer bar none in the produce industry. He's an original board member, past vice president, past president and current board member of the New England Produce Council.

You could also say he volunteers along the entire Eastern Seaboard, for in addition to his work with the New England Produce Council, he helped start the Southeast Produce Council's annual show. Today, many in the northeast produce trade attend this southern show. As one colleague says, "He's the pied piper of the produce industry."

Golf is another sport dear to our honoree. He founded and continues to head up the New England Produce Council's annual golf tournament. He's also been known to mix business with pleasure: One colleague recalls the time that he was with our honoree and another co-worker when they all took the time to play a round of golf. At one hole, our honoree took a swing, and his ball neatly tore off a large branch of a tree. This power swing has definitely earned him more home-runs than holes-in-one.

A dedicated and devoted family man is another apt descriptor of our honoree. His wife, Judy, whom he's known from sandbox days in kindergarten, tells how in spite of travels and taking business calls at all hours, our honoree has always made time for his son, Brendan, and two daughters, Valerie and Beverly. He's also known to regularly don an apron and fire up 'Big Al,' the family's fond nickname for the barbecue grill.

Better have your dictionary out when you're around our honoree. He's a keen speller with an eagle eye for mistakes on everything from menus to marquees. Finally, his 'can-do' spirit is embodied in his favorite saying, and one that he's passed on to his children. That is: "show 'em how it's done."

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in congratulating the 2011 New England Produce Person of the Year – Bob McGowan of Advantage Sales & Marketing.





# The Hunts Point Produce Market with Star Boxing's FIRST ANNUAL AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY'S KNOCK OUT CANCER: JULY 23, 2011



If you are like most Americans, cancer has touched your life or the life of someone you not only know, but love. The statistics are sobering. Cancer remains the second largest leading cause of death in our country, claiming more than half a million lives each year. That is one life lost to cancer every minute! The lifetime risk of developing cancer is as high as one in two for men, and one in three for women.

That is why on **Saturday July 23, 2011**, **Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association** is proudly partnering with the American Cancer Society to host the 1st Annual **KNOCK OUT CANCER** boxing fundraising event. Net proceeds from **KNOCK OUT CANCER** will support the American Cancer Society's efforts in research, advocacy, education and services.

**KNOCK OUT CANCER** is the first event of its kind; Joe DeGuardia, Founder & CEO of Star Boxing is a veteran in the boxing world, and a Bronx native. Star Boxing produces exciting, innovative, and professional boxing events. Star Boxing has consistently brought credibility, integrity, and exciting fights world wide. This event is taking place at the Market and promises to be a memorable experience for all of us.

The **KNOCK OUT CANCER** sponsorship opportunities outlining a variety of levels of participation and amenities can be viewed online by visiting [www.huntspointproducemkt.com](http://www.huntspointproducemkt.com). If you have any questions about **KNOCK OUT CANCER**, do not hesitate to contact *Myra Gordon*, Executive Administrative Director of Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association via email at [maggehuntspoint@aol.com](mailto:maggehuntspoint@aol.com) or *Yilda V. Guerrero*, Director of Special Events, American Cancer Society at **718-547-5064 x 2101** or via email at [yilda.guerrero@cancer.org](mailto:yilda.guerrero@cancer.org).

Please join us by supporting the American Cancer Society in the fight against cancer.

**TOGETHER WE CAN ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Sincerely,

Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association

*Where the Farmers Go To Market*

**producebusiness** is a PROUD SPONSOR  
MARKETING • DISTRIBUTION • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



# jazzed up

## For United Fresh

The United Fresh Produce Association convened its annual convention in New Orleans on May 2. Its RiverJazz Opening Party, sponsored by Avocados from Mexico, CHEP and PRODUCE BUSINESS, kicked off the event with networking throughout the New Orleans Riverfront Wharf.



Mike Wooten of Sunkist Growers and Robert Keeney of the USDA AMS



Jackie Wiggins of Freida's Inc. and Ellen Rosenthal of PRODUCE BUSINESS



Karin Gardner of The Oppenheimer Group, Suzanne Wolter of Rainier Fruit and Jennifer Armen-Bolen of The Armen Group



Andrew Schwartz, Raina Nelson, Joe McGuire and Jimmy Lotuffo of C.H. Robinson Worldwide



Doug Ranno and Mario Martinez of Colorful Harvest with Ray Connelly of Truetrac



Howard Nager of Domex Superfresh Growers, Reggie Griffin of Kroger Co., Kevin Kershaw and Ed Kershaw of Domex





Randall Freeman of Harvestmark, Dave Rodgers of IFCO Systems, Gordon Robertson of Sun World International, Scott Carr of Harvestmark and Al Vangelos of Sun World



Colleen Franklin, Jennilee McComb, Kimball Redd, Emily Redd, Phillip Muir, Gail Adamson, Kathy Muir, Laura Muir, Mike Muir of Muir Copper Canyon Farms Group



Steve Jewell of MAXCO Packaging, Cindy Jewell of California Giant Berry Farms and Mike Reed of Monterey Mushrooms



Randall Freeman of Harvestmark, Tim Debus of IFCO Systems and Scott Carr of Harvestmark



Cathy Stenzel of United Fresh and Jim Lemke of C.H. Robinson Worldwide



Joe Klare of Castellini Co. and Ruth Vondreau of Ready Pac Produce



Diane and Geoff White and Laura and Steve Burnham of Safeway Inc.



John Travers of Charlie's Produce, Roger Becker, John Schaeffer and Brent Scattini of Gold Coast Packing



Kay and Steve Probstfield of Nationfresh and Christa and Dan Spain of Kingsburg Orchards



Mike Wise of Horton Fruit, Alan Temple of B&W Quality Growers and Stanley Trout of Grow Farms



Anthony Totta and Chris Jacobs of Clifford Produce Sales



Fritz Koontz of Santa Cruz Berry Farming Co., Mark Hilton of Harris Teeter Super Markets, Stephanie Hilton of Hilton Marketing and Alan Tagami of Seven Seas Berry Sales



Mike Stuart of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, Charles Hall of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Gregg Storey of Clarkson Consulting and Reggie Brown of the Florida Tomato Committee





## 2010 MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS

- Avocados From Mexico
- California Giant Berry Farms
- Columbia Marketing International Corp.
- Dole Fresh Vegetables
- Earthbound Farm
- Idaho Potato Commission
- Litehouse Foods
- National Mango Board
- Ocean Mist Farms/Wegmans
- Pandol Brothers Inc.
- Tanimura & Antle
- University of Massachusetts
- Vidalia Onion Committee

# TURN YOUR MARKETING INTO AN **AWARDING** EXPERIENCE

Right now, and on through June 3, 2011, we're taking entries for the **23rd Annual Marketing Excellence Awards Program**, presented by **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. The awards recognize excellence in marketing in each of six categories: retailers, restaurants, wholesalers, shippers, commodity organizations and service providers. Print, broadcast and other media are eligible to win.

**To participate, send us the following for each entry:**

1. Your name, company, address and phone.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Type of business.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Name and dates of promotion (must have taken place between June 1, 2010 and June 1, 2011).  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Promotion objectives.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Description of promotion.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Promotion results (sales or traffic increases, media attention, etc.). What made this program a success?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. All support materials used in the promotion – such as POP, ads, posters, TV commercials.

**High-resolution images to illustrate the promotion are encouraged. (Please do not send any produce)**

SEND ENTRIES TO:

## **PRODUCE BUSINESS MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

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

Deadline for entries is June 3, 2011

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



# Passion For Produce

The industry acknowledges these leaders of tomorrow for their passion and inspiration to others.



**Nick Armano, 39**  
**Sourcing Manager**  
**C.H. Robinson Worldwide**  
**Eden Prairie, MN**

In his 15-year career with C.H. Robinson, Armano has developed unique and cutting-edge products that have impacted not only CHRW, but also the industry overall. From developing a nation-wide network of processors who produce apple slices, to advocating for regional growers in the Northeast, Armano has impacted the entire supply chain, from field to fork. Working from CHRW's Paulsboro, NJ, office, he is known for meeting the needs of industry partners by moving commodities from producer to end-user, helping growers market their products, and helping procure safe products for consumers. His work in helping to develop Mott's sliced apples and other products has helped lead to an increase in produce consumption with children.

Armano also continues to mentor the next generation of produce leaders. He dedicates a great deal of time and energy to new employee seminars at CHRW and Key Account Manager training. While Armano's individual accomplishments are noteworthy, as a direct result of his passion to educate and mentor, Armano's legacy will be evident in the accomplishments of others that he has coached and developed. He is active with the United Fresh GAP Harmonization Industry Committee and has participated in the Cornell Executive Leadership Program.

Working within every aspect of the supply and demand chain and being

able to gain an understanding of the complexities within it keeps him motivated. "I work every day to improve our supply chain and enhance the value that it brings to our world," he says. "I face challenges from product selection, to transportation of produce, to safety and traceability, to the merchandising of products. I stay inspired by our industry's lack of barriers to providing value and exercising the entrepreneurial spirit. I can't think of another industry that has the speed in which two individuals can connect for the first time and do business. I love that it is a true pure market built on a foundation of supply, demand and value. Watching others succeed also inspires me. Being able to be part of another individual's personal growth within our industry is amazingly rewarding to me. I appreciate that our industry provides these wonderful experiences to all of us.

"Being a CH Robinson employee gives me a unique ability to achieve my goals through matching up supply with demand and connecting with many people in our industry. This advantage of having a wide industry network leads to my ability to connect small to mid-size growers with consumers that the growers historically would have difficulty connecting with due to lack of time and technology."

He notes having had the fortune to learn from a number of individuals, but specifically mentions David Mostoller and Tim Gagnon of C.H. Robinson as mentors. "David and Tim have challenged me to continually develop myself and to use this development in order to further not only my career, but others' careers as well," he says. "Their real value to me is how they help me achieve my goals and help me develop my legacy. I want to be seen as a person that helped others grow as individuals, reaching their personal goals and reaching achievements that surpass their own expectations."





**Vince Ballesteros, 38**  
Director Of Sales  
Church Brothers  
Salinas, CA

Ballesteros has earned his place as director of sales at Church Brothers with hard work, dedication and a vision for the future. He is known for his innate business acumen and a genuine love of the produce industry. He is a great motivator, inspiring others to succeed and always helping to think outside of the box. He has helped Church Brothers continue to evolve and develop into a nationally recognized company, expanding its commodity-based line into the value-added and fresh-cut areas.

He began his career out of high school at Church Brothers and has worked his way up to his current position, as a successor to Steve Church. Since becoming director of sales, there has been an overall sales growth of 20 percent. He has been responsible for the development of the food-service program, cultivating the relationships that are the bulk of the company's foodservice business. He manages a sales and marketing department with daily attention to detail, but also with foresight to consider the long term future of the business. He is fiercely loyal to the company, and has helped build its reputation and visibility to what it is today.

Within Church Brothers, he has created vendor management and consolidation programs. He saw the need for a delivered sales program that instigated the start of the company's own transportation entity. In addition to generating new business, he has strengthened key account relationships and expanded market share in the retail, foodservice and chain sectors.

He loves that produce is a constant learning process. "You can always learn more, do more, achieve more...the sky is the limit!" he exclaims. "I love the unpredictability of the industry, how every day presents a new challenge. External factors, such as changing industry standards, weather, food safety, locally grown produce, fuel costs and price pressure, create an everyday battle to align the right program with the right customer. Meeting these challenges head on is motivating for me, and creating solutions is a constant inspiration to learn more, work harder and strive to be the best."

In his community, Ballesteros volunteers his time coaching various youth sports, and is a YMCA volunteer coach for underprivileged children. He is active in various produce industry associations.

He credits his father, Carlos Ballesteros, and Tom and Steve Church as mentors. "My father has been a consistent and ongoing mentor for me," he says. "I have always valued his hard work ethic, and been motivated to follow in his footsteps. Tom and Steve Church have been my mentors and my role models for the past 20 years. What they have built and accomplished in the produce industry over that years has made me proud to work by their side. I strive to build my career with the same integrity, dedication and innovation that defines them."



**Justin D. Bedwell, 33**  
President  
Bari Produce LLC  
Madera, CA

Bedwell has made produce his career since graduation in agricultural economics from the University of Arizona in 1999 but was brought up exposed to the business through his father and grandfather. He gained valuable experience in sales with local California marketing companies before opening his own firm in 2009. He has continually showed his commitment to the success of the produce industry while growing in his leadership skills.

Since forming Bari Produce in 2009 in order to market his grandfather's fruit, along with a select few outside growers, he has built the company into a successful marketer. In a short three years, not only have sales numbers and contacts increased each year, but the company's original grower base also remains committed to marketing their products with Bari.

Bedwell is known for taking pride in doing the best job possible for his growers. Building sales both domestically and internationally and standing behind the brand reputation with honesty and integrity has allowed further growth.

He is an active member of St. Columba Church in Fresno, as well as a Tree Fresno and Fresno Zoological Society volunteer. He is also a member

**"I love the unpredictability of the industry, how every day presents a new challenge. External factors, such as changing industry standards, weather, food safety, locally grown produce, fuel costs and price pressure, create an everyday battle to align the right program with the right customer."**

— Vince Ballesteros  
Church Brothers

of the fundraising arm for Fresno State Athletics, the Bulldog Foundation, although he didn't attend Fresno State — offering his support for hometown athletics. He is married with two young boys and coached his six year old in soccer this past year.

His inspiration comes from growers whom he considers the bloodline of the industry. "Growing up in an agricultural family and living in a region dominated by agricultural in one way or another, it is not hard to be inspired by all that around me," he says. "Growers work tirelessly day in and day out and yet they know there are factors they can't control; nonetheless they still give it their all to produce a quality product. You can't get much more organic in the general sense of the word, than that of a farmer."

Bedwell notes there are always many varied challenges in the industry. He explains, "Maybe Mother Nature wasn't too kind to our early peaches, or our grape harvest is late, or our new customer wants a special package. It's important to face these hurdles head on and then learn from them. I think anyone involved with perishables expects a certain amount of obstacles, but I think the successful people are the ones that not only deal with them, but use them to their advantage."

His future personal goal is to successfully market the Bari product lineup on a global level. "Our brand has been well received in North America and in the Asian markets for some time, but the time is right to introduce our products and brands in other areas specifically Europe and South America," he reports. "With current technology, we have the tools now to literally reach out to anyone, anywhere on the globe."

He credits his grandfather, Frank Logoluso, and his father, Barry Bedwell, for having taught him much and shaped the person he's become. "My grandfather is an extremely hard worker. Through hard work and a relentless drive, he has achieved so much," he says. "My father is also a hard worker and above all expects 110 percent effort from all around him. My father has the rare gift of really engaging the people around him. Together, they both made me see how great this industry was and created a desire for me to be a part of it. I am not only thankful for them being a part of my life, but also for them taking me under their wings so I can learn from two of the greatest."



**James Blowers, 40**  
Produce Sales Manager  
West Coast Distributing Inc.  
Malden, MA

Working from West Coast's Monterey, CA, location, Blowers is known to take on any task given to him and do it bigger and better than anyone could ask or expect. He has a reputation for working tirelessly and relentlessly with no job or detail being too big or small. A coworker says, "James has produce in his blood, work boots on his feet and success in his mind!"

Growing up in Los Angeles, Blowers had no idea that he would end up diving head first into the produce industry. While attending Cal Poly San Luis Obispo on a football scholarship, he stumbled into a job as a produce inspector and the rest is history. He worked long hours learning growing patterns, varieties and quality control of both fruits and vegetables. This knowledge gave him a strong foundation in his next position as produce manager at the East Bay branch of C.H. Robinson. After nine years, he became the top salesman at CHRW and was promoted to sales manager of



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**“Looking at ‘uncharted’ produce territory and determining how to conquer it is motivating and exciting, and I love the constant opportunity and challenges that the produce industry provides.”**

— James Blowers  
West Coast Distributing Inc.

the Pleasanton office, where he oversaw both the produce and freight sales.

In 2003, his success at CHRW led to his recruitment by West Coast Distributing. He developed a highly successful vegetable program, and eventually changed the core business of West Coast from a buying brokerage to a grower/shipper business. He single-handedly developed a broccoli, cilantro, green onion, cauliflower and snow pea program for West Coast and handles the management of the product as well. As the grower liaison and sales manager at West Coast, he has developed valuable partnerships with growers and now represents multiple growers all over North America.

In his community, he is active with the California Rodeo Paddock Committee and serves as a Monterey County Farm Day guide. He is a Karate red belt, enjoys golf and is active at St. Josephs Catholic church.

Every day in the produce industry is both a challenge and an inspiration for him. “I come to the office excited for what the day will bring, looking forward to the fast pace and ever changing business,” he says. “I am constantly on my toes, with the need to be both aware of the changes and adaptable to them. Looking at ‘uncharted’ produce territory and determining how to conquer it is motivating and exciting, and I love the constant opportunity and challenges that the produce industry provides.

He names Joe Barsi, of Cal Giant, and Jim Lemke, of C.H. Robinson, as mentors. “Joe is the reason I am in the produce industry,” he says. “He is a great example of staying true to his beliefs, despite circumstances that make that a challenge. In a business where it is easy to compromise oneself and not take the high road, Joe always takes the high road. As I began my career at C.H. Robinson, Jim was an inspiration with his hard work and his vision. He showed me how to take a challenge and work toward it with focus, perseverance and creative strategy. He inspires me with his goal-oriented work ethic and I respect his determination and drive to succeed.”



**Nina Brooks, 29**  
**Brand Manager**  
**H. Brooks and Company**  
**New Brighton, NY**

The fourth-generation daughter in a family produce business that has been operating since 1905, Brooks has worked in the family business since she was 16. In her current leadership role, as brand manager, Brooks has worked on a company-

wide rebranding project and marketing campaign including logo design, weekly newsletter, sales kit and other marketing materials, and will be launching the new H. Brooks Web site soon. She has participated in the development of new business platforms greatly improving the distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables. She has focused on leading projects and process improvement within H. Brooks, including marketing communications and route efficiency, and serves as a liaison with the University of Minnesota and other area colleges for student projects and tours of facilities, and partners on projects with their supply chain experts.

She gained knowledge and experience in retail sales, wholesale sales, fresh-cut, quality control, inventory, shipping and accounting prior to working in sales and marketing at H. Brooks and Company. She has grown her leadership skills through collaborative relationships with growers, shippers, customers and others. She views herself as a counselor, rather than a salesperson. She is recognized for her ability to know the people she works with on a personal level and listen and guide them by discussing in-depth their needs and goals.

Brooks currently serves as a member of the United Fresh Membership Relations Taskforce. She is a member of the United Fresh Produce Industry

Leadership Class 16.

The produce industry inspires her because the opportunities and challenges are endless. “I develop personal relationships with growers from all around the world as we focus on finding great products for consumers,” she says. “I can be confident that the products I sell help people lead a more healthful lifestyle.”

In the future, she plans to continue to develop the skills needed to be a leader in the produce industry. “In addition, I hope to better understand the changing nature of the industry and prepare the company for the emerging business climate through responsible leadership,” she says. “Our industry is quickly evolving. It is important to seek what new strategies we can use to drive sales, to promote products, to support health and wellness, and look for innovative ways to bring the freshest produce to the marketplace and encourage consumers to eat more. It is imperative to embrace the changes in the market, while working to sustain traditional channels.”

Brooks notes having the honor of meeting and working with some of the sharpest people in the produce and food industries, and credits her father, Phillip Brooks, as a mentor. “Professors, customers, growers, suppliers and more have taught me some of the best lessons and are willing to share their advice,” she says. “The stories passed from generations before are still relevant to our business today. My father is always a mentor to me, personally and professionally, and my clients inspire and encourage me. They are always pushing me to the highest standards, to do better and be the best that I can be for them.”



**Nibaldo J. Capote, 36**  
**Executive Vice President**  
**J&C Tropicals**  
**Miami, FL**

Capote is responsible for the day-to-day management of a dynamic executive team. Under his leadership, the company has seen a 20 percent growth in sales with a 400 percent growth in retail and foodservice. His recruitment of key manage-

ment executives and staff has resulted in increased talent level across the company as well as a 30 percent increase in farming acreage under production. He has led a successful drive to implement an ERP software system and ongoing hardware system.

Under his direction, the industry has seen J&C lead the charge to create awareness and expand the knowledge base of over 70 different tropical fruits, roots and vegetables throughout the entire supply chain. This was accomplished through active partnership and work with the Caribbean and Central and South American vendor community, import logistics community, wholesale, retail and foodservice distribution channels.

He and his company have led the effort to develop locally grown produce programs for kids through work with Baptist Health Systems and Miami-Dade Public Schools. He has also partnered with the State of Florida in its Redland Raised promotional campaign of produce grown in Miami-Dade County. He notes that J&C Tropicals’ accomplishments both in produce and in the community are in large part due to sticking to one simple mantra: respect for the industry and passion for the category.

He describes his biggest challenge as his non-produce background. “I am an attorney by trade, and practiced at several major law firms in Miami for six years,” he explains. “I left the day-to-day practice of law to develop real estate in Florida and the Caribbean for four years and then joined the family business to assist in the growth and expansion, which was already underway when I arrived in 2007. Another major challenge has been in learning to manage employees, agents, representatives and partners in a supply chain that encompasses 18 different countries of origin, several packing house/distribution centers in the United States and abroad with 125 employees and a distribution network that spans the U.S. and Canada.

His main goals for the future include participating in the education and awareness of the tropical produce category and continuing to work with the worldwide grower community. He also aspires to lead a third-generation of the family business to reach its maximum potential and to create in-roads to attract young professionals to the produce industry.

He names Carlos Capote and Lazaro Garcia of J&C, as well as Harris Cutler of Race West as mentors. “Carlos, our CEO and one of my older brothers, has played the most important role in my development as a professional within and outside the produce industry,” he says. “His dedication to his trade, partners and employees over a 30-year career commands respect and admi-



ration. Lazaro, our farming manager for the company's South Florida growing operations has also been very influential. His hard work and consistency to get the job done no matter what obstacle presents itself is admirable and guides me on many occasions when I'm challenged."

He continues, "Harris has been a client for many years. He always takes the time to give me great advice and makes me feel included within his family and circle of friends."



**Anthony D'Amico, 33**  
**President**  
**To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc.**  
**Avondale, PA**

D'Amico represents the fourth generation in his family to grow mushrooms in Chester County, PA. After his father passed away, D'Amico took the reins of the company and has subsequently excelled at operating the business. While he was always involved in the business, taking over as president at the young age of 25 forced him to shift his focus to more strategic issues.

Working closely with his brother, D'Amico is always looking for ways to advance the company. Under his leadership, the company has grown stronger than ever and developed several new innovative products, one of which received a packaging innovation award from the Produce Marketing Association. To-Jo currently grows, packs, processes and ships approximately 55 million pounds of fresh and processed mushrooms annually.

D'Amico is known for placing a top focus on the company's employees and strives to ensure employee satisfaction. He holds a degree in Food Science from Delaware Valley College. He was appointed by the Pennsylvania mushroom growers to serve on the Mushroom Council for a three-year term and was elected as treasurer of the Mushroom Council for 2011. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Southern Chester County Chamber of Commerce (2010-2013).

Continuing a legacy that his great-grandfather started in the 1930s, and his motivation to grow the business and develop great relationships with customers inspires him.

In the future, he wants To-Jo to be known as a company that delivers the best quality and service possible to its customers. He aims to have To-Jo be recognized as an industry leader when it comes to innovation and new product development.

His late father, Joseph D'Amico Sr., is one of his principal mentors, and he credits him for his great vision. "He could see where we wanted to be in 10 years and made decisions based on that," D'Amico says. "He was the most giving and caring person I have ever met. He always put others in front of himself. He always surrounded himself with the best talent in the industry and made a habit out of listening to them. My brother, Joe, and I, continue to lead the company utilizing the same family values our father felt so strongly about."

Other mentors include Bernie Ciuffetelli, vice president operations for To-Jo Food Products, and Mike "Woody" Wood, vice president operations for To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms. "Bernie is a great visionary with a keen feel for the next great thing," he says. "Woody will do whatever it takes to get the job done and satisfy a customer. I have learned from Woody that anything is possible."



**Christopher Drew, 35**  
**Production Manager**  
**Ocean Mist Farms**  
**Castroville, CA**

Drew is known as a humble, polite, intelligent, articulate, accomplished leader. He is responsible for managing production of artichokes, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, cardone, fennel, head lettuce, mix lettuces, romaine, romaine hearts and spinach on over 5,000 acres of land.

He chairs Ocean Mist's IPM team, which consists of 12 members that oversee production and is a steering-committee member of the Monterey and Santa Cruz County Farm, Food Safety, and Conservation Network. The Network provides a forum for the agricultural industry and local conservation agencies to co-manage agriculture and the natural environment. Additionally, he is a member of the Ocean Mist Farms Food Safety Committee and maintains the company's organic certification through Cali-

fornia Certified Organic Farmers.

In 2010, he was elected to the inaugural class of the Ocean Mist Farms Leadership and Development Program. He is an active member of the California Artichoke Advisory Board, a licensed California Pest Control Advisor, and a member of the Monterey County Agriculture Water Advisory Committee.

Challenges in the produce industry are part of the enjoyment of his job. "Whether it is pressure from insects, plant pathogens, poor weather conditions or low market prices, farming can be a demanding profession, especially when many problems hit at the same time," he relates. "Our production team is rich with great people and their efforts are truly inspiring. When times get tough or don't go quite as expected, everyone is willing to lend a hand or provide advice to get the task completed."

He sees a bright future ahead for the fruit and vegetable industry. "As people around the world become more interested in eating healthfully, it creates opportunities for the produce industry," he says. "Technological advancements in genetics and post-harvest handling, coupled with farming efficiencies and conservation efforts, will help our industry remain viable in the future. In my career, I have crossed paths with many individuals who have 40-plus years of experience in the agriculture business; I am honored that they have shared with me their many techniques for success."

Entering the produce business at the age of 18, Drew has enjoyed a wealth of mentors. "I have been privileged to work with many individuals who have mentored me over the years, but there are three that genuinely stand out: Steven Ray of Headstart Nursery, Dennis Sites of Ag-Business Management and Dale Huss of Ocean Mist Farms," he says. "These three gentlemen have been integral to my success. Without their ongoing support and direction, I would not be where I am today. I am very grateful for their help, expertise and guidance."



**Izak Du Toit, 34**  
**Director Of Export Sales**  
**Booth Ranches LLC**  
**Orange Cove, CA**

Du Toit grew up on a farm in South Africa, and immigrated to the U.S. 10 years ago. Since then, he has rapidly expanded his responsibilities into sales and marketing, and is now responsible for managing the entire export department at Booth Ranches. He is known for being extremely enthusiastic as well as a fair and honest trader. He excels at relationship building and is passionate about customer service. He is a young and modern thinker, yet still embodies all the traits of a seasoned and mature produce professional. Prior to his current position, he was interim sales manager at Booth Ranches and oversaw all sales until a vice president of sales and marketing was hired.

Before coming to Booth Ranches, he worked as export sales manager for Seald Sweet West, where he was in charge of all West Coast procurement and trucking for one of the key accounts, in addition to being responsible for most of the export for the West Coast. He participated in various experiential training and exchange programs, including as domestic sales manager in citrus for Export Select, a field foreman for Chivers Farms in Cambridge, England, with strawberries, and a farm manager's assistant at Roodezandt in South Africa. Through the Ohio State University exchange program he worked at Valley Sweet Packing in Tulare, CA.

He is a family man with two young daughters. He is involved with the athletic development of young people throughout the community. Since 2005, he has coached the Fresno Rugby Football Club, leading them to regional playoffs in 2005 and 2009.

He is motivated by the challenges he faces in produce every day. "Challenge in and of itself is not good, but if you can overcome it you get a fulfilling sense of accomplishment," he says. "People have to eat and that inspired me to be in the produce industry — selling a nutritious produce that will help people stay healthy. Additionally, if our products also taste good it makes it easy. Knowing that a person halfway around the world can enjoy a Booth Ranches' orange that I sold is rewarding."

His future goal is to be successful at expanding Booth Ranches market share internationally. "I want to focus on being successful at selling the volume our company has coming in over the next few years," he says.

He credits his father, Izak Du Toit, Sr. of Kleinbaai Fisheries, and Dave Muse, formerly with Export Select, as mentors. "My father showed me how hard work and honesty with a little bit of luck is key in trading produce



and he emphasized the importance of having the right supplier and the right customer to be successful," he says. "In the United States, Dave was the one who introduced me to the citrus industry, showed me the ropes and gave me access to all the export customers. He taught me how it all works and how to deal with most of our challenges."



**Jacquie Ediger, 36**  
Vice President  
Pro Citrus Network Inc.  
Visalia, CA 93277

Ediger has been highly instrumental in the creation and development of the Pro Citrus Network and the PCN Brands. First hired as director of new business development and marketing, she now serves as vice president. She has played a key role in the development of company strategic plans and mission statements. Under her direction, the company has accomplished numerous strategic goals. In 2006/2007, the company witnessed growth in imported product and its foodservice business increased from 13 percent to 20 percent. By 2008/2009, grower product reached a goal of 33 percent of the business and the company imported product into the Houston Port for the first time. In 2010, the company began to grow its own product. It has averaged 10 to 15 percent growth annually. Ediger has been successful at managing, mentoring and developing staff from sales to new business development to accounting.

In the industry, she serves as PMA Food Service Conference Planning Task Force Member and has co-chaired the task force. She is a Planning Task Force Member of the Produce Solutions Conference and Industry Advisor for PMA FIT Career Pathways-Nucci Program. She developed Hunger Awareness Day in Tulare County with Visalia Rescue Mission as beneficiary. She is a member of the Mt. Whitney (local Visalia High school) Agribusiness/Agriculture Advisory Committee and participates in Mentor's Meeting for Mt. Whitney High School Agribusiness Academy.

Ediger is from an agricultural background, and confirmed her passion for the produce industry during a college internship for a local produce company. "From that point on I knew that a position in the produce industry was the path for me," she says. "I'm inspired by the dynamic and challenging nature of the industry. Plain and simple — it's fun! I'm also motivated by working with youth and young adults, with programs like 5-a-Day/More Matters and PMA FIT."

In the future, she aspires to be president of Pro Citrus Network. "It's a personal and company goal since other strategic goals can only be achieved if I take the role of president sometime in the future. From an industry standpoint, I would like to serve on more boards of the PMA. I think the organization is great for the industry as a whole."

She names two mentors who are not directly related to the produce industry, but have guided her during her career: her high school Ag teacher, Lynn Martindale, and college professor, Marianne Wolf. "Lynn was an amazing mentor to me from a young age," she states. "She encouraged, guided and pushed me to be the strong, goal-oriented person I am today. Marianne was not only a mentor, but an amazing teacher who taught me that there are many different types of people in this world and that is what makes the world go 'round. Her guidance has helped me to be successful in dealing with the multitude of different people I'm blessed to work with today."

She also credits Allan Dodge, president of Pro Citrus, as a great mentor. "He recognizes others' strengths and weaknesses at a glance," she reports. "He utilizes their strengths and helps them overcome their weaknesses. He has taught me a lot about the citrus industry, but most importantly he has imparted the gift of having balance in life."



**Jennifer Fancher, 35**  
Category Development Manager  
Driscoll's  
Watsonville, CA

Working out of Broomfield, CO, Fancher brings a unique blend of skills in data management and fundraising to the category management field. When she started at Driscoll's in 2007 she immediately began working with some of the company's top retail accounts. She also became the category management team point

**"Watching our customers fight through the economic downturn of the past several years and trying to find ways to support them and help them maintain and grow their sales has been a challenge. However, it is also exhilarating to help them succeed."**

— Jennifer Fancher  
Driscoll's

person for data providers, a key responsibility since accurate and timely data is critical to the company's success and the success of its customers.

She got her start in the food industry in 1997 at Information Resources Inc. (IRI) as part of the onsite data team for Hunt Wesson/Con Agra Grocery Products. After learning the ins and outs of data and the food industry, she took the position of Account Manager at Perishables Group (PG) in 2002. During her tenure at PG, she focused on consumer insights, data analysis and helping new clients start up their category management programs. In 2007 and 2008, she was the Driscoll's category manager for Wegman's, where she successfully worked with Wegman's Community Relations team to create a sales event that would also help support their local community. In 2007, the event was executed in Wegman's New Jersey stores and raised \$15,000 for the Children's Home Society in New Jersey. It was a huge success, and was expanded to additional cities in 2008.

In her local community, Fancher has participated in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Light the Night Walk for several years. She also supports A Precious Child, a charity that helps improve the lives of displaced and disadvantaged children in Denver, CO. "It has not only been rewarding to be able to give back my time and resources, but to also show my three boys the importance of giving back as well," she says.

Coming from a family that always bonded in the kitchen, she has always been fascinated by the dynamics of food and family. "As part of the produce industry, I am continually inspired to better understand consumers and their needs," she says. "Watching our customers fight through the economic downturn of the past several years and trying to find ways to support them and help them maintain and grow their sales has been a challenge. However, it is also exhilarating to see them succeed."

In the future, she wants to continue to find ways to help support all the people with whom she works. "I strive to support the Category Management team, Driscoll's as a whole and our growers in our quest to continually delight consumers," she says. "I want to continue to find ways to expand my knowledge and skill set so that I can be an even better resource for Driscoll's for years to come."

She names Chuck Sweeney at Driscoll's and Whitney Messens, formerly of IRI and currently at U.S. Nutrition, as mentors. "Chuck not only has an immense knowledge of category management, but also has helped me become a much more strategic thinker," she says. "He approaches his team with kindness and respect that you don't find everywhere. While not in the produce industry, Whitney Messens was an inspirational leader in my formative years in the food industry."



**Ryan R. Flaim, 30**  
Co-Owner  
R&R Flaim Next Generation Produce LLC  
Vineland, NJ

At a time when small family farms are going by the wayside due to economic pressures and real estate development, Flaim, a fourth-generation farmer, fights to keep the family tradition alive. Known for working tirelessly and endlessly from early morning until after darkness seven days a week, he is committed to the survival of the farm his family started.

One of his greatest accomplishments outside the survival of his family farm, is the assistance he provided his sister, Jessica Flaim, in raising over \$140,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. At seven years old, she was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes and since that time, he has



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— Rafael Goldberg  
Interrupchhion\* Fair Trade

helped raise funds through a craft fair, raffle, and now through a yearly walk for the cure. In 2006, he even went to Washington, D.C. to address the need for more research funding.

He is inspired and challenged by the very nature of the industry. He explains, “Growing up in this business, I have noticed visible changes from my grandfather’s generation, to my father’s, and now to my generation. My grandfather dealt with a handshake or a nod and a man’s word could be trusted. He did not have to contend with produce being brought in from another country the same time as his, or the current immigration laws for seasonal workers, or third-party food safety audits. He worked hard, but in a less regulated and farm-friendly environment. Today, we, in the produce industry, face the constant competitiveness of selling our product, high overheads of running our operation, and trying to align our prices with those throughout the country. But I was born into this business and I love it. My inspiration is to try to help keep my business and our farm going strong so that it can be passed down to the fifth generation some day.”

He considers his father, Robert Flaim, Jr., and his grandfather, Robert Flaim, Sr., as his mentors. “My grandfather came to work on the farm every day, even when he was receiving radiation and chemotherapy for his cancer. He was a man who spent his entire life working seven days a week so that his children and grandchildren could have a better life. He taught me everything that I know about raising, packing and selling produce. It is also my grandfather who inspired me to run my business with mutual respect, honesty and integrity.”



**Rafael Goldberg, 30**  
CEO  
Interrupcion\* Fair Trade  
Brooklyn, NY

Goldberg is considered a leader in the industry in the growing trend of fair trade fresh produce. He began his vision eight years ago as he saw consumers’ desires to know more and more about where their food came from and how it was produced. His passion for sustainable supply chains that create lasting solutions for farmers and retailers alike fueled Interrupcion\* Fair Trade, which has been seeing triple-digit growth the past couple of years. He marketed and distributed the world’s first fair trade-certified blueberries, kiwis, cherries, and the first apple and pears into North America.

After traveling to Argentina and meeting the founders of a new and far-reaching project in sustainable and fair trade, he graduated from NYU and founded Interrupcion\* Fair Trade in New York in 2003. He immediately set about marketing and introducing specific fair trade produce items and concepts to the U.S. and Canadian markets.

Over the years, he has introduced multiple new certified Fair Trade items and has grown and influenced the U.S. market, bringing Fair Trade fresh produce items to many specialty, natural and mainstream retailers for the first time. His company’s marketing and educational initiatives have informed millions of consumers and helped them to understand the benefits of Fair Trade. He now works with over 40 items from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Brazil and Peru and continues to expand

capabilities and offerings to retailers and consumers alike. His company currently works with over 12,000 rural farmers who benefit from sound employment, fair wages and participate democratically in deciding how to invest their ‘fair trade premiums’ every year.

He is inspired by the amount of positive impact the produce industry can make. “Over 75 percent of the world’s people are engaged in agriculture in some way,” he says. “Of course our food supply is important to everyone who eats. These are two inspiring realities that challenge us to provide the best products to consumers, while making sure that we are being fair and responsible with those who grow our food, and the environment on which we depend.”

In the future, Goldberg aspires to continue to shift production to more economically, socially and environmentally sound supply chains and to influence the industry through best practices and performance. “We strive to create produce sections filled with fair trade fresh product options,” he says. “These products that combine social, environmental, and product quality into our value proposition for customers and when we connect the consumers to fantastic food, it makes the world a better place.”

Goldberg considers just about everyone he comes in contact with as mentors. “My fellow ‘interrupters’ and team members who have explored the industry on all ends of the spectrum are mentors to me,” he says, “as well the buyers and marketers that gave our products and ideas a chance when we first began. There are so many people who let me teach them something about Interrupcion\* Fair Trade and in return, taught me a thing or two about fresh produce. And I credit so many retailers and distributors who have not bought from us and have taken the time to tell us why.”



**Michael A. Gonzalez, 39**  
Sales Manager  
Sysco / BSCC-Florida  
Houston, Texas

Gonzalez has been in the produce business for over 15 years and his passion and knowledge for produce is described as awe-inspiring. Working from Sysco’s Deerfield Beach, FL, location, he is known for doing everything he can to give back to the industry he loves. He started as a forklift driver and has worked his way up through several positions to where he is today. He has partnered with many suppliers in the community to help them build programs that will best meet customers’ needs, and he leads several market discussion calls each week to help educate people in the industry.

In 2005, he became East Coast Sales Manager for Sysco, moving from merchandiser (buyer). Since becoming manager, he has created many programs and traditions that continue today. He started Sysco’s National Apple Program. The apple area was foreign to him given his background as an Eastern vegetable and specialty buyer. However, he rose to the challenge and after some recon on the industry, he and his staff were able to engineer a successful program for Sysco’s customers and vendors. In the past 10 years, they have created several popular promotions like March Madness, Michigan Celery Plus and Cabbage and Carrot, in addition to other internal systems later adopted in other divisions.

As sales manager, he is essentially the head of purchasing for BSCC-Florida (of Sysco Corp.) and directs everything that grows or originates on the Eastern Seaboard, including creation and management of contracts and promotions. He also manages the hiring and management of seven buyers and one coordinator for his division.

Gonzalez is an active board member of the Southeast Produce Council and serves on its Marketing and Membership committees. He has completed a Century Ride (100 miles in a day on a bicycle) with his son, and two triathlons. He is involved with raising money for the MRL (Masonic Research Lab) to find solutions for heart diseases. He also volunteers his time at several schools to educate children on the produce industry and has mentored several young adults into the produce industry. He has been married for 16 years and has two children.

His inspiration in produce remains the people and the relationships that are like no other industry. “I take great pride in providing service to an industry that feeds the world,” he mentions. “The challenges are daily as we are constantly adjusting to every changing market and growing conditions. I especially enjoy the problem-solving and the chance to serve and share knowledge with peers.”

He credits mentors Mike Heyer with Heyer Quality, Walter Perez with





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“The challenges are daily as we are constantly adjusting to every changing market and growing conditions. I especially enjoy the problem-solving and chance to serve and share knowledge with peers.”

— Michael A. Gonzalez  
Sysco/BSCC-Florida

Sun International Produce Co., Bob Costa with Sun City, Neil Mazal with J&J Farms, and Mike Hansen with Sysco. “Mike taught me about selling and making lasting produce relationships,” he says. “Walter informed me about business savvy, and Bob showed me the importance of buying on-time inventory. Neil has an encyclopedic-like knowledge and is a great role model on ethics. Mike Hansen has really helped me in people management.”



**Jessica Harris, 29**  
**Marketing Specialist**  
**Earthbound Farm**  
**San Juan Bautista, CA**

In the past four years, Harris has been able to cut the Earthbound Farm exhibiting costs at PMA Fresh Summit by more than 50 percent. This allowed the company to save money on its largest marketing expense while upgrading branding and

imaging in the booth. Under her management, the Earthbound Farm booth won second place in the 2008 PMA Fresh Summit. She strives to create personal benchmarks for all of the Earthbound Farm exhibits. She participates on the PMA Foodservice Expo Committee and serves on the PMA Exhibitor Advisory Committee, to help meet the needs of all types of exhibitors at PMA’s Fresh Summit and Foodservice Expo. She serves as the Co-President for the Salinas Valley Chapter of California Women for Agriculture, an honor elected by a group of her peers.

In her position, she works with the marketing and sales team to develop and execute the company’s regional and national trade show program as well as customer-specific marketing projects. Each year, Earthbound Farm executes close to 50 trade shows around the country.

Harris works closely with the Earthbound Farm regional sales team and sales desk team to develop, evaluate and execute customer-specific promotions through the major retailers. She also works on all national promotions, including the successful Earth Day promotion, which usually achieves 10 to 12 percent coupon redemption and between a 7 to 10 percent sales lift for the month of April.

Working in organics and organic produce is inspiring for her. “Every day, we encounter consumers and retailers who are passionate about our products, our company and the organic way of life,” she says. “They inspire me to work harder on bringing more organics to the table.”

Her biggest challenge in the industry is also one of her favorite parts about it. “The produce industry is 24/7, no matter what sector you are in,” she states. “I live it, breathe it and promote it — but sometimes, turning off and winding down is a huge challenge. Creating a great work/life balance is something I strive for every day.”

In the future, she’d like to mentor younger people in the industry. “Mentoring is such an important role, especially in the produce industry, because it will help keep fresh ideas coming into the industry and help us keep up with consumer trends.”

She names Tonya Antle of Tanimura & Antle, Lorri Koster of Mann Packing, and Earthbound Farm’s Sherry Parsons as mentors. “Tonya has been such an influence on my career and the way I conduct myself,” she explains. “She is an inspiration for me and the rest of the women in our industry for her style, attitude and perseverance. She was able to sell organics to all of the major retailers, making them mainstream, instead of just a niche market. Lorri’s ability to balance work, industry commitments, family and community is an invaluable lesson that you can have a great work/life balance. Sherry helped me develop the project management skills it takes to be a trade show manager in the produce industry.”



**Colin Harvey, 40**  
**Commercial Director — Hero Supermarket Group**  
**Indonesia**  
**Dairy Farm International trades as**  
**PT Hero Supermarkets**  
**Jakarta, Indonesia**

Harvey is known as an industry leader committed to the growth of produce in both Indonesia and Malaysia. As head of the business in Malaysia, he increased sales by more than 31 percent and his current charge of the total food business for Dairy Farm in Indonesia continues to post double-digit growth.

In Indonesia, he worked on remodeling structures within the organization, and focused on direct sourcing, both locally and on imports. This resulted in a produce growth of 47 percent for 2010.

Harvey has helped the company experience success in procuring product out of South Africa, Thailand and China. He helped drive an initiative to facilitate direct buys on Dragon Fruit and melon, resulting in providing farmers smoother access to market and better product to customers.

In Malaysia, where he worked from 2004 to 2008, he helped the company become the first retailer to import full container loads of avocados into Malaysia. This initiative dropped the price of avocados (previously imported by air) by a quarter, making this tropical fruit available to the everyday consumer. Previous to Malaysia, he held a position in South Africa as a retail produce buyer working with stores and producers to provide quality product at affordable prices. Under his leadership, his team accomplished launches of exclusive salad packs and exclusive mixed apple packs.

He is a member of the Indonesian British Chamber of Commerce Food and Agricultural Committee.

He is inspired by the drive to have an edge over the competition and satisfy customers by being first on shelf or better on shelf. He is challenged by the seasonality and unpredictability of the industry. “New markets and emerging markets all make for exciting times,” he says. “I am motivated by the networking necessary to build and maintain a relevant supply base — whether from local supply or imported product. I am also hugely inspired when I see associates with a passion for produce, and it is fantastic when that passion drives them up the ladder.”

His future goals are customer-oriented, and he plans to help the company maintain its position as an undisputed quality and price leader in Indonesia. He plans to do this through a focus on local sourcing, looking at export opportunities and investing even more in people and training. “Improving local sourcing will provide much needed employment, and of course, reduced pricing and reduced carbon emissions. With current expansion, and a vision to double produce sales within three years, training of fresh produce specialists and buyers remains key.”

He names Danie Kieviet of Freshworld (PTY) Ltd. in South Africa, Jim Prevor of PRODUCE BUSINESS and Bruce Peterson, formerly with Wal-Mart, as mentors. “Danie, essentially, created the foundation that is the distribution network for South Africa’s largest retailer: Shoprite,” he says. “He tirelessly looks to drive efficiency in produce, fighting on behalf of the customer and the farmer. Jim Prevor is a produce guru and relentless educator and produce watchdog. Bruce is a man who understood that sustainable supply depends on sustainable long-term relationships with farmers and processors.”



**Jamie Hillegas, 34**  
**Director of Trade Shows**  
**Produce Marketing Association**  
**Newark, DE**

In her 11 years with PMA, Hillegas has gone from meeting planner to director of trade shows. She is responsible for managing PMA’s biggest revenue source — Fresh Summit and Foodservice Conference trade shows. Hillegas has put her own unique imprint on the shows, while working to continue their growth patterns. She works closely with the Member Exhibitor Advisory Committee to improve the show experience for attendees and exhibitors. In recognition of her work, PMA promoted her to director last year.

She is known for her drive to continue looking for ways to deliver more value to show participants, such as renegotiating expo services contracts



to lower and/or eliminate product handling costs and labor rates, being creative with sold-out expo space to find ways for more exhibitors to participate and for providing tools and support to exhibitors on how to maximize their opportunities through webinars and a comprehensive marketing toolbox.

Additionally, she organizes the single largest produce donation to a local foodbank each year following Fresh Summit. "I take great pride in organizing the food bank donations made at the conclusion of our exhibitions," she says. "At Fresh Summit, approximately 200 local volunteers come onto the show floor to collect product generously donated by our exhibitors. For most cities, our donation is the largest one-time contribution of fresh produce that any food bank receives, and I am honored to be part of such a worthy cause. I also take pride in the fact that the Fresh Summit Exposition continues to grow and is now the largest U.S. produce industry event and one of the top 100 trade shows in the country.

Outside of work, Hillegas and her husband volunteer and support a local foodbank and the Cancer Federation. She has been awarded Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) designation by the Professional Meeting Management Association and also awarded the Certified in Exposition Management (CEM) designation by the International Association of Exhibitions & Events.

In the future, she plans to continue to strive toward PMA's overall mission to connect, inform, and deliver business solutions that enhance members' prosperity. "In the future, I'll be looking for ways to deliver better results at lower costs, and ways to take advantage of new technologies to help them expand their reach, such as virtual expos and social media."

Her greatest mentors in the produce industry are Ted and JoAnn Dawson, who own a small farm in Northeast, Maryland. "When I was eight, my family moved to a house that was a 10-minute walk to their farm," she relates. "From that point on, I spent all my free time working at the farm helping to pick corn and other produce to sell at the end of the driveway, taking care of the animals and teaching horseback riding lessons. Ted and JoAnn taught me the value of a strong work ethic, creative thinking to accomplish any goal, and that you can have fun while you are working really hard. I am also very fortunate to work on a day-to-day basis with a group of very talented people at PMA."



**Jay Kettle, 34**  
**General Manager**  
**Highline Produce Ltd.**  
**Leamington, Ontario, Canada**

Working from the Bloomfield, Ontario, location for Highline Produce, Kettle has moved from distribution manager to general manager in just eight years through his dedication, perseverance, professionalism and hard work. In 2009, his first year as manager, production at his location grew significantly more than it had ever grown before. Not only were more total pounds grown, but they were also produced more consistently and evenly than in the past. Production in his second year surpassed the first resulting in more mushrooms being grown than ever before, a feat some thought was nearly impossible. In this third year, the company is on track to break its record again.

He is motivated by trying to stay on top of market trends and shifts in attitudes. "We take great pride in the fact that our mushrooms are grown without pesticides of any kind," he says. "Being on top of the ever increasing demands of food safety is always challenging when dealing with such a grass-roots product. This being said, we are leaders in this regard and need to continue to work hard to ensure we stay leaders."

He is often challenged in the area of finding the right employees. "Harvesting mushrooms is hands on, hard work," he explains. "It's an imperative part of our commitment to quality. Without question, one of our more important positions within the company is our highly skilled harvesters. We have approximately 150 harvesters at my location and approximately 500 corporately."

In the future, he aspires to increase awareness about the health benefits of mushrooms as well as environmental benefits. "Mushroom growing at this level has always been challenging and will continue to be this way," he says. "Our people are our most important asset. I must continue to strive to ensure that every single person in our company feels needed and rewarded for the hard work they do every day."

He names Glenn Martin and Elizabeth O'Neil of Highline as mentors. "Glenn Martin has been with Highline produce for 30-plus years," he says.

"His business sense and management application provide guidance and strength of character. Elizabeth O'Neil has also been a major influence in my role in the produce industry. Her late father, Dr. Murray O'Neil, was the founder of Highline produce and was a role model for me. Elizabeth brings a part of her father as well as her own new perspective to Highline every day and it's a pleasure to work alongside of her."



**Patrick Killiany, 38**  
**Produce Category Manager**  
**Ahold USA Retail**  
**Carlisle, PA**

With more than 20 years in the produce business, Killiany is an industry leader in the area of category management, category analysis and business process development and manages one of the largest fruit portfolios in the United States. He started his path in the stores as a part-time produce clerk, and worked his way up to full-time clerk, assistant manager and department manager. Through this experience, he gained a great deal of knowledge that he continues to use today and teach to others who work with him.

As category manager for Ahold USA, he manages all the fruit commodities and develops the category plans to drive positive sales and units. Working with partners, he has implemented programs that donate funds back to charitable causes on behalf of the company, such as Produce for Kids, Children's Miracle Network and The Jake Gittlen Cancer Foundation. Giving back to the community is a major initiative he follows by supporting special events and local sports both at work and personally.

He is motivated by the excitement of facing continuous challenges and something new every day in the business, as well as working with new programs. "With corporate social responsibility being a huge part of the industry today, it is important that we are doing the right thing for the environment and for our consumers," he says. "Today's consumers want to know more about their produce and where it is grown while looking for convenience, healthful alternatives and natural and organic products.

In the future, he will continue to apply his knowledge and skill to build his programs. "In this business, everybody knows everybody and there are no secrets," he says. "If you have strong partnerships and put together the best quality programs, you will be successful in this industry and have the potential to grow. You must know what you want and stand behind your decisions no matter what people say. I practice all the fundamentals of category management in all the decisions I make everyday to keep up with the ever-changing trends and the usual demands in the fast pace industry."

He has learned a lot from many people, too numerous to name, but mentions in particular Dan McCullough, vice president of produce/floral for Ahold USA, as a mentor. "He gave me that opportunity in the temporary position and we are still working with our team to provide positive results for the company," he says. "I look to be a leader and provide the same knowledge to my team that I gained through the people I have had the privilege to work with in this industry. To be successful you need a strong team, and without my team I would not be where I am at right now.



**Deb Kreider, 39**  
**Produce Category Manager**  
**Ahold USA Retail**  
**Carlisle, PA**

Kreider has successfully managed one of the largest desks in the United States. She has worked for Giant Food Stores LLC of Carlisle, PA, and Ahold USA Retail for 20 years and has held several positions within the company.

Her experience on the grocery side of the business provided valuable business insights with regard to data analysis, understanding market data and effective promotional planning. When promoted to produce category manager with Giant Food Stores, she managed the fruit desk for produce, which included 16 categories. As a category manager, she is responsible for completing indepth category plan development and plan implementation. She now handles the packaged categories, such as packaged salads, cut fruit and vegetables for all four divisions of Ahold USA Retail. She has participated in a USDA Produce Inspection Training, which provided insight on product specifications and the USDA federal inspection process.

She works with vendor partners in supporting the charities that Ahold



USA Retail champions including the Our Kids charity event benefiting the Children's Miracle Network and the Jake Gittlen Cancer Foundation.

Kreider is motivated by the way the produce industry is always changing and developing. "Since I started my career on the grocery side of the business and moved to the fresh side of the business, it has been interesting to learn and see daily the vast differences in the fresh versus non-perishable business," she explains. "From product seasonality to food safety to keeping an eye on the weather, there are always various challenges to face and learn from to better serve our customers."

Her future goal is to continue learning and developing in produce. "I have learned so much from my own experiences, but always look forward to learning from others in the industry," she says. "As packaged category manager, I look forward to developing the convenience side of the produce business. As customers' needs change and develop, we must stay ahead of these changes and be ready to meet their needs."

She credits Ahold USA retail vice president of produce and floral, Dan McCullough, and Todd Patti, Ahold USA retail vice president of dairy and frozen, as mentors. "Dan has extensive knowledge of produce varieties, growing regions, procurement and the overall produce industry," she says. "He has a true passion for the business and has shared so many of his industry experiences. Our entire department has strong knowledgeable people with many years in the produce industry. The produce team demonstrates an incredible work ethic and a drive for what they do. Additionally, I developed many category management skills from Todd Patti. He was essential in my career development and has encouraged me throughout my tenure. Todd has always provided me with valuable guidance and advice."



**Gretchen Kreidler, 38**  
Sales/Marketing/Public Relations  
Rio Queen Citrus Inc.  
Mission, TX

Kreidler is known for her passion for the fresh produce industry. She got involved in the industry right out of college by working with wholesale and retail citrus buyers in their efforts to market Texas citrus. She also worked on public relations for the same commodity. Her ability to establish relationships with the buyers and the general public quickly took her further in the industry.

In September, 2008, she joined the marketing department of Rio Queen's mail order branch called Crest Fruit, establishing and maintaining their first Web site, among many other duties. Her desire to become more involved in sales led her to her current position on the sales floor. She has quickly established herself as a valuable member of that team while she continues to handle the company's marketing and public relations needs.

She is a current class member of the United Fresh Leadership program. She has served as president of the Hidalgo/Starr County Texas A&M University Club, as a board member for The Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg, TX, and as a member of the McAllen, TX Junior Service League. She has volunteered for The American Cancer Society, The Vannie E. Cook, Jr. Cancer and Hematology Clinic, the Palmer Drug Abuse Program, the American Heart Association, the March of Dimes, and for her church, St. John's Episcopal in McAllen. She is currently serving as a Steering and Executive Board Member of the Leadership McAllen organization as well as being the current Class Chairperson.

Her inspiration comes from all of the incredible people she has met while working in the produce industry. "I have had the opportunity to cross paths with incredible leaders as well as the amazing support teams that have worked diligently to make the industry what it is today," she says. "I thoroughly enjoy the day-to-day contact with our customers. The beginning of each commodity's season continues to excite and motivate me!"

Many have served as mentors and inspired her during her journey through produce. "My first job out of college was with TexaSweat Citrus Marketing in Mission, TX," she says. "My first boss, Mary McKeever, taught me what I needed to know about citrus and how to talk with buyers and merchandisers. Anna Martin, who worked at TexaSweat at the time, took me under her wing and turned me into the young adult I needed to be to succeed in my job. When asked who influenced me the most, I always think of Anna, not just for her influence on my job at the time, but for the way she took me under her wing and helped mold me into who I am today. I would be remiss if I didn't also mention other people who have influenced me greatly like Mike Martin of Rio Queen Citrus, Dan'l Mackey Almy

**"With corporate social responsibility being a huge part of the industry today, it is important that we are doing the right thing for the environment and for our consumers."**

— Patrick Killiany  
Ahold USA Retail

of DMA Solutions Inc., Jay Pack of Pack Group and Steve Grinstead of PRO\*ACT, among many others."



**Kelly C. Krutz, 37**  
Floral Category Manager  
Ahold USA Retail  
Carlisle, PA

Krutz has ten-plus years in the floral industry having held positions of merchandiser, buyer and category manager. She is known for her tremendous talent in the area of floral design and business process development. She is the sole

category manager at Ahold USA managing one of the largest floral departments in the United States.

Her first job out of college was as a manager trainee at a local floral shop, and during this time, she became certified as a floral designer while also learning the floral business. Her career path took several turns but eventually led her back to her passion in floral as a plant buyer at Giant Foods LLC. After holding several positions within the department, she was promoted to floral technical specialist, floral merchandiser and eventually, to floral category manager for Ahold USA.

In her current role, she has developed and implemented several successful category business plans, which are the platform for ongoing identical sales growth. From those plans, Ahold was one of the first companies to introduce Fair Trade products into its marketing area. Working with key vendor partners, she has also implemented programs that donate money back to charitable causes on behalf of the company, such as the Susan G. Komen and Alex Lemonade foundation.

Krutz is an accomplished runner, and has completed the Boston Marathon.

She is inspired by seeing ideas transpire from their initial inception to execution at the store level, and eventually into the customers' hands. "It is both fascinating and challenging to see how the flower travels from a field in South America to the many homes throughout the United States," she says. "The biggest challenge that I experience on a daily basis is managing floral in a grocery environment. Gathering the support of the operations team and the training of the associates to properly care for the product are crucial to the success of my business plan."

Krutz is working to enable Ahold to be viewed as the industry leader in floral category management in the United States. "Because of the limited amount of data available for floral, I have to use out-of-the-box thinking to come to my final analysis for building my business plans. Eventually, my long term goal is to hold a director position for a large company such as Ahold."

She mentions several mentors including her parents, along with Jodie Daubert and Charlie Pflug of Ahold. "My parents have always influenced me in my life to be open-minded and shoot for the stars," she says. "They taught me to create a goal and formulate a plan to get there. In addition, within the Ahold organization, Jodie has inspired me to aim for the highest goal. She supports me and the floral department as well. Charlie Pflug, floral director of Ahold, has helped me develop my management skills and stay true to my convictions. He has strengthened and supported me with my professional growth in a male-dominated industry."



**Josh Leichter, 39**  
Vice President East Coast, Director Grape Category  
The Oppenheimer Group  
Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada

Working out of Newark, DE, Leichter's contributions at Oppenheimer have been focused on both sales and grower relations. He began working at The Oppenheimer Group in 2002, and has seen



“I want to carry on a successful legacy so future generations of our family can be a part of what I have experienced and have the chance to shape the future of our industry at that time.”

— Nicholas Mascari  
Indianapolis Fruit Co.

his responsibilities continue to increase in the nearly 10 years he's been with the organization. Starting with the company as a Los Angeles-based sales representative, he was promoted to East Coast director of sales and eventually became the director of Oppenheimer's second largest category — grapes.

In January 2011, he became the East Coast vice president, overseeing business with customers in the Eastern U.S. and Canada. For several years, he was the company's highest volume sales person, building important retail relationships with several key national and regional accounts, developing programs and expanding the business. As director of Oppenheimer's grape category, he forged significant relationships with growers in Peru and Brazil, as well as strengthening ones in Chile, Mexico and California. In doing so, he helped solidify the company's position as a preferred year-round grape marketer.

He believes strongly in being involved in the work of industry associations. In 2008, he was a member of the PMA Fresh Summit Committee, and has returned to work with this group as it prepares for the 2011 Fresh Summit. He emphasizes the importance of PMA FIT and volunteers to help in any capacity needed, including participating in the 5K at Fresh Summit in 2009 and 2010.

With respect to community involvement, Leichter and his wife support Christ Church Episcopal School in Greenville, DE, National Public Radio and the Delaware Nature Society.

He sees his future as continuing to grow with Oppenheimer. “Our brand promise is to expect the world from us,” he explains. “My part in that is to continue to serve our customers and our growers to the best of my ability. I would like to further facilitate the understanding by our grower and retail customers as to each other's needs. This could provide stronger business relationships throughout the supply chain, which are even more critical now, given the challenging global economic conditions we are operating in.”

He names mentors Steve Battaglia of C.H. Robinson in Chicago, the late John Moyer of ATB Packing in Turlock, CA, and David Smith and John Anderson of Oppenheimer. “My first experience in the produce industry was an internship at ATB and from the first day, I was hooked on produce,” he explains. “The way John talked to his customers (and the things he got away with saying) was unlike anything I had seen in business before. I realized that this is a business where relationships matter most, and that appealed to me.”

“I worked for Steve during my first full time job in produce,” he continues. “He instilled many good habits in me. He taught me the right way to address issues, to treat each transaction as if I was dealing with my own money...and how to be successful in this business. When I came to David, he mentored me by teaching me how to work effectively within a large-scale, multiple-category company. He also helped me understand the important role that our growers play, and to create mutual success through collaboration. And, John Anderson's executive leadership and strategic vision are unparalleled in the industry.”



**Matthew Lyons, 38**  
Sales Manager  
River Ranch Fresh Foods  
Salinas, CA

During his 17-year tenure at River Ranch, Lyons has received continuous promotions demonstrating his dedication and success in his career. Working his way through dispatch, processing plant, distribution facility, field operations and sales has given him a comprehensive understanding of the business. In his current position as sales manager, he manages a group of eight people in

the sales office. He oversees the day-to-day sales operations, works with marketing on ads and promotions and assists in business development.

During the two years he has been sales manager, he has faced the challenges and opportunities presented by the company reorganization and sale of Taylor Farms. A majority of his time has been spent on customer and employee retention, office organization changes and assisting staff and customer base alike with the transition.

He has participated in the PMA Leadership Conference and is active in the Produce for Better Health organization. He has run the Relay for Life every year since 1997. He and his wife actively support California Rodeo, Leadership Salinas Valley, California Women for Agriculture and Golden Gate Lab Rescue.

He is inspired by the evolution of the industry and the potential in sales. “I have worked at River Ranch Fresh Foods in some capacity since high school and I have watched the industry, and our company, evolve a great deal over the past 20 years,” he says. “It's exciting to use what I have learned in all of the other areas of our business to optimize our sales component here at River Ranch. There are just so many ways sales operations can be enhanced by our supporting business functions and by properly communicating within the organization. Because the dynamics of the produce industry are always changing, coming to work every day is always challenging and engaging.”

In the future, Lyons aspires to nurture a symbiotic relationship within the grower-shipper-receiver community. “Instead of viewing certain associations as parasitic, many diverse players could work together to achieve more for the industry as a whole,” he explains.

His admits mentors are too numerous to name. “I can't really pinpoint just one person,” he says. “I've had the pleasure of working with a large group of industry leaders throughout the years and have absorbed a wealth of experience and knowledge.”



**Retna Malar, 33**  
Owner  
All About Fresh Produce  
Malaysia

Malar started her career in fresh produce shortly after graduating from the University Science of Malaysia, joining Dairy Farm International's Giant Hypermarket. Her first position was as a management trainee in the fresh produce section and the job took her from store operation to central purchase and the merchandising office. The volume per year when she started was roughly 15 40-foot containers a year. In a period of seven years, the business grew to over 450 containers with a turnover of around \$18 million a year.

She was awarded Buyer of the Year for 2009 in the Fresh Department: Meat, Seafood, Fresh Produce, Bakery, Ready To Eat category.

Even more telling is the result on the actual sales floor resulting from her work. Washington apples were performing badly when she took over the department in 2003. In the course of seven years, she grew the business to 11.5 times in sales. She changed the way apples were sold in hypermarkets, reducing loose apples and increasing bagged apples. She introduced co-branding of Washington apples together with the company's house brand to ensure the produce operators stocked up and sold more.

In 2008, she landed the first container of avocados into Malaysia, backed by supportive superiors, and built the business to 15 containers in three years. The merchandising of avocados was completely changed from small displays in chillers to large bulk displays in open bins. Affordability for avocados set in as the average price of avocados was reduced by 50 percent. She also implemented a successful project on dates, dried fruits and nuts for Ramadan (Muslim fasting month), taking sales from \$100,000 to \$400,000. In three years, the category was churning more than \$1 million annually. During her tenure in the merchandising department, she grew the sales of the grape category while keeping a close watch on the perceived image of Giant being the best grapes seller in the country. When she started, the volume was estimated at 40 containers a year and it grew to more than 100 containers a year.

In June, 2010, she began her own company with the goal of assisting the produce industry worldwide to market their produce to consumers in Malaysia. This will be her second year representing the Northwest Cherry Growers in Malaysia. She has also done work for an Australian cherry grower and Chinese mandarin importer and will be actively involved in the

marketing of New Zealand apples and South African avocados.

She notes the importance of training the produce personnel in retail. "Many are passionate workers, but lack basic knowledge in handling and produce use," she says. "While marketing is important, I strongly believe training of personnel is symbiotic to achieving success."

She is married and counts reading and cooking among her favorite hobbies.



**Nicholas F. Mascari, 31**  
**New Business Development**  
**Indianapolis Fruit Co.**  
**Indianapolis, IN**

Over the course of his career at Indianapolis Fruit, Mascari has played an instrumental role in creating new business, as well as building on existing customer and supplier relationships. He has been an integral part of committees and projects that have helped shape the future direction of the company. He has helped grow sales by working with the buying staff to bring on new programs and product offerings for their customers.

He is a 2009 Frieda Rapoport Caplan Family Business scholarship program winner and is a member of United Leadership Class 16. He is a member of the United Fresh Member Relations Task Force, part of the 2010 PMA FIT emerging leader focus group with the prestigious Thunderbird School of Global Management, a 2011 United Convention panelist for Wholesaler-Distributor Super Session and a certified HACCP manager. He participated in the 2009 Washington Public Policy Conference, and is a PMA GROW member.

In his community, he served as a mentor for the Youth Empowerment Program, was a teacher for Junior Achievement, and worked with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation to personally raise \$11,300 for the Guys and Dolls Campaign in 2010. He volunteers every year for the Holy Rosary church Italian Street Festival fundraiser.

He has been inspired and challenged by United Fresh and its work with the industry and U.S. Congress. "Both have inspired me to get more involved and to be a voice for our industry," he says. "By collaborating with the government, the produce industry will strive to produce safe, nutritious products that will encourage consumers to maintain healthful diets."

In the future, he will strive to become a leader for his company and build upon the success that the current ownership team has achieved. "I want to carry on a successful legacy so future generations of our family can be a part of what I have experienced and have the chance to shape the future of our industry at that time," he says.

He names four principal mentors in the produce industry: his grandfather, Frank Mascari; his father, Mike Mascari; Lisa McNeece of Grimmway Farms and Lisa Strube of Strube Celery and Vegetable. "My grandfather and father both demonstrated and instilled in me at an early age the importance of hard work, integrity, dedication, honesty and pride," he says. "This not only made Indianapolis Fruit a very successful company over its 65-year history, but it has shaped the man I am today. Lisa McNeece and Lisa Strube embody the qualities that make this industry the greatest industry in the world. They have shown me the ropes and the importance of getting involved and being a positive force in the industry. They have really made a positive impact in my personal life and career, and I hope I have given back to them in some way also."



**Tanya Mason, 35**  
**Vice President of Business Development**  
**New Leaf Food Safety Solutions**  
**Salinas, CA**

Throughout her career, Mason has held various research and technical positions where she contributed significantly to developments and innovation in the food safety arena. Her work in pathogen research, as well as her role in developing and executing new solutions in the harvesting and processing of lettuce, has provided great value to the industry.

Mason grew up in Canada and holds a Bachelor's degree in Food Science/Chemistry from Acadia University in Nova Scotia. After graduating from Acadia, she joined the food microbiology lab at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Research Station, in Kentville, Nova Scotia, where she continued her collegiate research on pathogens. In this role, she focused

**"I am motivated by the strong relationships in the produce industry. It's amazing how families that have been in the business for generations with strong family values and dedication to the industry can also have the ability to be flexible in the ever changing industry."**

—Megan McKenna  
National Mango Board

on the effects that pathogens had on poultry and fresh produce.

She then moved to Toronto, Ontario, to work for Summersweet Fine Foods as a quality assurance manager, where she was instrumental in attaining HACCP recognition for the meat and seafood products produced at the facility. Mason also worked in an operational capacity for both Coca Cola outside New York City and Dole Fresh Vegetables in Yuma, AZ, and Salinas, CA. In 2003, she joined Taylor Farms as a product manager, where her initial focus was on designing and implementing improvements from seed to salad in Taylor's romaine and iceberg programs. Throughout her time with Taylor Farms, she played an integral part in developing and executing innovative solutions to harvest and process romaine and iceberg.

True to her innovative background, Mason accepted a position at New Leaf Food Safety Solutions LLC (Taylor Farms-owned company) as vice president of business development in July of 2010. Her role at New Leaf allows her to couple her extensive experience with microbiology and her operational skills to develop and implement practical solutions for companies in the produce industry.

Mason's position at New Leaf has been both challenging and exciting. "Food safety events in our industry have triggered Taylor Farms to evaluate the process and come up with necessary steps to reduce the potential for food-borne illness outbreaks," she says. "Working toward a day when outbreaks and recalls are rare events in the produce industry is truly inspirational to me."

"My short term goal is to educate the processors, consumers and trade about the risks that outbreaks and recalls pose to our collective business and to deliver effective and efficient solutions to the industry that mitigate these risks."

She notes having the pleasure of being part of and learning from several great teams on a variety of different projects. "I have learned from many people in this industry who have shared their knowledge and experiences with me," she says. "Seeing how different organizations operate gives me perspective on the industry and business in general, which helps me offer a unique perspective to our team at New Leaf."



**Megan McKenna, 27**  
**Marketing Manager**  
**National Mango Board**  
**Orlando, FL**

McKenna demonstrates everyday that she is an incredibly versatile asset to the NMB and the produce industry. Colleagues cite her creativity in solving unique challenges and how putting things into context comes naturally. As marketing manager, her main goal is to increase the consumption of mangos in the United States. She is involved in the creation and execution of the consumer, retail and foodservice programs. She has been involved in creating the brand and key messages as well as establishing the NMB's presence in the industry. The 73 percent approval in NMB's continuance referendum last year was a great reward for this work.

McKenna has been responsible for driving the mango message through different foodservice sectors, and as a result, more foodservice operators around the country are using fresh mangos. With her leadership, the NMB has seen increased coverage in foodservice publications and is making a name for itself at foodservice events including PMA Foodservice, Culinary Institute of America, The Flavor Experience and the National Restaurant Association.



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She was involved in the formation of Young Produce Professionals (YPP) with the Produce Marketing Association three years ago, an Under 30 produce professionals group focused on helping “produce newbies” network. She has served on the Professional Development Awards Committee of the International Foodservice Editorial Council (IFEC), responsible for awarding sponsorship money to members looking for financial support to continue their personal education in foodservice, publishing, etc. Last year, she was elected to the IFEC board, chaired the Meet the Press Committee and revamped the Meet the Press event and education. At the last conference she was elected vice president of IFEC.

The passion of the produce industry and particularly the mango industry inspires her to do the best work she can. “I am motivated by the strong relationships in the produce industry,” she says. “It’s amazing how families that have been in the business for generations with strong family values and dedication to the industry can also have the ability to be flexible in the ever changing industry.”

In the future, she plans to continue growing with the NMB. “I see a future for myself here at the NMB, possibly as director of marketing one day,” she says. “I love the product and the diversity of my work never leaves me bored or wanting more. Not a day goes by I am not challenged. Beyond the NMB, I hope to get more involved in produce organizations such as Southeast Produce Council, Produce Marketing Association and United. Being involved in these organizations is just another way to build strong relationships in the produce industry and understand the industry as a whole, outside of my mango bubble!”

She notes her success would not be possible without the training and continuous support from William Watson and Wendy McManus of the NMB. “They have provided me with more than four years of great learning opportunities and their wisdom with the board,” she says. “They have great relationships with people across the produce supply chain. Additionally, Jan DeLyster of the California Avocado Commission is another mentor of mine. She is highly respected in the industry and is always willing to help. She has accomplished a lot with avocados, but also gives back to the industry with her involvement with PMA, which I admire.”



**Miriam S. Miller, 33**  
**Senior Director, Membership**  
**United Fresh Produce Association**  
**Washington, DC**

Miller joined the United Fresh Produce Association as director of membership in July, 2008, and was promoted to senior director of membership in August, 2010. Described by co-workers as passionate and brilliant, she has led United Fresh

to highest levels of membership recruitment and retention in history. She frequently travels to regional events to meet with members on industry issues and share the value of United Fresh membership. In addition to her membership responsibilities, Miller serves as a staff liaison to United Fresh’s Wholesaler-Distributor Board and Member Relations Task Force, as well as for the Produce Excellence in Foodservice Awards program.

In terms of leadership in the industry, she is active in United Fresh’s Town Hall program and educational events where she discusses current topics such as food safety, nutrition and other legislative and regulatory issues impacting the industry. This past March, she participated in United Fresh’s Produce Executive Development Program as a fellow “student.” She is active in the American Society for Association Executives (ASAE) and served on the Membership Section Council from 2007 to 2010. She received her Certified Association Executive credential in January 2010.

She volunteers at a Washington D.C. Jewish Community Center’s (DCJCC) hunger relief program that provided meals for DC Central Kitchen. She has served as a team captain for the past four years for the DCJCC’s December 25 Day of Service (D25), which sends 1,000 volunteers into the community to work on charitable projects with more than 100 area organizations.

Miller is motivated by the legacy and passion of the produce industry. “It is a true joy for me to work with members whose businesses are very often their family legacy, and who are so passionate about delivering healthful food to plates around the world,” she says. “Health and nutrition, especially getting it to children who don’t currently have regular access to nutritious food, is a true passion of mine.”

She names Jeff Oberman, Victoria Backer and Tom Stenzel of United as mentors. She explains, “Jeff helped me dive right into the industry by taking

me all over California to meet our members in my first month of working for United. He took the time with me to help me really learn the industry and has been a terrific example in his dedication to our members and his work ethic. Victoria is always willing to discuss ideas and help me with challenging situations. Working with Tom has been a truly transformative experience for me. He challenges me in the most positive of ways and truly makes it possible for me to play a leadership role with our members.”



**Jerry Moran, 30**  
**Bush Berry Category Manager**  
**California Giant Inc.**  
**Watsonville, CA**

As category manager, Moran has helped increase Cal Giant’s bush berry sales by 65 percent and takes his leadership of the sales team in building the bush berry program seriously. He is responsible for the overall sales operations execution, communication,

planning and measurement of the company’s bush berry category. He manages and develops customer accounts in the retail, wholesale, food service and international markets to successfully achieve the company’s sales goals. Part of his role in the bush berry position is to collaborate with growers to coordinate supply forecasts throughout the Western Hemisphere in order to execute the program effectively with the sales staff.

Moran is a member of United Produce Industry Leadership Class 16.

He is inspired to instill consumer confidence in produce. “I believe the most important issues we face today are building consumer confidence with food safety practices and the ability to grow our industry on a global level,” he explains. “We have all witnessed over the past few years how catastrophic the effects of food safety scares on fresh produce can affect our entire industry. When one item is impacted, we all feel the effects of reduced consumer confidence. We must work together to ensure the consumer has confidence in produce as a whole, and not just domestically grown products.”

In the future, he aspires to be a mentor to others. “During my career in the produce industry, I have admired the strong leaders around me and know that one day I want to provide leadership to young people entering the industry,” he says. “Every day, I learn something new gaining experience and confidence in my abilities. I look forward to capturing every opportunity to meet people in the industry, visit face-to-face with my customers whenever possible and attend industry leadership conferences so I can stay involved and informed in the ever-changing landscape of the produce industry and contribute to its success in the future.”

He has difficulty in choosing specific mentors from the industry. “Because of my position at California Giant, I get to work with a variety of customers, growers, management and others on our sales team every day,” he says. “I really look to talents from each of these groups as being mentors to me in being a better employee, peer and supplier. Whether I learn improved communication skills, better understand the needs of the buyer, or provide valuable industry insights to our growers, I take my role very seriously.”



**Sean Nelsen, 34**  
**Director Business Development and Food Service**  
**Sales, Manager Visalia Office**  
**C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc.**  
**Visalia, CA**

Nelsen has been a leader at C.H. Robinson for the past 13 years and has been instrumental in growing CHRW’s foodservice channel business by double digits since 2003. Personally responsible

for managing some of CHRW’s largest customers, he has played an integral role in developing new sourcing and supply chain revenue over the past decade. He’s also led the development of CHRW’s sourcing and transportation services to the restaurant segment.

Nelsen has worked tirelessly to bring supply chain visibility tools to produce shippers, distributors and restaurant chains in the form of greater information in pricing, contract management and freight execution, which has saved customers tens of millions of dollars annually. His clients’ revenue has grown by double digits consistently for the past seven years as a result of his work.

He is a devoted husband and a father to four girls and gives back to



his community by coaching soccer and softball teams. He sits on the board of Tulare AYSO. He is a school board member serving Tulare Christian School and past chairmen of the Tulare First Baptist Finance Committee as well as current finance chairman for the Tulare First Baptist new multi-purpose building project.

His inspiration comes from solving problems for clients at C.H. Robinson. "The first challenge is always building the level of trust between me and the client, which allows us to have an honest conversation as to the opportunity and the desired solution," he states. "We have a strong culture of customer service at C.H. Robinson. Solving those challenges inspires me to continue to the next challenge."

In the future, he sees himself continuing to be at the front of C.H. Robinson in developing and executing solutions for customers. "At 34 years old, I feel my future is still bigger than my past. After watching the changes that have occurred the past 13 years, it would be hard to limit myself and say with certainty that I will be doing this or that. I can say that no matter where this industry goes I will be at the front of C.H. Robinson solving client and industry problems and enhancing the reputation of C.H. Robinson as a company that gets things done."

His mentors are his family members. "I am very blessed to come from a family that has a long history in the produce industry with my grandpa, Walter Nelsen (former executive at Lucky Stores), father, Steve Nelsen (Eagle Fresh Marketing), uncle, Joel Nelsen, (California Citrus Mutual) and brother, Chad Nelsen (Fowler Packing) all working in the industry," he says. "Lively conversations as I was growing up have given me a well-rounded perspective to the challenges and opportunity that various segments in our industry face. I think the biggest lesson I learned was that your word was your contract. I know a lot has changed in the 13 years I have been in the industry, but the value of honesty and integrity has not. Even in today's fast-paced world, people want to and will do business with people they trust."



**Andrew J Pandol, 33**  
**Safety Manager**  
**Pandol Bros. Inc (PBI)**  
**Delano, CA**

Pandol, a fourth generation industry member, has significantly improved his company's safety and food safety culture. He has achieved this by strengthening educational programs and expanding the scope of what food safety means

by creating better standards for their operations. He developed and led a team of company employees and consultants to design, implement and monitor an efficient, comprehensive and continually improving food safety program for PBI's global produce supply network. He also oversaw worker and environmental safety programs. He has recently been appointed to the Board of Directors at PBI and participates in an active shareholder group that develops the strategic goals and direction of the company.

In the industry, he is involved in the Environmental Resource Committee at the California Grape and Tree Fruit League (CG&TFL) and the Membership Relations Task Force at the United Fresh Produce Association. He is a graduate of the United Fresh Produce Association 2009-2010 Produce Industry Leadership Program, Class 15.

Pandol is inspired by the culture of the produce industry. "The cooperation and camaraderie between different areas of the industry create a fast-paced, exciting environment that I enjoy working in," he says.

He is also inspired by his family's business and its tradition through the years. "Each generation and each individual have added and expanded the business in their own ways," he explains. "And I am, I hope, honoring that tradition. My current role in safety addresses an area where PBI needed improvement. Others have, throughout their careers, added value to our company and the produce industry for the past 60 or so years. My cousin, John Jr., has just started working, and it's exciting to see his optimism for what lies ahead in his career."

New challenges and learning more about the business are what inspires him. "I am interested in growing the business, both industry-wide and at PBI, in whatever role is best," he says. "Right now, that means food safety and providing the world with fresh, healthful products. Of course, the produce business is always changing, like any business, and most recently, government actions have been driving this change."

He points to his family as a strong source of mentoring. "I don't think one can escape a family business without a good amount of mentoring,"

he says. "My father, Steve, who doesn't work here day today but participates as an owner of the company, has contributed greatly to any success I enjoy. Michael McCartney of QLM Consulting, strongly guided, influenced and contributed an immeasurable amount to my development over the past few years. His approach to continuous excellence and eye for the opportunity in everything are influences that I'll carry with me throughout my career. Michael has a tremendous energy and passion for this industry."



**Doug Pearce, 33**  
**President**  
**Pier-C Produce Inc.**  
**Leamington, Ontario, Canada**

Pearce has been involved in the produce industry since he was 16 years old, following in the footsteps of many family members. He is known as a highly motivated individual who loves his work and the industry as a whole. Upon grad-

uating from high school, he started work full time in the family business. Over the years, he gained a great deal of insightful information and experience that led to his development of his own produce company. His company now runs two packing facilities and several farm operations employing over 100 individuals. Pier-C has been able to successfully meet a steady increase of 10 to 12 percent annual growth.

His company now sells 5,400 acres of product in various regions of Ontario, offering year-round availability of onions, carrots, parsnips and beets. It is a seasonal supplier of peppers, pumpkins and cabbage. Pearce's leadership has pushed for development of markets in the United States, Canada and Mexico. In the past year, he has helped extend markets to Barbados, Trinidad, Costa Rica, Ghana, Puerto Rico and areas in the Middle East. Pier-C has been a supplier for Metro Stores in Ontario and Quebec for the past few years, as well as Sobeys stores in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. He credits these retailers as being tremendous businesses to partner with, while also being a great aid in the growth of his company.

He is a member of the Produce Marketing Association, National Onion Association, Quebec Produce Marketing Association, The Ontario Produce Marketing Association and The Canadian Produce Marketing Association. He is a strong supporter of the Ontario Association of Food Banks and provides up to a tractor trailer load of product to them on a weekly basis.

He names the rising freight costs due to fuel spikes and the rising minimum wages in Canada as major challenges to staying competitive. "Minimum wages in Canada are higher than any other country and that makes it tough for us to compete when exporting our product," he explains. "Our exchange rate against the U.S. dollar has definitely shrunk profit margins in a way that has forced us to more aggressively cut costs at our facility in order to stay competitive. Some of the things that inspire me to work in this industry are the new relationships that I have developed with customers, the traveling and the new challenges that arise daily to keep me on my toes."

Since he grew up in the produce industry, a lot of family members influenced and guided him to where he is today. He states, "One person in particular is my uncle, Ken Pearce, who is a huge part of whom I've become and where I am in life. He has been in the industry for over 30 years and has the kind of knowledge and experience that you cannot simply learn overnight. With his guidance, I have learned the fundamental aspects involved in the produce business and have witnessed the success that can come out of hard work and determination in this industry."



**Kyle M. Reeves, 33**  
**Senior Produce Buyer**  
**United Supermarkets LLC**  
**Lubbock, TX**

Reeves is known as an intelligent, dedicated and eager person who strives to be the best possible at everything he does. He has his hands in all aspects of United Supermarkets' business, ensuring that things run properly from the buying

to trucking to training of those he manages. He works to develop relationships that not only better his company but the guests they serve. His willingness to go above and beyond what is necessary to get things done is noted by co-workers and managers. He is credited for being able to understand how important the relationships are with both growers and

consumers and the balance it takes to stay competitive and supplied.

He started in produce at United Supermarkets just under five years ago. In those five years, he has become the senior produce buyer for this 50-store grocery chain. He has received one of the company's mission statement awards, the Positive Impact Award, twice in those five years. He helped kick start the company's Wellness Initiative by his involvement on the Wellness Committee, created shortly after he began at United. He has since become the vice president of the United We Care board, comprised of team members that help distribute funds to fellow team members in emergency situations.

He is a Southeast Produce Council STEP UPP Program Scholarship Recipient, and is active with both PMA and United Fresh. He serves as a deacon in his home Baptist church, participates in mission trips to Peru and is active in various other church committees and teaching Sunday school.

He is motivated in that each day in the industry is completely different from the one before. "With every market changing frequently throughout each day, it makes it a challenge to get the best possible piece of produce to my shelf as possible at the lowest cost," he says.

In the future, he plans to continue his education in all aspects of this industry. "Knowledge cures many of the pains we go through and provides solutions to many of the problems we face on a daily basis," he explains. "I would like to continue to grow in my responsibilities in the position I am in and hopefully be positioned to take over for my boss as he draws closer to retirement. Another goal I have is to work close enough with all of my partners to say that I have visited each and every shed where we bring our trucks. This gives me and my team better understanding of the trials that each of our partners go through, which in turn allows me to help get my trucks loaded in a more timely manner."

He names Tommy Wilkins of United Supermarkets and Chad Allred with Kingsburg Orchards as mentors. "Tommy has been in this industry for over 30 years and has more knowledge than I could ever imagine grasping due to his exposure and the different scenarios he has been in throughout his career," he says. "He is willing to share that knowledge with those who are interested. The more I learn from him, the better I will be as I develop into the industry leader I hope to be. Chad has helped me quickly learn aspects of California stone fruit that I would not have been able to this early in my career. He is willing to share advice throughout the year, whether I am loading with him or not and is eager to share any helpful experiences."



**Cary Rubin, 38**  
**Vice President**  
**Rubin Bros Produce Corp.**  
**Bronx, NY**

Rubin is a third generation family owner and has played an integral part in modernizing the company. He fully computerized the operations and brought Rubin Bros to the internet. He also streamlined the accounts receivable system to

minimize bad debt.

He has expanded the direction of the company leading to the pursuit of imported produce to satisfy the demands of Hispanic, Asian and other ethnic communities. Sensing the ever expanding Hispanic population in the Tri-state area, he worked to add a full tropical line to service this new trend in the produce business. He has helped expand the company's market share in the value-added business by constantly promoting and marketing the Dole and Organic Girl line of salads. As a supplier to small chain stores and bodegas, he has brought value-added items to parts of the Tri-state area that would normally not have access to them.

He takes pride in supplying the "small guy" as well as the larger chain stores, and helping to feed New York, especially those less fortunate areas that don't have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. He donates to City Harvest and Food For Survival.

He serves as first vice president of the Hunts Point Produce Co-op Board of Directors, as vice president of Hunts Point Produce Trade Association, and on the market's PR Committee. "We represent close to 50 firms and account for approximately \$2 billion worth of sales," he states. "This is where I hang up my hat as an individual business owner and act objectively on behalf of all the firms in our produce market. We are constantly working on bettering the industry."

Rubin takes pleasure in using the produce and trucks at his disposal to help the community. "Recently, we donated produce to a local charity that

**"The cooperation and camaraderie between different areas of the industry create a fast-paced, exciting environment that I enjoy working in."**

— Andrew Pandol  
Pandol Bros. Inc.

used it for cooking demonstrations for low-income families to influence their diet with more fruit and vegetable intake," he explains. "In May, we're used our trucks to pick up sports equipment from a school on Long Island and deliver it to a school in the Bronx."

Employing a lot of people and contributing to their livelihood inspire him. "I like knowing that the fruits of my labor help many families live their lives," he says. "At the same time, it's challenging everyday to grow your business in our ever-changing industry. The challenge of increasing sales and growing profit to better my family's life as well as that of all my employees is what keeps me going every day."

His future goal is focused on expanding the business. "In order to do that, we need to stay relevant in an industry that is constantly changing," he says. "Being complacent is not an option."

He names his father, Marc Rubin, president of Rubin Bros Produce, as his biggest mentor. "I watched him take my grandfather's business and grow it to its current level," he says. "Seeing his drive everyday has inspired me to try to accomplish what he has in the business. He is one of the most respected men in the industry and I can only hope to be compared to him one day."



**Julian Sarraino, 26**  
**Sales and Marketing Manager**  
**Fresh Taste**  
**Toronto, ON**

Sarraino has quickly become recognized as one of the top young industry leaders since joining Fresh Taste full time. Sarraino is known for his motivation and drive, even at his young age, which is reflected in his increased responsibility both in the company and the industry. He has quickly become an integral component to Fresh Taste's success, providing increased sales and additional commodity lines. He introduced and implemented a number of procedures, which improved the speed and accuracy of everyday sales in a significant manner. He also implemented a set of standard procedures that have increased lot control capabilities, quality assurance and traceability. Sarraino is known for his creativity, as a co-developer and implementer of new packages and marketing labels for Fresh Taste's custom packaged products, with the latest design already demonstrating strong demand in its early stages. Interested in the future development of the business, he is also actively involved in employee recruitment, hiring and the training of new company employees.

Sarraino is currently the youngest person ever elected to the Ontario Produce Marketing Association (OPMA) Board of Directors, a non-profit organization with an objective to promote the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables within Ontario. In just his second year on the Board, his peers have elected him vice president.

In his community, he is a supporter of a number of initiatives that provide nutritional food to hungry children, as well as educational experiences for young children so they can learn and appreciate where fruit comes from and how it gets to their local grocery store.

He is inspired by the role the produce industry plays in the lives of diverse members of the community. "The expectations consumers have for our industry are understandably very high," he says. "I am committed to developing products and procedures that ensure the customer receives a safe, healthful, fresh tasting product."

He enjoys the challenge and unpredictability associated with product supply. He explains, "I've always been fascinated by the impact that weather conditions can have on product quality and general availability. Sourcing the best overall product and fulfilling the requirements of customers is the ultimate satisfaction."

In the future, he hopes to use his creativity to benefit consumers. "I will always try to remain creative and innovative, and to look forward and



“This industry epitomizes hard work, perseverance and integrity.

I am inspired by the resiliency and never-give-up attitude of so many people in the industry. The leaders within our industry who invest significant resources for continued innovation and other ‘game changer’ initiatives not only raise the bar, but most importantly gains the trust of consumers throughout the country.”

— Andrew Schultz  
DRS

develop new programs and approaches that will benefit the end consumer,” he says.

He credits his family’s deep produce industry roots as having mentored him. “I’ve had the benefit of four generations of experience,” he explains. “I have been fortunate enough to have the best mentors and the opportunity to gain exposure to the produce industry from a very young age. I also hope to be able to pass on the knowledge I obtain.”



**Andrew Schultz, 32**  
Vice President, Produce  
DRS (Diversified Restaurant Systems)  
San Diego, CA

When Schultz started with DRS in February 2004, there were approximately 13,000 Subway stores in North America. In seven years, the chain has doubled its size to more than 26,900 locations. This massive growth in such a short period provided an opportunity for demonstration of his leadership and commitment to excellence. He is now responsible for managing the \$350 million produce supply chain for Subway in North America. Some of his greatest accomplishments lie in forming and growing supplier relationships into partnerships upon which his success is contingent. Through this teamwork and collaboration of more than 23 different produce suppliers spread throughout the U.S and Canada, Subway has developed a very dynamic supply chain.

Thanks to the hard work of Schultz and countless others throughout the supply chain, they implemented a Produce Task Force and identified a few key “Big Play Goals,” which he helps lead. Over the past 12 months, he and his coworkers have truly raised the bar to reduce costs and lead-time, improve quality and bring further value to Subway franchisees everywhere. Another Produce Task Force initiative revolved around finding solutions to the many challenges in logistics and transportation.

He is a Board Member for a local charity that works with Children’s Hospital, and in particular, kids with cancer. He served on the Advisory Committee of last year’s PMA Joe Nucci Memorial Golf Tournament.

His biggest inspiration comes from knowing he works in an industry that feeds millions of people nutritious fruits and vegetables every day. “This industry epitomizes hard work, perseverance and integrity,” he says. “I am inspired by the resiliency and never-give-up attitude of so many people in the industry. The leaders within our industry who invest significant resources for continued innovation and other ‘game changer’ initiatives not only raise the bar, but most importantly gain the trust of consumers throughout the country.”

He views his future responsibility as helping out the younger generation and providing them the tools to succeed. “I was extremely fortunate to have such well-respected people show me the ropes when I first started in this industry. I feel an obligation to pay it forward in hopes of leaving the industry better than I found it.”

He also plans to continue working toward improving industry harmonization and standards. “The sooner we can come together as an industry

to implement objective and science-based benchmarks while referencing one set of guidelines, the better,” he says.

He names as mentors Brian Kocher of Chiquita, Garth Borman of Taylor Farms, and Jeff Klare of Club Chef. However, he credits Dan Spinazzola and Mike Spinazzola with DRS as being his most influential mentors. “They took a chance and hired me fresh out of college when not many others would,” he says. “Since Day 1 they have treated me like family, with utmost integrity, and always keeping an ‘open-door’ policy over the years making time for anything I needed. They taught me you can do the right thing and still be successful in life. They taught me the importance of giving back and helping those less fortunate.”



**Kevin Steiner, 29**  
Marketing Director/Category Manager  
Sage Fruit Company  
Yakima, WA

Steiner started with Sage Fruit in June, 2004, after graduating from Miami University in Oxford, OH, with a marketing degree. During his time with the company, he has facilitated sales and marketing objectives and grew sales with national and regional accounts. He implemented category management strategies and contributed to the company’s earning Vendor Of The Year three times with a national retailer.

He served as a member of the PMA Exhibitory Advisory Committee in 2009 and 2010. He is currently a member of the PMA Membership Committee, which aids in mentoring/retaining current members and increasing overall membership. He participates as a volunteer speaker for Miami University’s marketing department in various lectures and panel discussions to help graduating students find jobs and provide them with real world situations that arise in sales. He also volunteers for an area school’s health fair organized by Catholic schools in Dayton, OH, to educate students about the health benefits of produce, the different varieties and its various uses.

Steiner has been inspired and challenged in the produce industry by the people he works with and the company’s partners. He says, “When I see a second or third generation farmer put maximum effort into growing flavorful fruit, it inspires me to go out and do the very best I can to work with our retail/wholesale partners to grow sales and meet their needs. The fast-paced nature of the business is inspiring and challenging. Each day is different and our industry seems to work with a sense of urgency, which keeps our jobs exciting and fresh.”

His future goals with respect to his work in produce industry relate to maintaining a positive attitude and giving his best effort each day. “I think good things happen when we are positive and work hard,” he says.

His mentors are his father, Craig Steiner, and his boss, Chuck Sinks. “My dad has been involved in the produce industry for 35 years,” he states. “I remember when he used to get up every single morning and buy produce from the Cincinnati market for his fruit market. He worked seven days a week and he instilled the importance of hard work to our family growing up. He encouraged me to work for the Castellini Group of Companies loading trucks in the summer when I was home from college. At the time, I didn’t know it would eventually lead to a job in produce, but working those summers eventually led to an opportunity to work full time in the industry upon graduation.”

He continues, “Chuck Sinks gave me an opportunity to work for Sage Fruit Company after graduating from college. He has been in the produce industry for 30 years and I feel like he is always available for advice and guidance. I think the one thing I respect most about Chuck is he wouldn’t ask us to do anything that he wouldn’t do himself. He is a tireless worker and cares about all of us at work and outside of work.”



**Bryan Tate, 31**  
Corporate Category Buyer  
Associated Wholesale Grocers  
Kansas City, KS

Tate is said to embody many of the qualities that the industry needs in its rising stars. He is a self-directed professional who is articulate and enthusiastic. He is known for striving to learn as much as he can to put himself in a better place to

“It is my belief that we must make a conscience effort to work not only for the growth of the company, but the growth of the industry by striving tirelessly for the continual improvement of product and methods to go to market. With a happy consumers, all things are possible.”

— Russ Tavlan  
Moonlight Companies

progress the direction of the industry. He spent 10 years with the Kroger Company, gaining exposure to all areas of retail store operations.

He joined AWG at a time when the Kansas City division was undergoing an effort to strengthen its team of buyers. He was hired as a retail counselor and was promoted to FOB buyer within a short time period. After two years of buying for the Kansas City division he was promoted to the corporate office. His efforts from the corporate level have been focused on the centralized procurement of identified key commodities.

Tate served as the key contact person for Country of Origin Labeling at AWG, attending various training sessions conducted by USDA and disseminating the information to division teams. He is the key contact person for the implementation of Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) for AWG Produce, and works across the organizational departments to implement systems and practices that fall in line with the industry guidelines and milestones.

He is a graduate of FMI's Future Connect 2011, a member of United Fresh Leadership Class 16 and a member of the industry PTI Implementation Working Group Committee.

He notes that every day in the produce industry can be challenging and inspiring. “Having a strong foundation in retail is a huge advantage because retail is where the rubber meets the road,” he says. “It becomes so critical that everything falls together in a way that makes the consumer want to buy more produce. The industry moves very quickly so it becomes challenging to keep up with current trends yet keep time-tested practices in place. I enjoying looking for new and better ways to improve the way we do business.”

He identifies Gary Myracle, Lucky Hicks and Dennis Flynn (all at AWG) as key mentors, along with a host of unnamed others. “Within 20 feet of my office door here at AWG, I have over 100 years of experience from people who have been buying and selling fresh produce,” he says. “When you are surrounded by that much knowledge, you're limited only by the number of questions you can ask. Each person in our produce operation offers a unique perspective on a situation. Gary, Lucky and Dennis in particular have taken a personal interest in my career growth and have gone out of their way to see that I get the training and exposure I need. They all push for results, while at the same time give enough room to allow me to make mistakes and learn.”



**Russ Tavlan, 39**  
President & CEO  
Moonlight Companies  
Reedley, CA

At the young age of 19, Tavlan started the company with the goal of bringing the best stone fruit, grapes and citrus to consumers. Two decades later, he holds the reins of a successful and prospering business, yet looks to continually improve the operation and raise the standard of excellence within the industry. He travels over 100,000 miles a year maintaining a high level of interaction with customers.

Tavlan has successfully grown the company with his brother from 200 acres and one employee in 1993 to several thousand acres and over 700 full-time employees. The company has maintained an average growth of 27 percent over 20 years of business. He has identified and directed

Moonlight ahead of farming and retail trends, and has implemented successful retail merchandising programs emphasizing Moonlight's brand-building efforts with loyal customer partners. He and his team successfully manage a diverse farming portfolio with intense focus on operational efficiencies and quality. The company has designed and implemented proprietary software for enhanced quality assurance, food safety and empirical product traceability.

He has held board and committee positions for various industry organizations, including volunteering and mentoring international agricultural students for the PMA Foundation for Industry Talent, and has attended many leadership and retailer symposiums to develop a stronger knowledge of the industry from various perspectives.

He notes a rewarding part of his career is his involvement in philanthropy. In connection with retailer partners and other organizations, Moonlight has been able to assist various charities over the years such as The Children's Cancer Foundation and City of Hope. His family's foundations are also an important part of his life and include the Hollywood Museum, the official museum of Hollywood dedicated to celebrating the history and heritage of the area and industry, the Jose Iturbi Foundation, which provides a forum to showcase emerging classical musicians and singers through live performances and competitions, and the John Jay Tavlan Scholarship fund, which provides support to business students pursuing their MBA. Tavlan holds board positions with these charitable not-for-profit organizations.

Moonlight is a Silver Sponsor of the PMA FIT Foundation, supports local schools, organizations and charities as a way to stay active and involved in the community his family has called home for generations. Tavlan has also been a volunteer fireman for the city of Reedley for 20 years.

He has been inspired to succeed by being cognizant of the many challenges other companies in the industry have faced. “The challenge of positioning my company to consistently satisfy customer and consumer expectations was the impetus to operate Moonlight in a unique way,” he says. “We have always embraced and employed technology to meet the changing market and retail landscape with quick response. Of course, the never ending challenge to drive retail sales of our products collectively with our great customer partners is my passion.”

His future goal is to continue the growth trend Moonlight has experienced, and to maintain its quality reputation. “I hope the success of my company will do its part to strengthen the categories of produce we participate in,” he says. “It is my belief that we must make a conscience effort to work not only for the growth of the company, but the growth of the industry by striving tirelessly for the continual improvement of product and methods to go to market. With a happy consumer, all things are possible.”

His mentors are the farmers of California who he notes risk it all each and every year. “They battle inclement weather, forever increasing production costs and a global flat-world economy in hopes that a customer will purchase their products for above parity,” he explains.

pb

## Take Part In Selecting Next Year's Nominees!

40 Under Forty is an annual feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine. If you would like to nominate a young leader for next year's edition, please visit [www.producebusiness.com](http://www.producebusiness.com) or fax your nomination to 561-994-1610. Next year's nominees must be under the age of 40 as of March 1, 2012 (born after March 1, 1972).





PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF HARVEY'S SUPERMARKETS

Customers want to know where their produce was grown.

# How To Profit From Both Local And Locale

Whether produce is grown in the neighborhood it is being sold or in a specific area known for creating great flavor and authentic characteristics of a certain crop, smart and specific marketing techniques that tell the story to consumers are a win-win for everyone involved. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

Locally grown produce is a hot commodity. That doesn't mean it's time for retailers to throw out the baby with the bathwater and only source and sell fruits and vegetables harvested in their own backyards. After all, although the USDA estimates consumer demand for locally grown foods will nearly double from an approximate \$4 billion in 2002 to as much as \$7 billion by 2012, this figure is just a fraction of the \$1.18 trillion the USDA's Economic Research Service tallied Americans spent on food consumed either at or away from home in 2009. Similarly, even though Bentonville, AR-based Wal-Mart Stores pledged to double the percent of locally grown produce sold in the U.S. by 2015, this will only equal 9 percent of the retail titan's total produce sales, leaving 91 percent of fruits and vegetables on the shelves that aren't locally grown, or in Wal-Mart's definition, from the same state in which the produce is grown.

How can retailers profitably play both sides of the field? While consumer's interest in local

foods may be a push back against year-round availability and the disconnect that comes as a result of not knowing where their food is grown, at the end of the day, most consumers would be reluctant to give up the abundance and variety they now enjoy being able to buy. And why should they? Just because a food isn't grown locally doesn't make it inferior, and in fact, may make it better because it's grown in a locale or region that has all the right ingredients to produce a premium piece of fruit or vegetable. The truly important focus for retailers, according to Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A. Inc., in Coral Gables, FL, "should be in increasing consumption of produce."

The real opportunity for forward-thinking retailers is two-fold: purchase and promote locally grown fruits and vegetables when available and then implement lessons learned in local marketing to 'tell the story' of local products to lucratively sell the produce department all year long. The retailer who can accomplish this will be the one ahead of the curve and the

one with a strong bottom line.

## What Does Locally Grown Really Mean?

The term locally or regionally produced, according to the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 or 2008 U.S. Farm Bill, means any agricultural food product that is raised, produced and distributed in either the locality or region in which the final product is marketed, so that the total distance the product is transported is less than 400 miles from the origin of the product, or the state in which the product is produced.

Congress' description, however, is not a legal definition. "Some states are proposing new rules for governing the use of the term 'local' in marketing food, but it seems unlikely that there will be a federal standard," says Maggie Bezart, founder and president of Aptos, CA-based Bezart Marketing Services.

State officials already encourage the use of state branding program logos to clearly identify produce grown within the states borders. Al Murray, assistant secretary of agriculture for



the Trenton-based New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), specifies, "A retailer can label fresh corn as 'local' and it may come from another state. But if it's signed with the Jersey Fresh brand logo, consumers know the product was grown in New Jersey. There's a quality standard behind the brand, too."

Consumers' definition of the word 'local' varies and it doesn't necessarily equate to within the confines of a state. "Some think county," says Christou, "while others may define 'local' as food grown in a specific state,

region or country."

Mark Munger, vice president of marketing, for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc., in San Diego, CA, agrees and adds: "The locavore who won't eat anything that comes from outside a 100-mile radius of where they live is one extreme while other consumers simply want to be sure their produce is safe."

There are schisms within the produce industry when it comes to the definition of local. Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Wenatchee, WA-based Stemilt Growers LLC,

maintains, "I think most consumers in Seattle would call us local, even though we're 2½ hours away."

On the other hand, Rick Antle, president and CEO at Tanimura & Antle Inc., in Salinas, CA, says, "For us, 'locally grown' means the Continental 48 States, Canada and Mexico. It's all contiguous and doesn't have to be shipped by boat or airplane."

Retailers also define local differently. At Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets, Maria Brous, director of media and community relations, explains, "The Redland Raised brand promotes the awareness of fresh produce grown in Miami-Dade County. We also use the Fresh from Florida logo on produce sold that is sourced from the state. Yet on another level, we consider local to be any of the five states where we operate."

Wendy Ward, local sourcing specialist and "Close to Home" coordinator for Hannaford Bros. Co., based in Portland, ME, notes, "For us, it means grown in the same state where we sell the product."

The definition of local at Kings Super Markets, a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, is "shaped by how consumers view different market areas rather than by state boundaries or a certain mileage," explains Paul Kneeland, director of produce and floral. "In our Connecticut stores, local means Connecticut and New York. It doesn't mean Vermont. In New Jersey and New York stores, produce from those states as well as Pennsylvania is considered local, while in Maryland and Virginia, foods from those states as well as Delaware and Pennsylvania are local."

A regional definition of local holds true at New Seasons Market, a 10-store chain based in Portland, OR. Jeff Fairchild, director of produce, specifies, "It means Oregon, Western Oregon, Western Washington and Northern California."

This wide range of definitions creates a marketing challenge. Bezart Marketing's Bezart says, "With no federal regulation, the emerging debate is around how to define 'local,' and whether there will be a consensus definition that guides the industry."


### Capitalize On The Concept Of 'Locale'

"The term 'locale,'" says Del Monte's Christou, "indicates the physical location where a product was grown, regardless of the location of where it is sold."


Kneeland adds, "To me, 'locale' refers to a specific crop grown in a specific region, such as Washington cherries or Vidalia onions."

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## PROMOTE AUTHENTICITY

Washington apples. Florida citrus. Idaho potatoes. These fruits and vegetables may be marketed by retailers as ‘locally grown,’ but they also have the potent marketing potential to be marketed by their locale, or in other words, based on their authenticity and the historic significance of the area in which they grow as producing a premium piece of produce.

“Many retailers understand the rising tide of consumer interest in local,” says Dr. Ed McLaughlin, professor and director of the Food Industry Management Program at Cornell University, in Ithaca, NY. “But, they also understand the constraints of this by seasonality. Therefore, they are looking at authenticity and genuineness in other production areas and trying to create links.”

Dr. Larry Lev, professor and extension economist at Oregon State University, in Corvallis, OR, adds, “You see this concept of authenticity, or a focus on regions and particular specialties, more in European countries such as France, Spain and Italy. For example, in Italy, the Parma region is known for its ham.”

To bring this concept home, Dr. Elizabeth Barham, research assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness at the University of Arkansas, in Fayetteville, AR, has been working over the past several years to identify and document case studies of American Origin Products (AOPs). “AOPs, such as Florida oranges, Idaho potatoes, Napa Valley wine and Kona coffee exist across the United States and are often considered among our best national agri-

cultural products,” she says. “They are typically high value-added products with strong reputations for quality.”

“In addition,” says Barham, “many of the same values consumers seek in locally grown or produced products, such as support for local farming communities and social and economic sustainability, are also found in AOPs. An example would be Fair Trade coffee, which encourages consumers to support more sustainable production in other countries when buying products from them. Favoring consumption of sustainably produced AOPs could help keep U.S. rural regions viable in much the same way.”

There is an intellectual property component to AOPs. The process of having a product recognized as an AOP requires extensive research, mapping and authentication, which would lead to a Certified Collective Trademark. Traceability initiatives now in place could strengthen this association of a taste with a place and provide a marketing opportunity for retailers, growers and consumers alike. For example, consumers who wanted to be sure they were buying Florida oranges could scan a bar code on the product that would show them the field where the fruit was picked and thus confirm the authenticity of the premium product that they are buying.”

“There is no guarantee that obtaining a Certified Collective Trademark would add value to a product,” says Barham. However, “it has the potential to save a product from becoming generic and indistinguishable from the authentic item that built its reputation.” **pb**

areas are synonymous with quality produce and become famous for growing these items. Take the New Jersey tomato, for example. “Our latitude and longitude make for hot humid days. That, along with the sandy low-acid soil, is what has earned the Jersey tomato its flavorful reputation,” says the NJDA’s Murray.

“Similarly, the tropics — where many of our products are grown — allow for excellent, year-round, growing conditions. Local climates and conditions do not permit the commercial production of certain fruits and vegetables such as bananas and pineapple.”

National producers have chosen locations to produce based upon the historic ability to

produce profitably. For example, Tanimura & Antle’s Antle says, “Salinas is the Salad Bowl of America because of our proven ability to efficiently supply premium quality produce every day.” Yet, he adds, “Today, the USDA and local states are spending millions to determine the feasibility of producing broccoli on the East Coast. Ironic, as there already is Eastern Grown broccoli. How would you like to be a producer who has invested private dollars to develop an industry, which now faces increased competition supported by the USDA because they think locally grown is a trend? Private dollars will always invest when opportunity warrants.”



## BEST OF BOTH WORLDS — MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

**D**emand for locally grown produce is here to stay,” according to Mark Munger, vice president of marketing, for Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc., in San Diego, CA. “It’s a key part of the shopper psyche.”

At the same time, retail buyers and buying committees are making 52-week supply decisions for customers based on sourcing the best product quality and the best price, says Maggie Bezart, founder and president of Aptos, CA-based Bezart Marketing Services. “This does not mean that ‘local’ or ‘grown in the USA’ will meet this requirement, even in those areas, such as California, that has a 12-month growing season.”

“Whether it’s ‘Local,’ ‘Locale,’ ‘Seasonal,’ ‘In-Season’ or ‘Grown in the USA,’” Bezart adds, “Consumers want us to educate them.”

How do retailers and grower/shippers market to the best of both worlds? Here are six suggestions:

**1. SELL TRULY LOCAL PRODUCE** “At Hannaford, locally grown produce is merchandised separately and tagged with special signage that helps highlight the product and farm from which it originates,” says Wendy Ward, local sourcing specialist and “Close to Home” coordinator for Hannaford Bros. Co., based in Portland, ME. “We do require our local growers to sign affidavits agreeing that any produce they sell to us as local, truly is local.”

**2. MARKET BY SEASON** Sourcing produce locally starts at Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets. “We look first to our backyard to purchase, then to the broader United States if a product isn’t available or the quality we require, and then abroad,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations. “At the same time, there are items we purchase that aren’t grown in the South or are available at a different time of year than in our local growing area due to weather.”

The chain’s signature ‘At Season’s Peak’ reflects the best of what’s in season at a particular time and includes everything from Florida citrus and Florida strawberries to California Navels and King O’ the West honeydew melon, marketed by Turlock Fruit Co Inc., in Turlock, CA.

“‘Local’ has been confused by consumers with ‘seasonal,’” contends Rick Antle, president and CEO at Tanimura & Antle Inc., in Salinas, CA. “Promotions are always best when there are plentiful supplies, premium quality and value pricing.”

“The concept of seasonality transcends to a worldwide scale,” adds Robert Verloop, executive vice president of marketing for Estero, FL-based Naturipe Farms LLC. “Our trademark is, ‘In Season Locally, In Season Globally,’ and reflects that we grow and source product for our retail partners from the best place at the best time year-round.”

**3. ALWAYS FOCUS ON QUALITY** According to Doug Kling, chief sales and marketing officer at Village Farms LP, in Eatontown, NJ, “The majority of shoppers buy with their eyes. Local doesn’t automatically mean quality. What’s important is that the produce was grown in a high-quality, well-maintained, safe environment.”

“Quality was a key selling point for new major retail accounts a few years ago,” acknowledges Andrew & Williamson’s Munger. “The director of produce asked how we would support the chain since our produce was grown in Mexico. I told him to proudly put it on the shelf and build a big display. Some of our customers will also tell our story with grower profiles or promote our produce with the words ‘Grown In Pristine Baja California’ in the ad.”

**4. TELL THE STORY** Many retailers post POS signs picturing

local farmers next to their products. Tim Cunniff, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Backyard Farms, in Portland, ME, says, “It’s all about connecting a face with a place.”

“Just because something isn’t grown in someone’s backyard doesn’t mean there isn’t a story to it, a reason to buy it,” says Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Wenatchee, WA-based Stemilt Growers LLC.

“Not every consumer wants to know where their food is grown,” points out Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Homestead, FL-based Brooks Tropicals LLC. “The biggest questions from consumers are: ‘How is it grown? Is it organic or [genetically modified]?’”

Todd Linsky, vice president of organic sales for Lamont, CA-based Cal-Organic Vegetable, says, “We connect with consumers at a different level because organic shoppers are already interested in how their food is grown and where it comes from. So, it’s much easier to tell the story.”

The way in which California avocados are grown is the platform for the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission’s (CAC) ‘Hand Grown in California’ grower-oriented marketing campaign, which promotes the state’s avocado crop during its season to both retailers and foodservice outlets.

Jan DeLyser, the CAC’s vice president of marketing, explains, “The key components of the campaign have elements of both local and locale. California avocados are grown on small family farms in a unique coastal region. This is something that has resonated with consumers.”

It’s important for retailers to understand their customer base so they know which stories on what products resonate. For example, “At New Seasons Market, our customers want to support local businesses,” comments Jeff Fairchild, director of produce for the 10-store chain based in Portland, OR. “Seeing a picture of a Peruvian asparagus farmer and his family in the winter, for example, isn’t going to gain as much credibility or traction with them.”

**5. MERCHANDISE LOCAL & LOCALE TOGETHER** Scott Albertson, director of marketing for Oxnard, CA-based Deardorff Family Farms, maintains, “There is a space and place for both local and locale when marketing products on the shelf,” says. “A retailer on the East Coast, for example, can sell locally grown tomatoes from the East and sign them as such. And, they can sell our Ventura County, pole-grown tomatoes next to them as an alternative choice and let customers know that they are unique for reasons such as our soil and our seed variety. It gives customers a choice, and it fosters healthy competition in the marketplace.”

**6. INCLUDE THE WHOLE STORE** “Other departments in the supermarket do a better job of marketing locale than produce,” admits Stemilt’s Pepperl. “Just look at the seafood department. Strong brands associated with high quality product include Alaska seafood, Cooper River salmon and Maine lobster. They know what they are doing.”

“The promotion of locally grown produce and other locally produced foods will be featured throughout the store at Kings Super Markets this year,” says Paul Kneeland, director of produce and floral, a 25-unit chain in Parsippany, NJ. “The signage will be similar on products whether they are a New York-produced cheese in the dairy department or New York-grown apples. This consistency and cohesiveness will help consumers find all the locally grown products in-store.”

pb

## “The majority of shoppers buy with their eyes. Local doesn’t automatically mean quality. What’s important is that the produce was grown in a high-quality, well-maintained, safe environment.”

— Doug Kling, Village Farms LP

“If farming isn’t viable and profitable in a certain locale, then it won’t be sustainable,” adds Stemilt’s Pepperl. “We grow our fruit in an area where sunny days and cool nights produce higher production per acre. This means more fruit grown and harvested per gallon of fuel in the tractor. We’re also in an area where there are few pests, meaning less purchase and use of pesticides. On the other side, look at pineapple production in Hawaii. Real estate is the more valuable commodity there.”

Sometimes, the right place or locale to grow something comes with unique marketing hurdles. Andrew & Williamson’s Munger explains, “When you think Mexico, you think ocean, beach and relaxation. But associate the locale with food and the mindset shifts to one of food safety concerns. This is a matter of perception versus reality because the climate and soils in the regions of Mexico where we

operate are ideal for growing high quality and safe items like strawberries and tomatoes. While we can’t battle the extreme locavore, we feel we can win the war in providing great tasting produce, and by connecting with consumers, legitimately answering their questions and offering them the opportunity to learn about where their food was grown...the real people on real tractors.”

### What Do Consumers Really Want?

Consumer demand for locally grown produce isn’t limited solely to a distance factor. Dr. Ed McLaughlin, professor and director of the Food Industry Management Program at Cornell University, in Ithaca, NY, explains, “Consumers attach attributes to local that are not distance-related and these are equally important to them in making purchase decisions. These attributes can include product

quality, supporting local farmers and the local economy, and expressing a preference for certain agricultural production and distribution practices.”

This means consumers want fresher, tastier, cheaper and safer produce. Interestingly, locally grown produce doesn’t necessarily deliver on these traits, nor is produce farmed from further away devoid of these qualities.

“The eating and cosmetic quality of the product,” says Del Monte’s Christou, “depends more on the variety, weather and growing conditions rather than the location where the product was grown.”

Tastiness depends on how the produce was harvested. Locally grown produce, as well as nationally harvested products, will only be riper and more flavorful if picked when riper and more flavorful, and assuming climatic conditions were favorable,” maintains Antle.

Delivery inefficiencies at a local level can deal a blow to the freshness factor. Munger warns, “Local strawberries that are transported to market unrefrigerated could arrive in poorer quality than those grown further away, properly chilled and promptly transported. Strawberries lose one full day of shelf-life for every hour they stand at room temperature.”



## PETER STICCO'S

fellow employees would assist Peter from the office to the treatment center. He loved the business so much that it was hard to get Peter to leave the office for his treatments.

On his family farm, he learned the values of hard work and sacrifice. He also learned that we sometimes have no control over the elements that affect our industry. For example, the weather, and how it can affect both the crops in supply and the consumers’ demand for the item. When the crop is short, the demand is high. When the crop is plentiful, the demand is low. Peter understood this basic principle which drives our current global marketplace. Within this past year we have witnessed earthquakes in Japan, and New Zealand, record temperatures in Mexico, and lots of snow in the northeast. Along with high fuel prices we have seen historic increases in pricing, and shortages of product on the shelves.

Peter left his family farm, and pursued a career in produce as a produce inspector for Bozzuto’s in Cheshire, CT. It was here that Peter learned the characteristics that define the best quality fruit and

Peter Sticco was born on December 31, 1952. Sadly he lost his battle with cancer on September 1, 2008. He was only 55 years old. Peter’s life was our industry.

Peter was an only child, and his Dad passed away when Peter was in his early 20’s. He is survived by his Mom Millie, whom has kept Peter’s spirit alive, in all of our hearts today.

Peter always took care of others before himself. His belief in God and family kept his spirit strong during his 3 1/2 years of cancer treatment. He worked in the office tirelessly, and without complaint. During this time



**“There is a space and place for both local and locale when marketing products on the shelf. A retailer on the East Coast, for example, can sell locally grown tomatoes from the East and sign them as such. And, they can sell our Ventura County, pole-grown tomatoes next to them as an alternative choice and let customers know that they are unique for reasons such as our soil and our seed variety.”**

— Scott Albertson, Deardorff Family Farms



“Of course,” adds Hannaford’s Ward, “local corn picked in the field and sold to a customer the same day is fresher than corn transported hundreds or thousands of miles.”

“Yet, local produce is not necessarily less expensive due to varying efficiencies of scale for local growers,” Ward adds. “Sometimes, a local producer’s cost can be competitive with some larger commercial producers, but more often their costs are higher, even with reduced transportation required. Lack of efficiencies drives costs up for them.

However, rather than charging more to our customers, we typically take a smaller margin on local produce.”

Some consumers also believe that ‘local’ means reduced carbon footprint, adds Christou. “However, sometimes economies of scale outweigh economies of proximity. By only focusing on transportation savings, other energy factors involved in local small-scale food production are overlooked. Also, buying local products exclusively supports local farmers, but in turn deeply affects other parts

of the food chain that depend on agriculture for their survival and development.”

Consumers often view locally grown produce as safer. Yet, small local suppliers may lack the resources to implement the food safety standards of their larger counterparts. New Seasons Fairchild says, “We require all of our suppliers to be GAP-certified especially for high risk items.”

“All products sold to consumers should be subjected to the same safety criteria regardless of origin,” says Del Monte’s Christou. **pb**

## LEGACY CONTINUES

vegetables. Peter rose quickly at Bozzuto’s. He built their produce program from its infancy, as he grew into the position of produce director at Bozzuto’s. Peter spent 13 years cultivating Bozzuto’s produce program into one of the most respected wholesale produce enterprises in the Northeast. His commitment to honesty, fairness, and genuinely caring about the growers, shippers, retailers and transportation companies perpetuated Peter into his new venture: Coast to Coast Produce in 1985.

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Corn and cherries are two produce items that let consumers know summer has arrived.

# Make It A Sizzling Summer In Produce

The bounty of summer presents ample opportunities for retailers. **BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ**

For many people, there's nothing like summer, and not surprisingly, the produce industry is equally enthusiastic about it, as the season brings a plethora of opportunities to raise sales and consumption of fruits and vegetables. From berries and melons to stone fruit, peppers, peaches, grapes and cherries, summer is literally a cornucopia of the fruits — and vegetables — of the season. And this year, in particular, as much of the country has just recently emerged from a tremendously cold winter, consumers are eager to embrace summer's bounty.

"Summer produce announces the start of warm weather, vacations and fun," says Jim Grabowski, marketing manager at Watsonville, CA-based Well-Pict Inc. "It's a great time to merchandise produce because it gives retailers an opportunity to promote products that are healthful, fun to eat, taste great and haven't been available in promoteable quantities for months."

While much of what has traditionally been considered "summer produce" is now available throughout the year — thanks to the growth

in imports — that hasn't dampened consumers' enthusiasm for such items, say retailers. "There's a different taste profile for a lot of it," says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral at Kings Super Market a 25-unit chain based in Parsippany, NJ. "Domestic melons taste different than imports. Domestic tree fruit tastes way better than imported stuff. That keeps the seasonality going, even though we have it all year long."

Brent Demarest, regional produce purchasing team leader for Whole Foods Market Warehouse South/Harry's Farmer's Market, based in Braselton, GA, agrees, adding, "You may be able to get a peach any time of the year, but a peach from South America in January has nothing on the taste of a Georgia peach in June."

Naturally, the locally grown movement plays a role in boosting interest in domestic summer produce, as consumers are increasingly displaying a preference for produce grown close to home. "As the local food movement has grown, people are looking for local products as much as possible, and they get

excited when they can get something locally rather than having it come in from overseas," explains Demarest. "Also, our local farmers are able to leave product on plants to ripen up and really get a great taste, rather than having to pick things early so they have enough shelf-life to ship."

## Summertime Sun

The tendency to spend more time outdoors — and to cook more often outdoors — presents an abundance of opportunities to encourage consumers to incorporate produce into their favorite summertime activities, whether that's barbecuing, going to the beach, or taking a leisurely picnic. "Summertime is all about soaking up the sun and spending as much time as possible outdoors with friends and family," says Elena Hernandez, marketing coordinator at Mann Packing Co. Inc., based in Salinas, CA. "What better way to enjoy warm summer days than with beach barbecues, picnics and backyard cookouts?"

Summertime presents a wealth of opportunities for consumers to be outside. From



**“If you are going to feed a family-size picnic, you don’t need a pound of an item; you need four pounds of it. There’s a big opportunity to step up purchase sizes and have satellite displays of those items.”**

— Roger Pepperl, Stemilt Growers LLC

Memorial Day to Father’s Day to the 4th of July all the way through to Labor Day and every day in between, any chance to be outside is an opportunity to get out of the house and cook in the great outdoors. “In the summertime, there is an excitement about on-site grilling and barbecuing versus Crock Pots and cooking over a hot stove,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce Inc., in Vernon, CA. “With the hot weather, people are not up to being in the kitchen when they could be enjoying the sun outside.”

Increasingly, consumers are throwing fruits and vegetables on the grill alongside the traditional hamburgers, hot dogs and chicken breasts, says Hernandez, adding that consumers can frequently be found looking for

“fresh ingredients” to toss in the cart along with the burger fixings, hot dog buns, chips and soda.

“Anytime you can get that mix of fruits and vegetables added to the grill, it gives it a little more colorful table than just having a bunch of burgers and dogs,” says Jason Stemm, spokesman for the Fresh Supersweet Corn Council, headquartered in Maitland, FL. “It also helps meet the varied needs of people — diet restrictions and eating preferences, like vegetarian or gluten-free.”

Grilling presents a wealth of opportunities to cross-merchandise produce with such cookout favorites as meat, seafood, soda and beer. Whole Foods’ Demarest likes to cross-merchandise summer vegetables with

hamburgers and charcoal. Whole Foods also offers “bundle deals,” which offer consumers a full meal that serves four to six people. For example, for just \$20, Whole Foods’ customers get a watermelon, hot dogs, hot dog buns, potato salad, a six-pack of soda, and the requisite paper products.

Meanwhile, Watsonville, CA-based Monterey Mushrooms Inc. is focused not only on promoting portabellas as a popular grilling item, but on mushrooms as complements to other summertime favorites, such as salads, according to Joe Caldwell, vice president.

### Celebration Time

Holidays are a great way to boost summertime produce sales, which may otherwise take a hit during the warmer months, according to Demarest. “We tend to see a slowdown in business during the summertime as people spend more time on vacations, eating out and buying from local farmer’s markets,” he says. “These holidays present a great chance to bump up sales and really get people eating more and trying more of our summer products.”

Event-driven promotions are popular merchandising strategies for Kings. For the

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**“People get excited about cherries. When they see them, they know that summer has arrived. You need to capitalize on that with good signage and displays upfront, not only to start the deal but throughout.”**

— Loren Queen, Domex Superfresh Growers LLC

fourth of July, for instance, the chain pairs produce with seafood, shrimp, scallops or fish with corn, melons and the like. Kneeland also describes surf-and-turf promotions featuring meat, seafood, corn and potatoes, which includes an educational component designed to teach consumers how to cook corn and potatoes on the grill. “Grilling themes with summer produce that tie multiple departments together make sense to the consumer and create impulse sales,” says Kneeland.

They also present opportunities to sell larger packages of produce, according to Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Wenatchee, WA-based Stemilt Growers LLC. In fact, he says, retailers can please their customers by carrying larger sizes that make it easy to grab what they need for their summertime cookout. “If you are going to feed a family-size picnic, you don’t

need a pound of an item; you need four pounds of it,” says Pepperl. “There’s a big opportunity to step up purchase sizes and have satellite displays of those items.”

Kneeland wants to ensure the first thing the customer sees is summer produce, so at Kings, he places displays of such product just inside the front door, even if that is not the location of the produce department.

“This is a great time to put produce front-and-center when people are first coming in because it’s a welcome surprise for most shoppers,” says Stemm of the Fresh Supersweet Corn Council. “There’s a sense of excitement when you start to see those items that you haven’t had a chance to enjoy for awhile.”

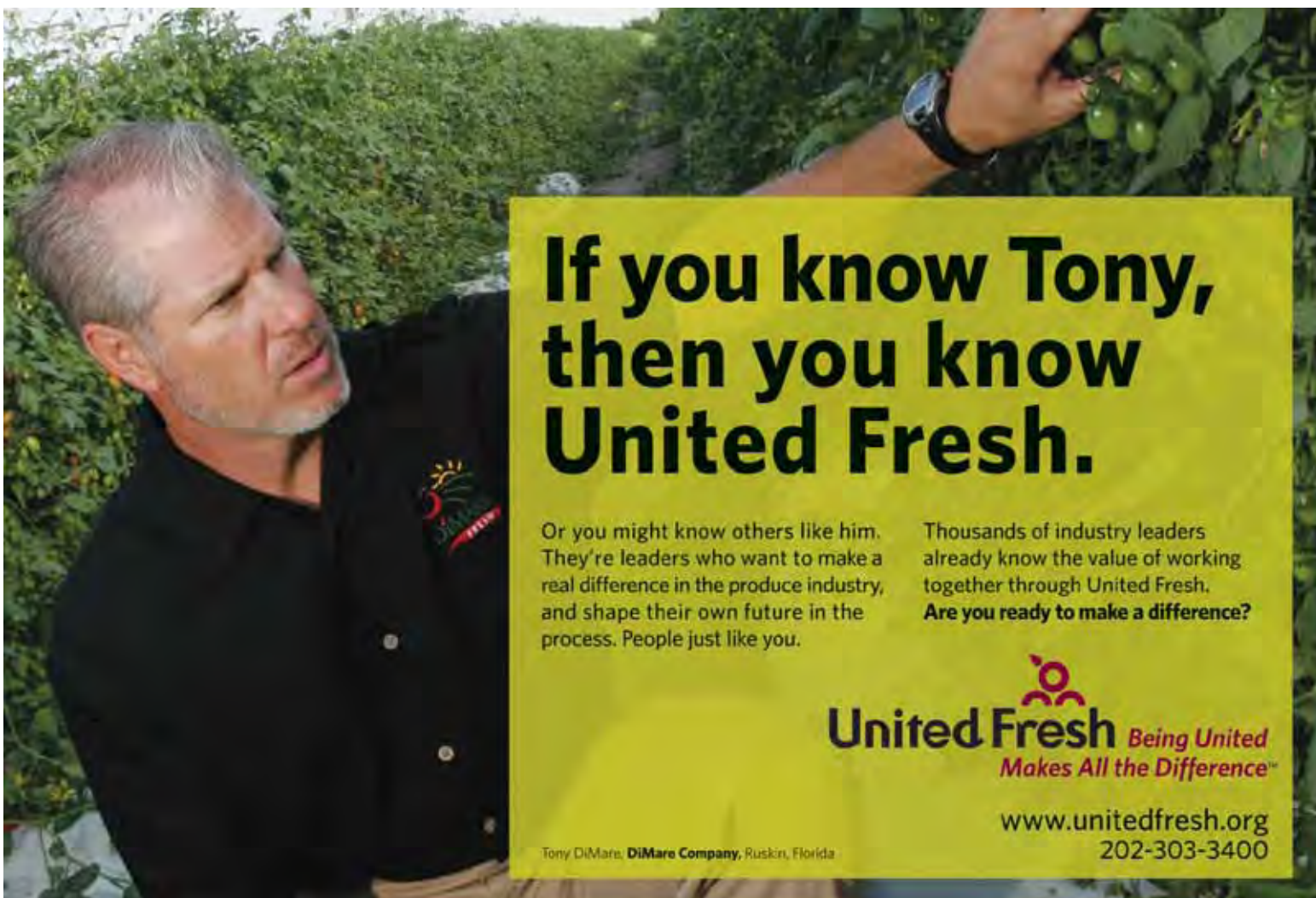
Stemm encourages retailers to use larger, more prominent displays and to incorporate a variety of POS materials his organization

makes available. These include tear-off pads, which provide grilling techniques and recipes for different kinds of spreads and dry spice rubs designed to give fresh sweet corn an extra special kick.

According to John O’Rourke, president and owner of RJO Produce Marketing, based in Fresno, CA, many retailers have taken to holding consumer recipe contests that boost consumption by exposing people to new ways to enjoy summer produce.

It’s also a good idea to stress the limited time availability of summer produce, according to Duke Lane III, president of the Byron-based Georgia Peach Council. “Georgia peaches, for example, have such a seasonal limited availability,” says Lane. “Retailers’ message should be, ‘They’re here now; they’re fabulous; and you’ve got to get them now because they won’t be here long.’”

Also considered one of the harbingers of summer, cherries are best welcomed with the appropriate fanfare, including large displays at the front of the produce department and signs in the window or the foyer announcing the cherries have arrived, according to Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager for Domex Superfresh Growers LLC,



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in Yakima, WA. "People get excited about cherries," he says. "When they see them, they know that summer has arrived. You need to capitalize on that with good signage and displays upfront, not only to start the deal but throughout."

Large, front-page ads are also incredibly helpful, adds Queen, particularly when they offer a sizeable discount, in the 25 to 30 percent off range. When applied to cherries, for example, such a discount typically results in a 55 percent lift in sales.

In addition to advertising a particular item's limited time availability and offering a deep discount, Lane believes it is helpful to highlight its growing region and play up a "fresh from the orchard message."

Pepperl agrees, adding that the effort to educate consumers about the origins of the food they eat is a big movement. "Consumers want to know who grew their food," says Pepperl. "It's important to tie the product to where it came from and let people know their food came from somebody who cares."

Any attempt to better educate the consumer is a good idea, says Melissa's Schueller. He recommends retailers utilize signage containing information about the origins of the produce, including the specific growing fields, how they are grown and how they taste. Demos can be useful, particularly when it comes to specialty varieties and anything that is "out of the norm." Schueller

also encourages retailers to display brochures and recipe cards if they have room.

Monterey Mushrooms is encouraging retailers to kick up their summertime merchandising with a store produce managers' display contest. The grand prize is a trip to the PMA this coming fall.

Whenever possible, big, bold summertime displays are highly effective, says Damon Barkdull, sales representative for Uesugi Farms Inc., in Gilroy, CA. He has been especially impressed when retailers have set up a "pseudo farmer's market" outside their store.

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makes it easy to merchandise produce outside the store. This provides the opportunity to grab consumers' attention and encourage them to start making produce purchases before they even enter the store. "It just screams, 'Fresh!' as you approach the store," says Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co. Inc., in Brooks, OR. "It makes you want to impulse-buy so many items because you can just tell it's going to taste great."

Watermelons are commonly merchandised outside during the summer months, according to Wayne Szabla, principal of MelonSource Inc., located in Chicago, IL. Using trucks equipped with lift gates, Melon Source places a "massive display in front of the door," says Szabla. Such strategies are highly effective, he

says, as consumers will grab a shopping cart and "throw a watermelon in the basket" before they even enter the store.

Melons are frequently merchandised outside Kings stores, as is corn. Roughly six times a year, Kings stations someone outside to shuck the corn for those customers who would rather not bring the husks home with them, says Kneeland. While he speaks positively of opportunities to appeal to customers' senses before they even get in the store, Kneeland says he has to be careful about which summertime produce he chooses to merchandise outside, as some items simply cannot withstand the sun and heat. "I have done nectarines and peaches, but when it gets warm,

you have to be very careful with it," he says. "I typically don't do berries out there because of the heat, but we'll do a mini-farmer's market outside with squash and eggplant and other things that are available locally."

Whether produce is merchandised outside or inside, the warm summer months make it far more difficult to maintain the cold chain, according to Kneeland. "Shrink becomes a big challenge in the summer," says Kneeland. "The air conditioning is certainly working in the stores, but if the product is not moving as quickly as you'd like, it starts breaking down right away."

The delicate nature of some summer produce makes it necessary to educate



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produce staff on proper storage and handling techniques. Perhaps nowhere is that more the case than with peaches. "What makes our fruit sweet and desirable also makes it fragile," says Lane of the Georgia Peach Council. "It's not one of those fruits that you can store in a temperature- and humidity-controlled warehouse, and it will last 90 days before it gets to the consumer. We pick it in the morning, pack it in the afternoon and ship it that night."

### Making Room

Always at a premium, space becomes even more of an issue in the summer because there's such an abundance of product available.

"Summer is a great time to promote produce, but it is also a struggle at times due to the availability of so much product," explains Well-Pict's Grabowski. "On our end, strawberries are in peak production, as well as increased quantities of raspberries, blackberries and blueberries. Then throw in melons, grapes, cherries and stone fruit, and you see we are all competing for the same promotable store space, as well as the same retail customer."

Many of the items that arrive just in time for summer don't have a permanent, year-round place in the produce department, says Stemm of the Corn Council. That makes it harder for retailers to find room for them, as

they are inevitably going to be displacing something else.

However, RJO's O'Rourke believes retailers are typically more than happy to make space for summer's bounty. Pepperl agrees, adding that the cherry industry rarely has to justify space simply because the fruit is so popular and carries such a high profit margin.

When you factor in organic product and locally grown produce, retailers say that makes it even more difficult to find space for everything. "We have a lot of local producers that grow the same things, so it's tough to work them all into the sets," says Whole Foods' Demarest. "These are good challenges to have, though."

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The Jersey Fresh program is one of the oldest state marketing programs promoting a locally grown message.

# Why New Jersey Is The Garden State

Three unique growing seasons, the right growing climate, different soil types and small generational farms in the southern part of the state are just a few of the reasons why New Jersey provides the perfect environment for massive produce production. **BY K.O. MORGAN**

**N**ew Jersey is the most densely populated state in the United States, with almost nine million people living in roughly 8,700 square miles, yet it produces more varieties of fruits and vegetables than any other state in the country. “We’re known as the ‘Garden State’ for a good reason,” boasts Al Murray, assistant secretary of agriculture for the Trenton-based New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA). “Our growing season runs from April to the first frost of November; our farms are small in size and grow more than 100 varieties of fruits and vegetables, and we’re home to five soil types.”

“Most New Jersey growers are small, family owned operations with reputations that have been built over time — often over many generations,” says Kevin Weaver, vice president of produce and floral for Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company Inc., part of the A&P Family of Supermarkets, headquartered in Montvale, NJ. “The intense pride that comes with growing a quality product drives the New Jersey farmer to a high degree of excellence,

and that’s particularly important when the fruits and vegetables they grow are sold and consumed by friends and family members in the next house or the next town.”

“I think the sheer diversity is what’s alluring about New Jersey produce, and the quality is second to none,” adds Frank Dandrea, president of Vineland, NJ-based Dandrea Produce Inc. “We have three unique growing seasons: spring for greens, of which we have 100 varieties of greens; then our summer crops, which include the squashes, cucumbers, eggplants, blueberries, beans, potatoes and tomatoes; then back into fall with the duplication of our spring crops and continuation of some of our summer plants,” he explains.

In addition to an almost year-long growing climate, New Jersey’s diverse soil types allow for the ability to grow a huge assortment of crops. “It’s the best use of land that’s available,” says Murray. “What’s interesting is that in pre-colonial times, there were lots of posters sent to the Netherlands touting New Jersey as garden spot of the new world!”

“The most unique thing that New Jersey

farmers do is utilize the land they have to the maximum,” agrees Nick Giordano, vice president at The Fresh Wave LLC, located in Vineland, NJ. “All growers here will plant one crop in the spring harvest, plant a second crop for the summer, then harvest and plant the same items they planted for the spring again in the fall. This way, New Jersey growers will get three harvests off of the same land.”

“New Jersey is really two states in one,” explains Louis Pizzo, president and manager of Lou Pizzo LLC, headquartered in Vineland, NJ. “The northern part of the state is urban, and where the majority of the population lives. But the southern part of the state is rural and mostly farmland. Most of these farms are family owned and involve less amounts of labor. This allows them to be more competitive. They have less overhead because with each growing season, there’s a limited window for production.”

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are, it's grown in New Jersey. "The Top Ten fruits and vegetables include peaches, blueberries, sweet corn, cucumbers, bell peppers, green beans, Romaine lettuce, cabbage, green asparagus and summer squash," reports Weaver. "And at the top of that list are blueberries and tomatoes."

"Certainly, blueberries are one of the top volume items that have exploded in the past few years due to their widely publicized health benefits, but corn, tomatoes and peaches are very high on the list, too," says Dean

Holmquist, director of produce and floral at Foodtown Supermarkets, based in Avenel, NJ.

"Cranberries are also popular," adds Tim Wetherbee, sales manager at Diamond Blueberry Inc., located in Hammonton, NJ.

"When it comes to New Jersey tomatoes, there's almost a cult following," says Dandrea of Dandrea Produce. "We've also been selling more and more asparagus."

"New Jersey provides the optimal growing environment for tomatoes with day and night time temperatures being just right," agrees J.M.

**"New Jersey provides the optimal growing environment for tomatoes with day and night time temperatures being just right. The cooler temperatures at night help produce a more flavorful tomato and a better yielding crop."**

— J.M. Procacci, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp.

Procacci, chief operations officer of Santa Sweets Inc. and Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., both based in Philadelphia, PA. "The cooler temperatures at night help produce a more flavorful tomato and a better yielding crop."

"I'd add spinach, eggplant and herbs to that list," states Vince Consalo, president of William Consalo & Sons Farms Inc., in Vineland, NJ.

John Formisano, president of Formisano Produce Co. Inc., headquartered in Buena, NJ, agrees about herbs being a top seller in New Jersey. "Basil, fennel, parsley, anise — all the herbs, really, are big sellers. Also, red and green beets, broccoli and strawberries, as well as cilantro — because of the diverse ethnicity in New Jersey — are all very popular," he adds.

"We're seeing a lot of interest in peppers," says the NJDA's Murray. "There are so many varieties, but farmers are growing lots of cilantros, jalapenos and cherry peppers."

"Apples and green, string, English and fava beans are also selling well," says Pizzo.

"In addition to our climate and soil, the timing of our growing seasons also benefits produce sales," explains Thomas Sheppard, president of Eastern Fresh Growers Inc. and vice president of Sheppard Farms, both based in Cedarville, NJ. "Tomatoes are a huge seller; we're really big when it comes to squash; and peppers are number four or five because our season happens when other areas such as Florida and Arizona aren't active."

It is this abundance in produce choices and production that has put New Jersey on the map when it comes to the "locally grown" movement currently sweeping the rest of the country. In fact, New Jersey was one of the first states to promote the idea that buying locally meant buying fresher, better tasting produce.

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- Organic registration
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See <http://www.state.nj.us/jerseyfresh/> for more information, or visit the NJDA's Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/NJDeptofAgriculture>.



"Locally grown is popular in all areas, not just in New Jersey," points out Wetherbee of Diamond Blueberry, Inc. "But it's been in vogue here for a long time."

"Although we have been an avid promoter of produce grown in New Jersey for many years, the relatively new and intensified demand for locally grown produce across the country will motivate us to take the program to even greater heights with the upcoming season," says Weaver of Great Atlantic and

Pacific Tea Company.

"Demand is soaring when it comes to providing local programs," agrees Dandrea of Dandrea Produce. "We can harvest today and deliver tomorrow. The closer to the harvest, the more nutritional value — and the taste is phenomenal!"

"The closer you get to the market, the more ripe the produce, so it tastes better and it's fresher," adds Sheppard.

The growing popularity of buying local has

led to an increase in local farmer's markets. "Locally grown" is exploding nationally as consumers become more and more concerned about leaving a carbon footprint," says Murray of the NJDA. "Plus, local tastes better, and there are less food security issues such as foodborne illnesses. People are more confident if they know the farmer or recognize the farmer's name. It's a great problem, if you will. Ten years ago there were maybe 35 farmer's markets in New Jersey; today there are over 140!"

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### Jersey Fresh

The popularity of the local movement is what led to the New Jersey Department of Ag's "Jersey Fresh" campaign, its most successful marketing promotion to date. "The Jersey Fresh program is our banner program, states Murray. "This program, through state budget funding, utilizes promotional advertising, such as TV commercials, radio spots, billboard advertising, POS materials and trade shows to help local growers, distributors and retailers promote their products."

"The NJDA is very helpful in assisting the New Jersey blueberry industry with marketing support and matching funds," offers Art Galleta, co-owner of the Atlantic Blueberry Co. Inc., in Hammonton, NJ, and chairperson of the Folsom, CA-based U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council.

"The NJDA is very active in helping us get the message out to the public," agrees Weaver. "They serve as liaisons between growers and retailers, and communicate to the public with television and radio advertising. They also make an assortment of POP materials available to help highlight the products grown in New Jersey."

"We've had a terrific relationship with the NJDA for many, many years," says Holmquist of Foodtown. "The secretary of agriculture, Doug Fisher, will meet with retailers to give an overview of new marketing materials that may be available. It's no secret that the budget has been tight, but in spite of that, they continue to encourage support for Jersey Fresh."

"The Jersey Fresh sales materials are very strong, including beautiful banners — it's unlike any marketing program out there," states Dandrea of Dandrea Produce. "It enables consumers to be able to identify a product with the Jersey Fresh label, and that's very important."

"Jersey Fresh tends to be the most popular local program that we participate in as a grower," says Procacci of Procacci Brothers. "The Jersey Fresh logo is a great marketing tool and the promotions and advertising throughout the years has been a key driver in making the program the success it is today."

"Jersey Fresh is such a powerful marketing campaign that other states have emulated it," adds Sheppard of Eastern Fresh Growers.

Growers, suppliers, distributors and retailers also contribute to getting the word out that New Jersey produce is fresh, tasty and available almost year-round.

"There are many avenues available to actively promote New Jersey produce," advises Weaver of Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company. "The obvious include newspaper circulars, radio advertising, television and billboards. The emerging social media audience continues to become more mainstream, providing savvy retailers with a tremendous platform from which to highlight the fresh fruits and vegetables of the season. The real measure of success is delivering a clear message to the consumer so that he/she knows the produce is fresh, nutritious and from New Jersey."

"Stores are recognizing the importance of locally grown to today's consumer," acknowledges Dandrea. "Many retailers are now identifying who their growers are and are providing a brief bio on their growing operation to their customers."

Pizzo of Lou Pizzo Produce believes the success of the locally grown movement in New Jersey is largely thanks to the farmers. "The younger farmers are on the top of their game," he asserts. "We get a lot of support from the NJDA, but the support comes in after. Without the initiatives on the part of entrepreneurial

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**“The emerging social media audience continues to become more mainstream, providing savvy retailers with a tremendous platform from which to highlight the fresh fruits and vegetables of the season. The real measure of success is delivering a clear message to the consumer so that he/she knows the produce is fresh, nutritious and from New Jersey.”**

— Kevin Weaver, Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company

produce is in creating value products, that is, offering more out of a particular item of produce than in its original state. “For example, Kevin Flaim is the largest grower of New Jersey eggplants, and his company is making and selling eggplant parmesan and a fried eggplant product,” says Murray of the NJDA. “Someone else is making peach cider or crushed tomatoes. In this way, we’re seeing more and more farmers getting extra value for their products all year long. We’ve enacted regulations so that in order to have the New Jersey logo on these

farmers, we’d have nothing.”

“Resources from the NJDA are limited because of budget cuts,” admits Phil Neary, director of operations and grower relationships for Sunny Valley International Inc., a Glassboro, NJ-based marketing company for Jersey Fruit Co-Op Association. “Five years ago, ‘locally grown’ were just empty buzz words, but it is now popular with retailers. We promote locally grown by working with the New Jersey school network to get blueberries into schools. We also sell peaches to prisons, and we work with food banks.”

“We try to get more and more of our member stores to emulate the farmer’s market and do outdoor markets in the parking lots,” says Holmquist of Foodtown. “From a corporate point of view, we get into the Jersey Fresh materials when they become available in July and August when there is the highest volume of products and we run major ads and promote putting produce outside. But retailers have to be careful when doing this — you have to have enough room and rope off a restricted area so that customers won’t get hurt.”

“Consumers today want to know where their food is coming from, so a lot of chains are labeling where the produce was grown and are putting up photos of the growers in the fields,” says Sheppard of Eastern Fresh Growers.

But Giordano of The Fresh Wave believes that more can be done on the part of retailers to promote locally grown New Jersey produce. “The NJDA works hard to keep New Jersey farms in the minds of consumers,” he says. “The Jersey Fresh program has been a staple for years and it does create awareness. But I think it can reach further and become more aggressive in forcing the New Jersey retailer to support home grown. The bottom line is it should not always be about price, but pride in quality and pride in local product.”

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products, the primary ingredient has to be a Jersey Fresh product.”

“I see the introduction of more and more organics as an emerging trend,” says Foodtown’s Holmquist. “We promote organics as part of our weekly sales program and in ads, but the organics line of produce continues to grow. The economy factors into it, of course, but organics have become more mainstream and there’s more availability to retailers. When you look at the category, organics are pricier but farmers are finding new and better ways to

grow organically, so it’s also becoming more reasonably priced.”

The different types of pre-cooling is a growing trend, although not necessarily a new one, states Dandrea of Dandrea Produce. “You have vacuum cooling, hydro-cooling, forced air cooling — each has its own purpose depending on the produce. For example, for greens, it is pre-cooling. Forced air is good for summer cooling and provides for a longer shelf-life, thus diminishing shrink.”

“We force-air cool 100 percent,” adds

**“We are becoming more diligent with cold chain management and third-party auditing. We are taking every step to ensure that all farms and packing houses are held to the highest standards of food safety.”**

— Nick Giordano, The Fresh Wave LLC

Wetherbee of Diamond Blueberry. “However, it’s not a new trend — this has been around for 15 years.”

“That’s been done for years; we call it vacuum cooling,” says Consalo of William Consalo & Sons Farms. “The newest trend available in New Jersey, however, is growing on plastic.”

“Virtually all New Jersey blueberries are forced-air cooled right after packaging,” adds Galleta of Atlanta Blueberry. “The trend has been pretty much quality improvement and multiple pack sizes.”

“We’re doing more pre-packaging in bags,” reports Sheppard. “Customers are asking us to do it here. Also, sole display ready boxes are becoming more of a trend. It’s easier for retailers out there and it’s very attractive.”

“One trend I’ve noticed is that technology has taken over in regards to fertilizing and packaging house equipment,” states Pizzo of Lou Pizzo Produce. “A new generation has had to go into every field and do more, do better and do it faster. Also, what farmers have learned over the years is how to get more yield per acre by doing things like planting on poles and using underground irrigation that incorporates feed and nutrients for better food and production. For example, pepper growers used to raise peppers on 200-300 acres, but now they can do it on only 120 acres. They also have better color grading and sizing, and better packing house equipment that is top quality and grades more efficiently, whereas before there was a lot more manual work that is now more electronically controlled,” he adds.

“We’ve seen the mid-sized growers going away,” says Neary of Sunny Valley International. “Over the past five to 10 years, farming has become more competitive. Either the growers are small and are retailing for farmer’s markets, or they’ve gotten bigger and can

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afford the latest technologies on a larger scale.”

Neary has also witnessed how new technology trends are also making New Jersey produce more competitive. “Our farmers grow peaches or blueberries. When it comes to blueberries, most of the growers use a soft sort of some kind, where they sort out and accept or reject those berries that are too soft. Some of the sorters use infrared light and measure softness and a couple of sorters use lasers and soft sort. This technology isn’t unique to New Jersey, but most New Jersey growers are using it,” he says.

“Toward the end of the 2010 growing season, we installed a two-megawatt solar energy field that will produce enough power to support the energy needs of our packing and cooler facilities,” reveals Procacci of Procacci Brothers. “We look forward to this upcoming season where all our Jersey-grown tomatoes will be packed in our solar-powered facilities.”

“The biggest trend we see is in food safety,” says Sheppard of Eastern Fresh Growers. “We’re spending a lot of money at our new packing house to meet the required specs, including the ability to trace food back to its original source.”

Giordano of The Fresh Wave agrees. “One of the biggest crop trends is pulling out the old variety of blueberry bushes and replacing them with newer varieties that will ship and eat better,” he reports. “But we are also becoming more diligent with cold chain management and third-party auditing. We are taking every step to ensure that all farms and packing houses are held to the highest standards of food safety. We have third-party companies

coming in and evaluating our operations and telling us where we need to improve to protect the consumer from food borne illnesses. The Fresh Wave, in particular, is SQF-certified to the highest standard in food safety.”

“With peaches, one of the main practices that make us competitive is bloom thinning,” states Neary. “It’s risky, but the benefit is you get a bigger peach. The longer you wait to thin, the less bang you get for your buck, because blooms sap trees of a lot of energy. It’s aggressive, but our growers are leaders in being able

to grow a bigger peach.”

“Social media is the latest trend,” says Murray of the NJDA. “The department’s secretary of agriculture, Doug Fisher, is trying to move the department into social media, starting with a Facebook page.” With over 100 varieties of fruits and vegetables, the NJDA’s Facebook page won’t have trouble getting plenty of fans. It will also help to bring awareness to the rest of the country that when it comes to produce, New Jersey is a leader in taste, availability and choices. **pb**

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# 10 Ways To Sell More Grapes

Offering consumers a variety of grapes, as well as plenty of promotions throughout the season, ensures swift sales of summer grapes. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



PHOTO COURTESY OF KING'S SUPER MARKETS

Industry experts recommend merchandising as many colors of grapes as possible at once.

**G**rapes are one of the most popular fruits in the produce department. The numbers prove it. Table grapes tied with citrus as the fourth highest contributor to total U.S. fruit dollar sales at retail at 11.9 percent, right behind berries (16.9 percent), apples (13.2 percent) and bananas (12.8 percent), during the 52 weeks ending February 26, 2011, according to the Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based market research firm that tracks and analyzes retail sales data of fresh foods. In addition, grapes contributed 5.4 percent of total produce department dollar sales during the same annual time period.

Jeff Fairchild, director of produce at New Seasons Market, a 10-store chain based in Portland, OR, says, "Grapes are a must-have commodity. We sell all three colors — red, green and black — year-round."

New varieties bred for size, flavor and texture offer even greater profit opportunities in the grape category, especially for retailers who capitalize on this development with savvy merchandising.

## 1. Stock Best-Sellers

Red, green and black grapes as well as seeded Red Globes and seasonally available

Muscats and Concord are sold at Kings Super Markets Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ. "However, the two main sellers are red and green grapes," adds Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral.

According to the Perishables Group, red grapes are the category leaders, contributing 54.4 percent of dollar sales during the 52-week period ending February 26, 2011, compared to 38.4 percent for green grapes,

Josh Leichter, East Coast vice president and grape category director for The Oppenheimer Group, based in Coquitlam, BC, Canada, says, "We continue to see increased consumption in the red seedless varieties. Red seedless overtaking green seedless is a trend that's been going on for the past five years."

"One reason is eye appeal," says Jared Lane, vice president of sales and marketing for Los Angeles, CA-based Stevco Inc. "Red grapes are less apt to show defects such as blemishes or scarring."

Flames and Crimson are the most popular red seedless grapes in the early and late season, respectively. "Newer late season varieties, such as Scarlet Royal and Vintage Red, have better quality over the Crimson, which can be color-challenged the later it gets in the season," adds Lane. "These new varieties can help extend the

season and offer greater variety at this time of the year."

"Red seedless grape's dominance could be changing, as later green seedless varieties such as Autumn King increase in volume and customer acceptance," contends Bert Boyd, vice president of marketing development for Sunlight International Sales Inc., in Delano, CA. "These late green varieties will enable retailers to promote fresher and larger sized green grapes throughout the holidays and into the first of the year." Thompson is the traditional green seedless grape.

Andy Kampa, produce sales associate for Eden Prairie, MN-based C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc., says, "Now that the Sugraone is more widely available, it could replace Perlette on the front end. Pristine as well as Autumn King, which have a good ability to store, could displace the Thompson late season."

## 2. Add Black Grape Varieties

Kings Super Markets' Kneeland acknowledges, "Black grapes are a hard sell, but there are varieties that are great tasting."

Black grapes contributed 6.2 percent of category dollar sales during the 52-week period ending February 26, 2011, according to the Perishables Group.





# CALIFORNIA SUMMER PRODUCE SHOWCASE

MORE ON NEXT PAGE →

Domenick Bianco, president and owner of Bakersfield, CA-based Anthony Vineyards Inc., notes, "Sales of black grapes will never displace red or green grapes, but they are improving."

Black seedless grape sales increased 5.7 percent in volume and 6.6 percent in dollar sales between the months of May to August in 2010, as compared to the same months in 2009, according to Perishables Group data as provided by the Fresno, CA-based California Table Grape Commission (CTGC).

"One boost to black grape sales is the early season Summer Royal," says Kampa. "Its size, color and eating quality are great, so it's a good way to get consumers to buy black seedless grapes right out of the gate. On the back end, the Autumn Royal is a great-eating grape that is ideal for Halloween promotions in late October."

Midnight Beauty is a proprietary black seedless grape grown by Bakersfield, CA-based Sun World International LLC. It harvests May through August. "The expanding production base of exceptional eating black seedless grapes and consumer acceptance of black grapes provide an opportunity to leverage the category segment," says Gordon Robertson, Sun World's senior vice president of sales and marketing. "We've seen success in boosting incremental sales and overall category growth when retailers stock black grapes and feature them in variety-specific promotions by themselves."

One variety promotion can produce an average category lift of 67 percent, according to 2010 Perishables Group research conducted between May and August on behalf of the CTGA.

"The offering of black grapes as part of a tri-variety clamshell pack also encourages greater sales of this variety," maintains Steve Kenfield, vice president of marketing and business development for Kingsburg, CA-based The HMC Marketing Group Inc.

### 3. Sell By Color And Variety

New unique grapes now allow retailers to call out and build excitement around specific varieties. Pete Hronis, vice president of sales and marketing for Delano, CA-based Hronis Inc., says, "In the past, consumers were only being sold based on color — red, green and black grapes. What we are experiencing now is the more knowledge we are giving the consumer, the more grapes we are selling. We are pushing the great attributes of the variety such as size, color and flavor. New varieties such as Princess, Autumn King and Scarlet Royal, as well as some exclusive varieties such as Cerise, have given the grape category a huge lift in sales in all markets that are pushing the



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**“We are seeing interest in a single-serve cup. We’ll stem a mix of red and green grapes in the back room and pack them into 16-oz. cups that hold about eight ounces of product.”**

— Paul Kneeland, King’s Super Markets

variety factor.”

Patty Boman, director of category management for the Los Angeles, CA-headquartered Giumarra Bros. Fruit Co. Inc., agrees. “More emphasis is being placed on proprietary varieties within each color category, as a way to differentiate brands. These specialty varieties are

often packaged in clamshells or branded poly bags. This is expanding the mix and breadth of the grape category beyond color alone.”

Oppenheimer’s Leichter offers a word of caution: “There are opportunities for retailers to highlight new varieties through merchandising efforts, but they want to make sure those

varieties are tried and tested before they do. There is a lot to be said about simplicity, because once you become more varietal-specific you tend to complicate what has thus far been a relatively simple and successful approach of selling ‘red seedless’ and ‘green seedless,’ not specific to the variety.”

**4. Offer Organic, Too**

“Organic is the only type of grape stocked during the summer months at New Seasons Market, a chain that averages 75 to 80 percent of its produce in organic form,” reports Fairchild. “We carry all three colors in organic and some of the local varieties, too. In the winter, we don’t carry any organic grapes because they aren’t available.”



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Organic grape sales are a niche part of the category that contributed only 2.2 percent of dollar sales during the 52-week period ending February 26, 2011, according to the Perishables Group.

“However, organic grape sales are growing,” says C.H. Robinson’s Kampa. “Dollar sales for organic grapes at retail increased 15.5 percent between 2009 and 2010 according to IRI data, which represents \$47 million dollars. We see incredible growth opportunity for organic grapes.”

This opportunity may be blunted by supply, especially on imports. Leichter explains, “The biggest supply issue affecting organic grapes is phytosanitary protocols on imported fruit. An example of this would be fruit imported from

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PHOTO COURTESY OF KING'S SUPER MARKETS

Chile, where most fruit needs to be fumigated in order to meet import requirements. Once the fruit is fumigated, it no longer classified as organic.”

**5. Merchandise The ‘Right’ Mix**

“To offer the ‘right mix’ of grapes, retailers need to look at their demographic to figure out what works best for their consumers,” suggests

Leichter. “For example, we are seeing increased consumption in black seedless and red globes. Part of the reason for that may be due to their popularity among the ethnic consumers, who tend to favor the sweet, seeded grape variety.”

Jon Zaninovich, vice president of Delano, CA-based Jasmine Vineyards Inc., advises, “In general, always have as many colors on the shelf as possible. Adjust as you see sale trends or offer samples of certain lagers to increase sales.”

Oppenheimer’s Leichter agrees and adds, “Offer as many SKUs as possible during the peak season when price points are at levels that allow for promotions. We also suggest multiple SKUs within the same varieties to promote incremental sales, like having different pack styles within the same varieties. So, you might have a bag year-round and then introduce a clam-style pack for peak season promotions.”

Research backs up the benefit of multi-item ads. Two variety ads can increase sales 52 percent and five-plus varieties up to 70 percent, according to 2010 Perishables Group research conducted between May and August on behalf of the CTGC. Interestingly, three variety ads

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(From left) Casey Bassetti, Lucky Vana, Doug James, Lupe Valdez  
Red Blossom, Salinas, California



**“On the import side, the exchange rate and strengthening market demand in developing countries is providing more competition for fruit that traditionally comes to the United States. As an industry, we need to be aware of that, and we need to position ourselves to be an attractive market to these growers who have far more options now than they did in the past.”**

— Josh Leichter, *The Oppenheimer Group*

only generated an 18 percent lift and four varieties a 50 percent increase in sales.

### 6. Handle Gently

Cold chain management is crucial for maintaining the optimal shelf-life of grapes and decreasing shrink. “Keep grapes as cold as possible, ideally between 30 and 32° F,” recommends Kampa of C.H. Robinson. “Unrefrigerated bagged grapes will start to break down in 24 hours and clamshell packaged grapes in 48.”

Giumarra’s Boman adds, “Keep displays shallow and wide. Do not overstack the

product. Restock the display toward the back rather than the front. Make sure displays are well stocked in the early evening peak shopping hours. Remove damaged or unattractive fruit.”

### 7. Package To Move

Bagged grapes rule at Kings Super Market. “We haven’t had a lot of success with clamshells,” admits Kneeland.

New Seasons Markets’ Fairchild agrees. “For us, organic grapes already come at a premium price. Clamshells would add an extra cost on top of this,” he explains. “In

addition, many of our customers are singles or small families that don’t need a big quantity such as a 2-lb. clamshell.”

“Even when grapes in bags and clamshells are similarly priced, sticker shock can deter sales of clamshells,” notes John Pandol, vice president of special projects for Delano, CA-based Pandol Bros Inc. “Ninety percent of people will choose bagged grapes priced at \$1.99 per pound over a 2-lb. clamshell at \$3.99. Think about it. It’s an identical value proposition.”

Advantages offered by clamshells include protection from crush damage, better eye appeal for special or unique varieties, and increased volume sales, of which this later benefit is favored in club-store formats. Disadvantages include being a fixed weight container and more labor intensive to pack. Kampa explains, “You can take a 19-pound box with nine bags of grapes and weigh the entire box. However, if you have 10 2-lb. clamshells, you have to weigh each unit individually to make sure it’s not underweight. It takes more time and labor to cut and pack the grapes to achieve this, and this can add up. This is why bagged grapes account for about 97 percent of grapes sold.”



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in the store. A dynamic grape display can generate additional sales.”

“A prominent display during the peak season, preferably at the entrance to the produce department, definitely makes for a profitable grape display,” contends Leichter. “If you have the space, the larger the square footage of the display the better, and if possible, utilize multiple locations in the produce department.

At least 25 to 30 square feet of display space is recommended to optimize grape sales, according to research provided by the CTGC. More specifically, space allocation of more than 25 feet can generate up to 63 percent more dollars per store per year than sets under 18 feet.

Mixed color clamshells, either bi- or tri-color packs, are an even smaller segment of the category. “These account for about 20 percent of the volume sold in clamshells,” reports Giumarra’s Boman.

Grapes packed in mixed color clamshells rose 11.5 percent in volume between the months of May and August 2010 compared to the same time frame in 2009, according to Perishables Group data conducted on behalf of the CTGC.

Bi- and tri-color packs haven’t seen great success at Kings Super Markets. Kneeland reports, “They are a nice looking pack and offer customers a choice of flavors. However, we are seeing interest in a single-serve cup. We’ll stem a mix of red and green grapes in the back room and pack them into 16-oz. cups that hold about eight ounces of product.”

Oppenheimer’s Leichter comments, “We find single-serve the biggest challenge from a shelf-life stand point.”

### 8. Display In Primary And Secondary Locations

Grapes are sold in an eye-catching destination display at Kings Super Markets. “For example,” says Kneeland, “we may put cherries next to the green grapes and mangos or dragon fruit in the middle of the grape display.”

This tactic produces a positive sales result as well. Kneeland says, “We can often achieve a secondary impulse sale by merchandising mainstream items, like grapes, together with non-mainstream items.”

Research shows that appearance is the most important in-store factor for grape impulse purchases, says Boman. “Research also shows that 55 percent of primary grape shoppers make the decision to buy grapes after they are



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Veronica Kraushaar, president of Nogales, AZ-based Viva Global Marketing LLC, and marketing consultant for Mexican grape shipper, Farmer's Best International, asserts, "Spillovers, secondary displays and cross-promotions can add to sales. Retailers need to look at taking the grape consumer beyond just snacking and suggesting recipes and usage ideas."

"Capitalize on the impulse nature of grape sales by merchandising in locations such as the deli or dairy sections and cross-promoting with complementary products such as cheese or yogurt," suggests Sun World's Robertson. "The check-out stand is another good location."

"New Seasons Market has built secondary

grape displays by the front end registers, reports Fairchild. "It is a good place for impulse sales. However, the downside is that there's usually no refrigeration and it's out of our produce staff's normal work flow so it's more difficult to keep stocked."

#### 9. SUPPORT SAMPLING

It may sound simple to sample grapes since they are such a popular fruit. "However, sampling can be an effective way to demonstrate the taste variations among varieties," says Giumarra's Boman.

Kraushaar agrees. "Grapes are one of the few items that, although it has high penetration — meaning just about everyone knows what they taste like — consumers still wonder

**"Capitalize on the impulse nature of grape sales by merchandising in locations such as the deli or dairy sections and cross-promoting with complementary products such as cheese or yogurt. The check-out stand is another good location."**

— Josh Leichter, The Oppenheimer Group

if the specific bunch they are buying is any good. You don't see that with tomatoes, oranges or other fruit, but something about grapes just begs that trial. The best way is to put out a box with a header card that says "Yes, take one (or two!)."

Variety-specific sampling can be cost prohibitive. "However, the optimum time is when you have an item with distinct and different characteristics," says Sun World's Robertson. "Sable Seedless, for example, is a good variety to sample because it has a unique flavor profile with a trace of Muscat and sampling assures consumers the variety is seedless."

#### 10. Year-Round Promotion

Opportunities abound to merchandise and promote fresh grapes year-round. "Summer grapes coincide with eating outdoors and being on the go," says Jasmine Vineyard's Zaninovich. "Portability of grapes is an attractive sell with kids and mothers. Fall grapes depend more on holiday themes: cooking, family gatherings and dessert. Opportunities abound for both seasons."

"On the import side," adds Oppenheimer's Leichter, "the exchange rate and strengthening market demand in developing countries is providing more competition for fruit that traditionally comes to the United States. As an industry, we need to be aware of that, and we need to position ourselves to be an attractive market to these growers who have far more options now than they did in the past."

Summer is usually the ripe time to promote grapes. FOB price points and volumes generally allow for the most aggressive retail ad



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## MERCHANDISING REVIEW

pricing during this time period.

New Seasons Markets' Fairchild says, "We'll sometimes feature grapes as a loss leader in the summer. This is anytime we can run organic grapes for under \$2 per pound."

"Aggressive retail pricing is what drives volume," adds Leichter.

A 51 percent discount or more from the everyday non-promoted price during the May to August timeframe can increase category volume by 215 percent, according to 2010 Perishables Group research for the CTGC. Lesser discounts also move volume. For example, a price reduction of 1 to 10 percent boosts sales by 19 percent; an 11 to 20 percent reduction results in a 32 percent increase; a 21 to 30 percent discount bumps

sales by 94 percent; a 31 to 40 percent drop in price yields a 113 percent sales boost; and a 41 to 50 percent discount can raise sales by 133 percent.

Front page ads produce the highest volume impacts on the grape category in the May to August timeframe, with an average category volume impact of 68 percent, according to 2010 Perishables Group research for the CTGC, and five promotions per month during the same timeframe generated over five times more volume lift for the category than one promotion per month.

Industry groups such as the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association and CTGC provide extensive year-round merchandising and promotional materials for grapes materials. For example,

similar to last season, the CTGC will partner with the Food Network in a highly integrated campaign to promote grapes. The campaign will feature TV spots and commercials, radio, magazine and Web-based content including videos of celebrity chefs talking about and cooking with California grapes as well as Web site banner ads geo-targeted to specific retailers.

Jim Howard, CTGC's director of communications, says, "Eighty-seven percent of U.S. households tune in to the Food Network; its Web site gets over 141 million page views per month; and the Food Network magazine is the No. 1 seller in its category at the newsstand. Retailers are aware of the power of the Food Network on their customers and sales in-store so it's a win-win promotion." **pb**

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## A Message from Commissioner Gary Black



One of the benefits of living in a large state with a wide range of soils, elevations and growing conditions is that we can produce a wide array of fruits, nuts and vegetables. Diversity is a hallmark of Georgia agriculture. No sector of our agriculture picture exemplifies this better than our produce.

Whether it is apples, peaches, blueberries, standard vegetable offerings, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and green beans, or Southern specialties, such as collards, sweet potatoes, muscadines, pecans, watermelons, field peas or okra... you can find it in Georgia. And let's not forget the sweet and unique Vidalia onion — you won't find that anywhere else.

While I could brag about the number of different things we grow, it is more important to give credit to the farmers who make this diversity possible. Their hard work, innovation and marketing savvy are as important as our soil and climate in having a successful produce industry in our state. From modern hybrids to classic Heirloom varieties, and from traditional growing methods to hydroponics or high-tunnel production, our growers are looking at every option to successfully grow and market Georgia produce.

At the Georgia Department of Agriculture, we are working to match that commitment of hard work and innovation as we promote and help market our state's produce.

We are currently in the midst of a Strategic Planning Initiative that is looking at all aspects of the department. By consulting with industry leaders, customers, farmers and others, we can get a fresh perspective not only on how we can improve the job we do, but also receive new ideas about what is possible.

I have challenged managers at our farmer's markets across the state to recruit new businesses for the markets and to be more community-oriented to better meet the needs of both our retail and wholesale customers. I am pleased to announce two new employees who are already proving to be great assets to the department: Jack Spruill, division director of marketing (404-656-3368); and Paul Thompson, manager for the Atlanta Farmer's Market (404-675-1782). Please do not hesitate to call on these individuals if you need assistance.

Since taking office in January, I have been meeting with school officials to discuss a program called "Feed My School for a Week," in which individual schools work with farmers in their county to see what it would take to supply the school's cafeteria for a week. If an entire week is not possible, other options include supplying the salad bar or just the vegetables or fruits required. Because this is a local program, control is at the local level, which allows for flexibility to meet the school's needs. It benefits farmers, gets fresh, healthy food in the school, and opens the door for educating students and teachers about agriculture in their county.

We have started a campaign called "Wake Up Your Taste Buds with Georgia Fruits and Vegetables!" which emphasizes the use of fruits of vegetables at breakfast. The morning meal is often devoid of any fruits or vegetables. Through a series of newspaper articles and Facebook reminders, we are offering suggestions and recipes for incorporating them into breakfast and brunch menus.

We are expanding our social media outreach through Facebook. We are working to get photographs of all our crops on the site. (Currently we have 266 produce-related photos.) We are also using Facebook to promote events such as the Echols County Carrot Festival and the Georgia Blueberry Festival. We are promoting community and neighborhood farmers markets and informing the public when produce comes into season.

As Georgia's Agriculture Commissioner, I welcome the Produce Marketing Association to Atlanta for your October convention, and invite you to visit Georgia and the Georgia Department of Agriculture at any time. If I or my staff may assist you in any way, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Gary W. Black  
Commissioner, Georgia Department of Agriculture





# Georgia-Grown Produce Garners Local And National Allure

Small-scale farms make their mark in Georgia produce.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVEY'S SUPERMARKETS

**G**eorgia may be nicknamed for its peach production, but this Southeastern U.S. state produces many more fruits as well as vegetables and nuts. Fertile soils, a lucrative marketing window and state-of-the-art farms and distribution infrastructure offer many opportunities for retailers and foodservice operators to incorporate Georgia's fresh produce into their summer and fall offerings.

## Agricultural Snapshot

Agriculture is a \$68 billion industry in Georgia. Small family farms, rather than large corporate entities, are the rule. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture for Georgia, published by the USDA's National

Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA NASS) in 2007 and updated in December 2009, there are 47,846 farms encompassing a total 10,150,539 acres with each farm averaging 212 acres. More specifically, 34 percent of farms are 10 to 49 acres in size, with another 34 percent slightly larger at 50 to 179 acres.

Gary Black, Atlanta-based Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) commissioner, reports, "The newest production trend in Georgia is the growth of small-scale farms and food processors. These new agribusinesses are taking advantage of the rising demand for locally grown food with a strong emphasis on food and farm safety."

Georgia farmers enjoy an extended prime marketing window. "As the largest state in area east of the Mississippi," explains Black, "Georgia has





Adam Lytch, grower development specialist for Raleigh, NC-headquartered, L & M Companies Inc., acknowledges, "Currently, the marketing plus for this bounty is that Georgia's peak production encompasses two big holidays — Memorial Day and Independence Day. There's always a big push with Georgia-grown watermelon and cantaloupe for Fourth of July."



Another advantage is Georgia's location and market reach. Whittles remarks, "Georgia has

a variety of growing regions with different soils and different climates and microclimates. Coastal Southern Georgia, Southern Georgia, mid-Georgia, North Georgia and the North Georgia mountains are all going to have different dates for the first and last frosts of the year and different average temperatures. The changes in climate created by the changes in latitude, as well as the changes from sea level to 4,000-plus feet, offer many opportunities for a long harvest season. For example, you can get a Georgia peach from extreme South Georgia in May and one from the North Georgia mountains in late August."

The Georgia season typically marks the move into the more regional deals of the spring, summer and fall after an extended winter season of foreign imports and Floridian production, notes Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and product development for Boca Raton, FL-based Rosemont Farms. "It is unique in that there is a spring deal and a fall deal, which means two seasonal opportunities to take advantage of peak quality as well as peak availability."

Normally, there is an orderly progression of harvest and produce available from Florida to Georgia and then north to the Carolinas. Brian Rayfield, vice president of sales and marketing for Loxahatchee, FL-based J & J Produce Inc., says, "Weather can throw a curve and create an interesting dynamic, but typically Georgia has a good four to six week window all to itself from about the end of May through early July."

Georgia's biggest problem during this high-volume time is that the state competes with itself, especially in the sale of vegetables, Rayfield adds. "This may change in the future," he says. "Some farmers are turning over vegetable acreage to higher-priced row crop commodities like cotton, soybean and corn. These crops are less risky and there's a guaranteed return. It will be interesting to see how this plays out in the future. "

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a unique position as both a local producer and as a substantial regional producer. The production area fits the bill for 'local' in a multi-state manner, and we ship as far as the West Coast with some items."

Strides in quality, efficiency and food safety have all occurred in Georgia's agricultural industry over the past decade. "Most growers have some type of pre-cooling facilities," says Charles Hall, executive director of the LaGrange-based Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA).

Lytch adds, "We've tripled our forced-air cooling this season. Proper cooling is essential for good quality and shelf-life. As costly as freight is, we don't want any issues on the receiving end."

"There are more and more wireless scan guns and less paper," points out Andrew Scott, sales and procurement manager for General

**"The newest production trend in Georgia is the growth of small-scale farms and food processors. These new agribusinesses are taking advantage of the rising demand for locally grown food with a strong emphasis on food and farm safety."**

— GARY BLACK  
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Produce Inc., located in the Atlanta State Farmer's Market, in Forest Park. "This means less risk of errors, better inventory control and improved traceability."

Food safety programs are in place at commercial farms throughout in the state. For example, Duke Lane, III, vice president of sales for Lane Southern Orchards, headquartered in Fort Valley, GA, and president of the Byron-based Georgia Peach Council, says, "In order

to ensure proper procedures and safety protocols are being followed all of the time, we recently hired a food safety director who creates and manages all of our food safety programs."

Similarly, the GFVGA also has a full-time director of education and food safety. "This staff person's responsibilities include consulting directly with growers and assisting them in the preparation for third-party audits."

Food safety is also a priority of the GDA. Commissioner Black explains, "Our marketing division became involved with a University of Georgia grant, 'Enhancing the Safety of Locally Grown Produce Through Research and Extension,' in 2010. We have department employees serving on the Grant's Advisory Panel. The project assesses current practices for growing and handling fresh produce; the materials added to the soils and the effects they have on disease-causing organisms; and the methods of handling and processing foods, which reduce the risk of contaminating fresh produce. The findings from this project will be translated into educational materials. The end goal is to enhance the safety of organic and locally grown foods for consumers and help farmers and farmer's markets avoid liability issues that could be associated with outbreaks of food borne illness."

### Top Crops

Fresh produce grown in Georgia ranges from apples to zucchini. L & M's Lytch sums it up this way: "Georgia grows just about everything that Florida does, minus the citrus. The biggest items are watermelons, vegetables, Vidalia onions and the peaches."

**MELONS** Watermelon was the top tonnage fresh produce item grown in Georgia in 2010, totaling 672 million pounds and \$76 million. Other popular melons included cantaloupes, of which 165 million tons were harvested last year, totaling \$51 million.

"There is a lot of potential for Eastern cantaloupes this year as freight changes escalate," says Lytch. "This summer, the freight

## TOP CROPS

### TOP FRESH MARKET CROPS IN 2010

	<u>POUNDS</u>
Watermelon	672 million pounds
Sweet Corn (Fresh Market)	392 million pounds
Onions, Spring	228 million pounds
Cucumbers (Fresh Market)	213 million pounds
Cabbage (Fresh Market)	165 million pounds
Cantaloupes	150 million pounds
Bell Peppers	87 million pounds
Peaches	77 million pounds (utilized)
Pecans	65 million pounds (utilized)
Snap Beans (Fresh Market)	61 million pounds
Blueberries	58 million pounds (utilized)
Squash	48 million pounds

### TOP FRESH MARKET CROPS IN 2010

	<u>DOLLARS</u>
Pecans	\$132 million (utilized)
Onions, Spring	\$113 million
Watermelon	\$76 million
Blueberries	\$72 million (utilized)
Sweet Corn (Fresh Market)	\$65 million
Cucumbers (Fresh Market)	\$51 million
Cantaloupes	\$51 million
Peaches	\$31 million (utilized)
Bell Peppers	\$22 million
Snap Beans (Fresh Market)	\$20 million
Cabbage (Fresh Market)	\$18 million
Squash	\$15 million

#### Sources:

USDA-NASS Vegetables, 2010 Summary, January 2011

USDA-NASS NonCitrus Fruits and Nuts, 2010 Preliminary Summary, January 2011



“Our Local Grown Produce 2011 campaign will identify Harvey’s as the destination for locally grown, fresh produce while showing the impact of each of the featured items on Georgia’s economy with POS signage.”

— HARVEY’S SUPERMARKETS  
MICHAEL PURVIS

cost alone will be almost 75-cents to bring a melon from the West Coast to the East. We’ve been experimenting for the past four to five years with different varieties of traditional West Coast melon varieties, both cantaloupe and honeydew.”

**VEGETABLES** Top vegetable crops, such as fresh-market sweet corn, cucumbers, cabbage, bell peppers, snap beans and squash collectively totaled \$966 million pounds in production in 2011 and contributed \$191 million dollars.

J & J’s Rayfield says, “We start with zucchini and cabbage mid-April, then follow with yellow squash’ and get into volume with

these items by the end of the month. Cucumbers start the first of May, snap beans mid-May, then bell peppers, eggplant and tomato come in by the end of May. This season, we will have a bigger vine-ripe tomato program with a focus on flavor.”

“More retailers are requesting over-wrap packs,” reports General Produce’s Scott. “We have two machines and over-wrap zucchini, yellow squash and green beans for several retailers in the Southeast. These items take labor out of the store level and are easier to trace and control inventory over bulk. Retailers often merchandise these items in their value section.”

In addition to mainstream vegetables, Nickey Gregory, Western vegetable buyer and president of Nickey Gregory Co. LLC, based in Forest Park, GA, says, “There are more Latin vegetables being grown in the state, such as tomatillos, as well as oriental vegetables.”



**ONIONS** Sales of Vidalia sweet onions amounted to 228 million pounds and \$113 million in sales in 2010. John Shuman, president and director of sales at Shuman Produce Inc., in Reidsville, GA, says, “Some 4.6 million 40-lb. equivalents of Vidalia onions were grown, packed and sold last year. Because the market was high last year, growers made some money and it enabled them to plant more. The crop estimate for 2011 is 4.75 to 5 million. This is one of the better years in terms of onion size and quality.”

One key development in the industry is hybrid varieties with higher yields, adds Shuman. “Input costs increase annually, and the survival and prosperity of the industry is based on these new onion varieties that yield 50 to 100 percent more per acre.”

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## CHEFS AND RETAILERS PROMOTE GEORGIA PRODUCE

Many growers, wholesalers and distributors partner to notify and supply chefs and retailers alike with fresh seasonal Georgia produce. “There are several great foodservice companies that utilize our State Farmers Market network to deliver safe, fresh and locally grown produce to restaurants,” says Commissioner Black.

Farmer’s markets are where David Sweeney, chef de jardin at Restaurant Eugene, an upscale Atlanta eatery that specializes in dishes made with state-grown ingredients, sources his fresh produce. “We purchase directly from farmers and we also use the farmer’s market to meet and establish relationships with growers with whom we can set up delivery schedules in the future.”

Indeed, the idea for a Saturday farmer’s market located a few blocks away from the restaurant was born out of the thought to not only supply the eatery with local produce, but to also make it more profitable for farmers by enabling them to sell their produce to the public, rather than just making restaurant deliveries.

At least 75 percent of the produce on Restaurant Eugene’s menu is sourced locally. Judith Winfrey, the restaurant’s director of hospitality and fruition, says, “We believe so strongly in supporting local farmers that we list the farms we purchase from on our menu. Every night is a celebration of local foods.”

A sampling of menu items that feature local produce includes a Cream of Vidalia Onion Soup; a tasting of spring vegetables that includes roasted baby red beets and goat cheese, horseradish cream kohlrabi, cranberry beans, turnip greens, wild mushrooms and corn dumplings, and baby Vidalia and fennel, English peas and beet greens; and a plate of greens



PHOTO COURTESY OF RESTAURANT EUGENE

Restaurant Eugene’s tasting of spring vegetables highlights Georgia-grown produce.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVEY’S SUPERMARKETS

Harvey’s Supermarkets promotes locally grown produce with large displays and descriptive signage.

featuring turnip greens in a buttermilk puree, beet greens with smoked onion and mustard greens with pickled blackberry juice. Selections such as these are featured on the restaurant’s new five- and seven-course vegetable menu.

Many large retailers such as Ahold, Kroger and Supervalu have a major presence in Georgia. J & J’s Rayfield, says, “We work directly with retailers to source Georgia-grown produce and offer special prices, special promotional opportunities and POS materials like grower bios.”

Some distributors, like General Produce, offer help with merchandising. “We have seven or eight merchandisers who can assist with retail resets of seasonal items,” says Scott. “Many of our customers are independent retailers.”

One retailer that does a fantastic job of merchandising the state’s produce to its customers is Harvey’s Supermarkets, a 71-store chain based in Nashville, GA. Michael Purvis, director of produce and floral, says, “Our Local Grown Produce 2011 campaign will identify Harvey’s as the destination for locally grown, fresh produce while showing the impact of each of the featured items on Georgia’s economy with POS signage.”

There will initially be seven fresh products featured: Vidalia onions in May and Georgia peaches and blueberries in June. Georgia-grown

watermelons and Athena cantaloupes will follow in July, peanuts in August and Muscadine grapes in September. Two panels placed on each side of the chain’s signature three-dimensional locally grown centerpiece signage will make consumers aware of what each product represents in revenue and jobs to the state of Georgia. For peaches, for example, the signage reads, “Georgia’s Peach crop accounts for over \$59 million in revenue and jobs in Georgia.”

There will be accompanying signage that pays tribute to the specific local farmers that provide Harvey’s produce. In addition, supporting price and shelf signs will be paired with each Local Grown product as it is being merchandised in the department.

Purvis is creating enthusiasm for the chain’s Local Grown program by challenging his managers with a display contest. Each month the produce manager and store manager who have the best display for that month’s focus item will win a cash prize. At the end of the contest period in September, the produce manager who has the Best Overall Displays will be invited to attend the 2011 Produce Marketing Association’s Fresh Summit, which will be held in Atlanta, Georgia. “The campaign,” says Purvis, “is all about Harvey’s ability and commitment to provide its customers with the best of local grown produce from within their own community.”

GA





both domestically and internationally. Shuman maintains, "This in an outgrowth of the retail consolidations and acquisitions in the 1990s and retailers' desire to have a year-round sweet onion category supply partner."



Many Georgia onion growers, such as Bland Farms, also cultivate red-skinned onions from May to June. "We harvest about 100,000 pounds of red onions annually," estimates Pazderski. "Retailers like this, especially those that can't take a full truck of Vidalias, because both of these onions serve two different customer needs."

**PEACHES** Some 77 million pounds of peaches, contributing \$31 million, were harvested in 2010. Due to the short, 16-week window of availability that spans from mid-May to mid-August, Georgia peaches are a popular summer treat. Lane Packing's Lane says, "We have turned over virtually all of our peach varieties during the past 15 years. Aggressive breeding programs are in place with primary goals to develop varieties that are more pest-tolerant, increase yields and extend seasons. However, maintaining

Technological upgrades include high-speed sizing and grading lines. Richard Pazderski, director of sales and marketing for Bland Farms LLC, based in Glennville, GA, reveals, "We added a second 8-lane high-speed line and can now pack to very specific sizes. As a result, our capacity has grown from 25,000 to 50,000 40-lb. box units a day, in addition to bags."

"What gives Vidalia onions their charac-

teristic sweetness," Pazderski adds, "is the naturally low sulfur soil in which they're grown. Sulfur-containing compound, such as pyruvate, give onions their pungency. The low pyruvate and high sugars give Vidalias their mild flavor."

Today, many Vidalia onion growers have become a one-stop shop for sweet onions by growing flat granex onions in other locations

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If each of the approximately 3.7 million households in the state devoted \$10 per week to locally grown products from Georgia, it would add more than \$1.9 billion into the state's economy.

flavor is extremely important in developing new peach varieties."

**BLUEBERRIES** "Blueberries are not a new crop; they are native to Georgia," says Joe Cornelius, president of J&B Blueberry Farms Inc., in Manor, GA, and president of the Georgia Blueberry Commission. "Rabbiteye blueberries, which are especially large, grow in the low acid soils in the South of the state as well as the northern mountains."

In 2010, nearly 52 million pounds of blueberries were harvested from some 300 to 400 farms and on 20,000 to 22,000 acres between April 15 and July 5. Commissioner Black says, "We are becoming a bigger player in the blueberry market and are able to harvest and ship our blueberries from Southeast Georgia much earlier than those from Michigan or New Jersey. We feel that having fresh blueberries on the market early in the season gives us 'first shot' at the consumers."

**PECANS** The 65 million pounds of pecans harvested in 2010 by 600 to 700 commercial growers in Georgia contributed \$132 million. John Robison, co-owner of Robison Farms, in Vidalia, GA, and vice chairman for the Atlanta-based Georgia Pecan Commission, reveals, "Georgia is the leading state in the nation for growing pecans with over 100,000 acres in production. New orchards planted in the past seven to eight years will soon be bearing and we look forward to increased production."

There are 25 to 30 commercial varieties of pecans cultivated in Georgia. Harvest typically begins mid-October. Robison adds, "Pecans are an alternate-bearing crop. We expect 100 to 120 million pounds this year."

Georgia pecans are exported internationally with increased demand seen in markets such as China, India, the Middle East and Europe.

**NEWER CROPS** Broccoli is one of the newer vegetables grown in Georgia that is traditionally sourced from the California, says L & M's Lytch. "Georgia has two distinct deals," he explains. "One in the spring, which comes between late April and May, and the other is in the fall and hits for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We market both bunched broccoli and broccoli crowns."

Sweet potato production in Georgia is also on the increase, adds Lytch. "We plan to have our sweets harvested, cured and ready to ship by mid-to-late August and carry them through to Christmas. It's a crop that is garnering a lot of interest by the Georgia market."

The GFVGA's Hall declares, "Blackberries are a fairly new crop with acreage and production on the rise. They are available from late May through July from the south of the state and through August from the north."

Following the success of Vidalia onions, says GDA's Commissioner Black, "growers in south Georgia have been working to produce sweet carrots."

In addition, says Black, "We are very excited at the creation and growth of Georgia olives and olive oil. We have had several farmers creating olive groves and a number of new processors creating Georgia Grown olive oil."

### Marketing Programs

The GDA and many of the state's commodity groups offer aggressive marketing programs. Georgia Grown is an initiative established by the GDA in 2000 with the goal of increasing consumer awareness and driving demand for the state's locally grown and produced foods. In 2001, retail and consumer pilot programs started with 149 Kroger supermarkets and grew to include other chains throughout the state. Participating supermarkets feature a Georgia Grown section. In addition, both small- and large-scale produce suppliers across the state display the Georgia Grown logo on their products, marketing materials and product labels.

Local is indeed a potentially huge market for Georgia. According to the May 2010-released study, *The Local Food Impact: What if Georgians Ate Georgia Produce?* funded by Georgia Organics and published by the University of Georgia's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, if each of the approximately 3.7 million households in the state devoted \$10 per week to locally grown products from Georgia, it would add more than \$1.9





PHOTO COURTESY OF VIDALIA ONION COMMITTEE

The Vidalia Onion Museum, which opened in April, tells the history of this storied crop

cious and creative recipes and preserving and storing peaches for year-round enjoyment.



The Georgia Pecan Commission has hired a public relations firm this year and is funding research into the health benefits of pecans.

Finally, a new collaborative effort that emerged through the GFVGA and under the umbrella of the GDA's Georgia Grown program features a four-commodity marketing partnership, which spotlight Vidalia onions and blueberries in May and peaches and watermelon in June in two-minute videos that each commodity board helped to produce. These infomercials were shown on Georgia-based Delta Air Lines in-flight entertainment network. The spots aired during nearly 18,000 flights and were seen by more than 2.6 million passengers. Brennan acknowledges, "I, along with the other commodity group leaders, have said that we need to pool our resources more often to spread the word about these delicious Georgia products. What better way to nationally showcase our products than putting them in front of captive in-flight audiences?" **GA**

billion into the state's economy.

"In continuing the program," says Commissioner Black, "we have a new Georgia Grown Web site that will be specially designed to help connect consumers with Georgia farmers across the state."

In addition, the GDA is running a campaign called "Wake Up Your Taste Buds with Georgia Fruits and Vegetables." The campaign will promote various ways to incorporate fruits and vegetables into breakfast — a meal often devoid of them — on its Facebook page and through the weekly Question & Answer column and articles sent to newspapers and other media.

The Vidalia-based Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), on the heels of a successful *Shrek*-themed promotion in 2010, has partnered with Universal Music Group Nashville in a promotional event. "Vidalia onions and country music both share a southern heritage," says Wendy Brannen, the VOC's executive director. "At the same time, Vidalias are shipped bi-coastal and the top country music markets include New York and Los Angeles, so it's a perfect fit." The promotion, which coincides with the Vidalia onion season, includes a Vidalia Onion Jingle Contest, on-pack favorite onion recipes from country music stars, and retail resources such as POS materials, circular advertising artwork and a display contest. What's more, in a nod toward bolstering agri-tourism in the state, the first-ever Vidalia Onion Museum hosted its grand opening in April.

The Georgia Peach Council, the promotional arm of the Georgia Peach industry, has undertaken an aggressive consumer-driven

campaign this summer that includes partnering with official spokesperson and cookbook author, Gena Knox. Knox has developed detailed how-to videos to educate consumers about three key areas: selecting and handling the perfect peach, preparing deli-



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# The Name Of The Game: Selling More Dried Plums — Or Prunes

Clear marketing ensures appeal to existing prune customers while enticing the “hipper” dried plum consumer. **BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE**



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIANI PACKING CO INC.

Industry executives contend the switch to “dried plums” has expanded marketing opportunities to a younger demographic.

**R**ecently, prunes have undergone a transformation and have become dried plums. The produce industry realizes the importance of a name is key to maintaining the existing prune customer as well as inspiring the younger customer, who most likely has a limited concept of this healthy, convenient super fruit. Fortunately, most suppliers have put a lot of work into making sure the product is recognized across demographics, so produce departments can use the existing platforms to continue educating consumers and increase sales to the existing consumers while adding new ones.

The word “prune” comes from the scientific name, *prunus*, for plums, and is still more internationally recognized. In most of the United States, the term is associated with a more elderly demographic who use the product for digestive purposes and fiber. As Rich Peterson, executive director for the Sacramento-based California Dried Plum Board, explains, “Around 2000, the FDA started using the term ‘dried plums’ because women in their 20s and 30s responded negatively to ‘prunes.’”

The Board changed the name in all publications and has had a more positive reception since. “There are a lot less dried plum jokes than prune jokes.”

## Who Moved My Prunes?

Despite Peterson’s observation that the overall response to the change from “prunes” to “dried plums” has been positive, he also points out that some labels still list “prunes” because they cater to an older demographic. He’s also received letters insisting, “Dried plums will always be prunes.”

Sun-Maid Growers of California, based in Kingsburg, CA, and celebrating its 100th anniversary next year, is one of the companies that prefers using the term “prunes” on its labeling. The company received complaints from consumers that they were confused with the name change, so the company chose to use the more traditional term. Vice president of sales, Joe Tamble, reports, “‘Prunes’ is the dominant word across our package. Below that, it says ‘Dried Plums.’” Many people want clarity, and the “core users of prunes wanted to see the name ‘prunes,’” he explains.

Earl Cronk, category manager for Schenectady, NY-based Price Chopper, remembers the change to dried plums, but didn’t hear much confusion among his shoppers as different suppliers “did a lot to market them as snacking products.” He cites Sunsweet’s grab-and-go packaging and single-serving products as being effective, for example. On top of that, the store still marketed them in the same location with the dried fruit.

“There are still some channels of trade domestically that prefer to market dried plums as ‘prunes’ since they believe this resonates with an older target demographic, such as baby-boomers,” further explains Miranda Ackerman, marketing director for Mariani Packing Co., out of Vacaville, CA. “Internationally, the preference is for California dried plums to be marketed as ‘prunes’ as this helps maintain the familiarity with U.S. brands.” However, she also points out, “The term ‘dried plums’ has opened up the marketing opportunities to younger demographics because it helps convey the imagery of a fresh piece of fruit, which is more appealing and more recognizable to younger consumers. This has also



## DRIED FRUITS AND NUTS

helped the industry educate consumers about the benefits of dried plums as a healthful snack, packed with nutritional benefits, and the term has broadened the appeal of dried plums for all consumers.”

Jeff McLemore, product manager for dried fruit for Sunsweet Growers Inc. of Yuba City, CA, says that the company uses both “prunes” and “dried plums” in its packaging and marketing. “Using ‘dried plums’ has opened some opportunities with some folks. ‘Dried plums’ is definitely more appealing to the younger demographic.” More diverse products, too, like the single-serving Sunsweet Ones and educational packaging, have helped boost sales. “Household penetration has grown 40 percent in the past three years,” he cites.

### Part Of A Bigger Picture

Beyond the name change, boosting sales for dried plums/prunes relies on seeing a much bigger picture for the dried fruit segment and the produce department as a whole. Dried fruit works in the produce section so well because it caters to the demographic that wants to eat more healthfully, regardless of age.

As part of the dried fruit category, dried plums/prunes are the third largest segment, as Tamble points out, making up about 15 percent of sales. Furthermore, he says, “Many consumers going to dried fruit buy more than one segment of dried fruit.” An increase of sales in prunes isn’t likely to take away from another segment, but rather be an addition to existing sales — if not a positive effect on other segments of the category.

In favor of prunes is the growing recognition that plums — dried or otherwise — are a super fruit that provide an array of antioxidants and vitamins in addition to the dietary fiber for which prunes are already known. With dried plums, Ackerman points out, “These products increase sales in produce as they are extremely shelf-stable, can be aggressively promoted to target heavy users and promote trial with new consumers. These items, and dried fruit in general, help to contribute to the overall profitability of a produce department as they have high margin and provide very little shrink.”

When it comes to dried fruit overall, not just dried plums, Price Chopper’s Cronk says, “A lot of what we see changing in dried fruit is going to mimic what fresh produce items are doing.” Throughout produce, suppliers are marketing the specific health benefits of each item, as well as the convenience it may provide: grab-and-go, a quick snack and easy preparation. People want healthy, but they

also want easy.

McLemore agrees with the assessment of dried plums/prunes, dried fruit and the produce department moving in the same direction of focusing on health benefits and convenience. One of Sunsweet’s newest products, D’Noir Prunes, also caters to the growing “all-natural” demand because they are preservative-free.

### Spreading The Word And Driving Sales

Suppliers of dried plums/prunes have done a lot to boost the image of the product and make it easier for produce departments to sell more. Department managers can further increase sales by making the most of the tools, catering to their store demographic and educating consumers.

Many suppliers, for example, have product shippers that can be used to create secondary displays. Cronk finds these shippers especially useful because it allows for more promotion, such as around Thanksgiving or back-to-school periods. It also allows the product to be cross-merchandised with items such as salads or nuts, or even outside of the produce department, by meat — pork is a good combination — or with baking supplies, as Sunsweet’s McLemore suggests.

“In the past couple of years, a secondary display has helped drive sales,” McLemore says. “It provides a nice billboard for those not necessarily seeking dried plums and reflects what people see on the TV spot.”

Mariani’s Ackerman suggests a permanent rack or display that supports everyday consumer traffic, but supplementing that with shippers as secondary displays for “high volume displays during promotional periods, to drive an increase in sales. Some of the best times to promote dried plums are during the holiday baking months and during the beginning of the year when consumers are making a renewed focus on ‘better-for-you’ snacking and a ‘return to healthy eating.’”

The California Dried Plum Board has teamed up with Natalie Coughlin, the Olympic swimmer, to promote dried plums for the past two years. Promotions have included cooking and preparing recipes for dried plums, as well as educating the consumer about the health benefits. Stores can tap into the celebrity power and the information by using information available at [www.californiadriedplums.org](http://www.californiadriedplums.org).

With dried plums/prunes specifically, consumers do still need to be educated.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNSWEET GROWERS INC.

Whether the demographic prefers “dried plums” or “prunes,” it’s important to highlight the benefits of the fruit and how it can fit into a healthier lifestyle. “It’s no secret you have to educate people” says McLemore, who sees a strong future for not just prunes, but all dried fruit, but one “where we must continue to educate consumers.” This education includes providing opportunities to sample and information on how to use the product. Stores and suppliers should also consider, “How can you incorporate prunes beyond snacking? There’s a huge market out there where people are using raisins and cranberries where they could easily be using dried plums.”

Sun-Maid’s Tamble emphasizes the importance of using existing media attention to help educate consumers, such as the “Let’s Move” campaign started by First Lady Michelle Obama. Using this campaign to draw more attention to dried fruit helps educate parents about a healthful snacking alternative, particularly for kids’ lunches or treats. With the continued focus on healthy eating, “The dried fruit category continues to grow and will continue to grow with incremental sales thanks to merchandising by retailers,” he says.

Produce departments can continue to boost sales in the dried plum/prune segment and the whole dried fruit category if they utilize the suppliers’ tools and creatively educate consumers that the product is still delicious, healthy and convenient, regardless of the name they choose to use. **pb**



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Schubert Nursery Inc., Salinas, CA, offers its weathered-look Ivy Rustica Sun featuring a 10-inch pot of ivy that is hand-wrapped up the rusted wire frame. Packed three per case, the 10-inch Ivy Rustica Sun is 45 inches tall and has a diameter of 23½ inches.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**



**FPFC HOSTS EXPO  
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The Fresh Produce & Floral Council, LaMirada, CA, is hosting its Southern California Expo, July 19, at the Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim, CA. Featuring NBA legend, Bill Walton, as the keynote breakfast speaker, the one-day event will have hundreds of suppliers from the produce and floral segments of the industry exhibiting from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.



**CHICAGO SITE OF IGC SHOW**

The Independent Garden Center Show, produced by *Garden Chic* and *Nursery Retailer* magazines, Clearwater, FL, will be held August 16-18, at Navy Pier, Chicago, IL. In its fifth year, the event serves the sourcing, buying, information and education needs of IGC buyers. The event boasts more than 1,000 booths. This year buyers will appreciate expanded show hours.



**RED SQUARE GOES FLORAL**

HPP Worldwide, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, announces its Expo Flora Russia International Trade Fair will be held August 30-September 1 at Gostiny Dvor Hotel Red Square, Moscow, Russia. This industry-wide event serves all segments of the Russian floriculture industry, from breeders, growers and other floral suppliers to the traders of flowers and plants.



**NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW  
AND CONFERENCE**

Eastern Produce Council, Short Hills, NJ, and PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine, Boca Raton, FL, will host the second annual New York Produce Show and Conference November 7-9, 2011 in New York City. Held in Manhattan at the New York Hilton, the show will feature a keynote breakfast and approximately 342 exhibit booths. Companies offering products for floral departments are eligible to purchase booth space.



# Winn-Dixie's Winning Formula

PRODUCE BUSINESS sits down with Walt Grossman, director of floral for Jacksonville, FL-based Winn-Dixie Stores Inc. to discuss its strategy for going forward. **BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN**

Walt Grossman worked at Acme Markets in Philadelphia, PA, for 25 years, starting as a store clerk. Now, in the supermarket industry for 29 years, he taps his background in operations as he leads the floral program in the Southeast for Winn-Dixie Stores. Boosted by dedicated support from on-board suppliers, called business partners, Grossman attributes the well-implemented message — Simplify — as a motto that works. Referring to customers as guests, Grossman envisions continued accomplishments as the corporation focuses on knowing and better serving each region's demographics.

**PRODUCE BUSINESS: Since August 2010, you've been responsible for floral operations in 461 Winn-Dixie floral departments. What direction is the Winn-Dixie floral program headed under your leadership?**

Grossman: For the past 12 years, there has been a large decline in the number of traditional retail florists. We have a unique opportunity to differentiate ourselves by becoming the "Neighborhood Florist." With that goal, our focus is to offer all Winn-Dixie guests florist-quality products, including personalized upgrades that meet their needs while providing outstanding service.

**PB: What new initiatives have been implemented?**

Grossman: There's a move to simplify merchandising programs and take advantage of cross-merchandising opportunities. Most of my career has been spent in store operations and I realize that if a program is too complicated, it will be difficult to achieve 100 percent execution at store level. Product placement in high traffic areas such as the lobby and execution at store level is critical to driving sales since many floral purchases are impulse. Providing stores with a simple 1-page slide that includes a picture of how the display should look, as well as a few key bullet points, has helped improve execution.

Another important aspect of where Winn-Dixie's Floral is headed involves our cluster-driven strategy. Merchandising by cluster is helping us become unique and local since we have a better understanding of the demographics of each neighborhood. The cluster segments are: Affluent, African-American, Hispanic, Low-Income, Mature Suburb and Rural Working Families. We want to simplify, and the cluster-driven strategy helps us with that approach.

**PB: Do you have any major floral promotions planned or are you partnering with a supplier for limited-time offerings on themed bouquets?**

Grossman: We've developed a great business partnership with Passion Growers [of Miami, FL], and their consistent quality products help us

build a rose experience for our guests. For Memorial Day weekend, we are running a 100-store promotion where there is a half pallet drop of 10-stem roses for only \$7. The displays are easy for stores to execute and not require much labor. The displays will be placed in the lobbies, which enhances our overall fresh image and drives impulse sales, since it offers guests a great value.

**PB: You refer to your vendors and suppliers as business partners. Could you discuss their role and what it takes to become a business partner with Winn-Dixie?**

Grossman: In late March, we invited 100 vendor/suppliers, both current and new, to an all-day meeting in Miami. Bill Hendricks, our director of category management, presented Winn-Dixie's overall cluster-driven strategy. The purpose of the meeting was to provide the vendors with better insight regarding the makeup of Winn-Dixie and strategy of the floral department going forward.

I also challenged the vendors during that meeting with questions. How does your company differentiate from others in the industry? How does your company fit into our strategy? What are the three primary things that you are most proud of about your company? It's important that all business partners have a passion about their company and are aligned with our strategy by offering great quality product that is unique, which will ultimately help us differentiate our floral department from other retailers. One compliment that we heard from a vendor was they no longer felt as if they were just an order-taker.

They felt like a true business partner working with Winn Dixie to build success for both companies.

**PB: With stores in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, what does it take to differentiate Winn-Dixie floral from your competitors?**

Grossman: Going back to our cluster-driven strategy, we recognize that each store and marketplace can be very different. We are working very closely with our vendor business partners, our three regional merchandisers, Jeff Krieg in the South region, Larry Campagno in the West and Todd Greene in

the Central region, as well as all operations specialists to ensure that we have the right product offering and variety to meet our guests' needs on an everyday basis, as well as for special events. The cluster-driven strategy promotes in-store merchandising that reflects the community. For example, each store has to



Walt Grossman,  
director of floral,  
Winn-Dixie Stores Inc.,  
Jacksonville, FL





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be prepared to merchandise for local sports teams and holidays that may not be celebrated in other areas. Stores located near college towns or other sporting events can sell a large amount of balloons and other floral items in their favorite local teams colors.

In other areas, such as South Florida, there is an opportunity to offer totally different product and variety, especially in our Hispanic markets. We are currently working with a business partner to create a new bouquet line that includes wording in Spanish on the bouquet sleeves and more colorful flowers.

**PB: Do you see emerging trends in floral such as stronger sales in garden center types of floral products and hard goods?**

Grossman: Outside garden-mart selling provides an opportunity to capture additional sales in many areas of our company in each region. A solid plan, time commitment and proper care/handling are needed to ensure the success of both sales and profit when selling product outside, especially in areas where heat can be an issue. During this past spring, we merchandised three or four of the best selling outside potted items in approximately 90 stores across all three regions. Offering the right product selection, including product that has low maintenance care and handling is important. At this time we are finalizing plans to sell larger outdoor mums this fall in a select group of stores for those guests who want to decorate their front door entrances.

**PB: In what ways do you gather feedback from Winn-Dixie floral guests and your stores?**

Grossman: The majority of guest feedback is gathered primarily at store level. However, Winn-Dixie also has a formal 1-800 call system in place to obtain guest feedback. We rely heavily on the feedback from floral managers, operations specialists and merchandisers. Every week we have a conference call with the produce/floral regional merchandisers to discuss the previous week's sales, strengths, opportunities and obtain feedback.

For Mother's Day, we developed a 12-question survey that was sent to all floral managers a few days after the holiday. By listening to our team members, we were able to

determine what went well, what opportunities existed and how we can improve going forward.

We are currently in the process of partnering with Passion Growers to develop a 40-question rose survey that will be sent to guests that recently purchased roses at Winn-Dixie. We want to know what influences their buying decision, what colors they prefer and how often they purchase roses, how long the roses lasted, etc. This survey will help us learn more about our floral guests and their preferences.

**PB: What is Winn-Dixie doing to make floral a must-have product in consumers' shopping carts every week?**

Grossman: Floral is all about merchandising for eye-appeal, which helps to create impulse sales. It's having the right product mix in each store. However, I will always mention our commitment to quality because it's important to us and to our guests. We also see the strong connection we have with our business partners as a vital factor in enabling us to offer unique floral products to our guests to help differentiate. An example is our strong business relationship with burton + BURTON [the balloon and gift vendor based in Bogart, GA]. They offer imprint balloons with local school names, logos and colors that help us personalize the shopping experience.

**PB: What is the status of Winn-Dixie's arrangement with FTD?**

Grossman: We currently have a total of seven FTD "hub" stores that can receive, fill and deliver orders. We also have an additional 35 "spoke stores" that can take orders and send them to the "hub" stores. Over the past several months, we have had several meetings with FTD in order to gain a better understanding of the entire process and also discuss strengths and opportunities by store. We have many locations that are doing an outstanding job growing their FTD sales and we see the potential for continued growth. We are currently reviewing store-specific data to determine the appropriate next steps, including the feasibility of adding additional locations.

**PB: You mention Winn-Dixie floral positioning itself as the Neighborhood Florist. What advantages do you have as a large supermarket chain related to this neighborhood effort?**

Grossman: First and most important, is that we offer florist-grade quality products. Also, our cross-merchandising with other departments helps us provide solutions to our guests' busy lifestyles. This is especially important during events and holidays. Traditional florists don't have that opportunity. Guests also benefit from our ability to act on what we call "hot buys." For example, if a vendor business partner has extra cases of product on hand that ended up not going to the original buyer for whatever reason, they will offer it to us at a reduced cost. However, all product quality and specs must still meet our standards. We will then price the product at a great retail price to sell out quickly. This translates into a win for the supplier, a win for Winn-Dixie and a win for guests since they can purchase a great quality product at a great price.

**pb**



To read an expanded version of this interview with Walt Grossman go to [www.ProduceBusiness.com](http://www.ProduceBusiness.com) and click on the floral icon.



# A Merrier and More Profitable Christmas

*Table top, retail-ready Christmas trees make a jolly addition to your bottom line.*

While the Christmas tree has been a holiday tradition for centuries, this symbol of the season often presents difficulties for stores and consumers alike. Issues of size, convenience, labor and cost can put a damper on holiday spirit, especially with an aging population and economic cut-backs.

A new innovative table-top tree offers retailers the chance to serve their customers while bringing profitable and glad tidings to the store. "This product is ideal for people who want a live tree but due to any number of factors cannot get a traditional size tree," says Tom Leonard, president of Peak Seasons in River-

side, CA, supplier of the special water-based stand which requires no screws or nails to stand the tree. "They may not have space for a traditional size tree or may not want to spend a lot of money or have no way of transporting a large tree home."

Retailers likewise face challenges in offering a full-blown Christmas tree program. "Many retailers want to serve their customers by offering trees but they can't afford the labor of such a program," continues Leonard. "They may not have the staff or space to unload a truckload of trees in their parking lot and man outdoor sales."



## **READY MADE SOLUTION**

The smaller two- to four-foot "Retail Ready" Christmas tree allows a retailer to serve customers by offering a convenient item at a great price point. The trees are milled at the base to fit a specially made stand. The tree can then be shipped, merchandised and sold with a water-based stand attached. The retail-ready nature of the tree means very little handling, labor, or space is required at store level.

"This concept is very big in Europe where 15 million trees are sold this way but it's just starting to catch on here," reports Leonard. "The consumer benefits from not having to worry about a stand or struggle with the size of the tree. The retailer can merchandise an extremely popular and profitable item in a relatively small space."

The trees come by the Gaylord box (watermelon bin) completely ready for sale. The box holds around 25 trees and retail staff need only pull out a few trees for display. The only space taken up is that of the bin—the size of a pallet.

## **SUCCESSFUL START**

In just two years, these "Retail Ready" trees are off to a very successful start. The company sold 27,000 the first year and 150,000 last year. A large California retailer sold out their entire stock in just the first weekend they offered the product. A major national Christmas wholesaler ordered 30,000 "Quick Fit" tree stands last year and this year already has a standing order for 90,000. Peak Seasons is forecasting exponential growth as these trees become more common in the marketplace.

"Christmas trees are an emotional buy," says Leonard. "Once a live tree is part of your tradition, it's hard to give it up. However, many people these days are not able to purchase a large tree. These smaller trees really fill a need both for customers and retailers. It's a particularly great opportunity for grocery chains who over time have given up on Christmas trees because the business was burdensome. Now they have a profitable reason to sell fresh cut Christmas trees again."

The product is particularly well-suited to market to the elderly or empty-nesters as well as younger singles and couples who live in apartments. Average retail price ranges from \$19.99 to \$24.95 depending on the size of the tree. "These customers may not invest the time, effort and cost necessary to seek out a large traditional tree," suggests Leonard. "But, they will take advantage of this convenient, reasonably-priced tree."

## **TOP SOURCES**

Sales of the "Retail Ready" tree are made directly to the retailer by the Christmas tree grower. Peak Seasons supplies the special stands to top Christmas tree sources throughout the country and coordinates with them in this unique program. "Retailers don't have to worry about exorbitant freight costs or tree freshness," says Leonard. "In many cases trees come from the same regional sources as the larger traditional Christmas trees."

Peak Seasons is a 30-year old company and the leading manufacturer and supplier of Christmas tree lot supplies in the U.S. It supplies nationally and even ships into the Caribbean and Mexi-

co. Interested retailers can contact Peak Seasons who will help them work with their existing tree supplier to set up a program or channel them to a supplier with an existing program.



## **Peak Seasons**

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# A Holiday In Search Of Itself

Chinese New Year 2012 may bring good fortune for retailers who plan in advance, book floral orders now and creatively implement store-wide, cross-merchandising programs. **BY MEREDITH AUERBACH**



PHOTO COURTESY OF PRICE CHOPPER

Chinese New Year displays often include lucky bamboo, orchids, pachira (money trees) and plenty of red and yellow.

**U**.S. consumers find holidays irresistible. Each holiday offers the chance to celebrate with food and decorations, gifts and cards. Connecting with friends and family brings excitement to the ordinary routines of life and work. Likewise, savvy supermarket retailers prize these celebratory events to increase sales, profits and help establish the view that their store is different, exciting and a great place to experience new ideas.

Watchful retailers have seen Cinco de Mayo, St. Patrick's Day and Day of the Dead move beyond their ethnic origins to become ideal excuses for parties. So why not include Chinese New Year on that list?

There are some challenges, no doubt. The specific date of the Lunar New Year floats from year to year with a more-than-occasional conflict with Valentine's Day or the Super Bowl. We insist on calling it Chinese New Year when there are numerous other Asian cultures for which the lunar New Year is equally important. The share of Asian population in the U.S. is relatively small, and the traditions of the New Year celebration may be less familiar in many areas of the country.

However, this holiday offers great potential for the floral department in the coming year.

An old Chinese proverb says, "All creation is reborn on New Year's Day." Allen Yung, vice president of 99 International, Alhambra, CA-based sellers of Lucky Bamboo, notes, "Asians worldwide view every new year as a new beginning, the time to clean the house, take out the trash, pay every bill and put fresh flowers and live plants in every room of the house. The colors of red and yellow attract prosperity and good luck while brightening winter. Budding flowers on bare branches represent renewal."

In 2012, the Year of the Dragon roars in on January 23 — well apart from other holidays and a typically slow time in the winter calendar.

## Recognition Is Increasing

Kennicott Brothers, a 130-year-old grower and distributor of cut flowers located in Chicago, takes the long view. Lenny Walker, director of business development, says, "These things come in waves and we are now at the point of seeing every holiday as an opportunity to celebrate with floral products. Making it work is all about finding the right partner — sources and customers who want to run with it and grow. We started as peony growers before Mother's Day was even established so we believe there is good reason to be positive about Chinese New Year. Actually, our best

markets for it are Chicago, where we have our warehouses, and in Minneapolis. We contract grow red gladiolas in Mexico and have our own farms in several countries producing the other flowers. We will soon move into Canada and expand there," Walker reveals.

United Floral, a Vista, CA, company, owned by Miami, FL-based The USA Bouquet Co., designs floral bouquets with California-grown floral material for retailers. Director of sales, Steve Dionne, reports, "There is still primarily an Asian audience for Chinese New Year and it's growing, but so is the interest in communities with low Asian populations. As the distribution grows stronger, more young buyers looking for new ways to increase sales understand how holidays evolve; over time, they can lead with traditions that are better suited to today's customers. Retailers do a great job of marketing holidays, grabbing consumer attention and giving them new ways to look at tradition. We do mixed bouquets of red gladiolas and bright yellow chrysanthemums for retail supermarkets and can vary wraps to match colors."

Peter Smith, vice president of national sales for Chesapeake, VA-based White's Nursery and Greenhouses, explains the grower perspective:



“In our markets, of which Washington D.C. is the biggest, Chinese New Year is recognized, but not fully taken advantage of. We saw significant volume increases about two years ago and now are paying more attention. Ideally, we should start developing specific products to help promote these secondary holidays. It usually starts, however, with adapting current products to meet the needs of an order. The challenge always is making sure what we offer for any event provides value to both our customers and their consumers. In this case, that means better understanding of the culture and traditions of the event.”

### Plan Ahead

The best time to start preparing a great holiday display is right after finishing the current year’s event. Analysis of best sellers, display ideas, even photos can get planning for the next year off to a good start.

Working closely with suppliers helps ensure smooth operation. Growers need advance estimates to make sure the right supplies of flowers and plants are available. Pre-booking at least six months in advance makes sense. Creating special accessories for displays can take between six months and a year.

Jo Fry, marketing specialist for Nurserymen’s Exchange Inc., located in Half Moon Bay, CA, recommends putting together a sales forecast in early to mid-August followed by firm orders in October. “We have a section in our catalog showing some of the classic arrangements. We incorporate red to chase demons, yellow and gold for prosperity, lucky bamboo for good fortune, and potted plants and pachira, or money trees. In 2011, we introduced a dragon pick with great results; we expect even more in 2012 with year of the dragon. Pairing floral with décor items such as lanterns, banners, Chinese characters and bright red money envelopes makes it possible for a floral retailer to set up a display almost anywhere in the store. Pairing Chinese New Year themed floral products with traditional citrus in the produce department helps build results in both departments. It’s a great way to cross-merchandise.”

“You have to give a display enough time to be really effective,” reminds United Floral’s Dionne. “Build a good-sized, visual display one to two weeks in advance of the event, then add to it as the holiday gets closer to push harder and grab shoppers’ attention. You want to remind them, create some urgency and help them with solutions. Pulling together all the pieces takes time. We recommend preliminary orders six to 12 months in advance, even

though all the specific flowers may be available throughout the period.”

### Make It Serve Double Duty

While Chinese New Year is often considered a secondary holiday, there are other approaches that combine the traditions, colors and enthusiasm for the New Year with ways to custom-brand products in appealing ways.

“We have a product called a tempo strip,” comments Russell Wulfenstein, marketing coordinator for Temkin International Inc., in

Payson, UT. “It forms the top strip of a decorative sleeve or wrap; it offers a way to have high-graphic messages on a perforated strip of material about a price promotion, a supermarket logo, or a holiday description. The multi-use strip can be removed by the customer who wants a gift or by a retailer who wants to use the wrap after the holiday for a different occasion.

A colleague of Wulfenstein, Tatiana Perez, general manager of Temkin Miami, comments, “We also produce shipper displays to make

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## FLORAL & FOLIAGE MARKETING

out-of-department presentations easier and box wraps with different designs on each side called a Flip Ship to make them more versatile.

“Chinese New Year is not a big push for us,” admits Bill Byland, business manager for Micky’s Minis, located in St. Louis, MO, “but we do offer a bright red cup for curly or lucky bamboo that can be used effectively for Chinese New Year or as part of a regular display.”

### On The Front Lines

California-based Bristol Farms has 13 stores

in communities from San Francisco to San Diego, with most of the stores in the Los Angeles area. “You have to look at holidays like Chinese New Year on a community-by-community basis,” explains Alice Hosepian, floral marketing director for the upscale chain. “Our stores in South Pasadena and San Francisco have developed the event, appeal to Asian customers and are successful with floral marketing for it. We do have orchids and lucky bamboo year-round. It’s more about how they get merchandised along with yellow mums and



PHOTO COURTESY OF NURSERYMAN'S EXCHANGE

Retailers will offer customers red and yellow floral options to attract prosperity and luck.

the use of the red money envelopes. Customers in other areas have shown less interest. It is growing, but I’d say growing slowly.”

Across the country in a decidedly less Asian population center, Price Chopper has 130 stores scattered in a five-state arc around its headquarters in Schenectady, NY. Jon Strom, vice president of floral and lifestyle merchandising, describes the company’s situation: “Our stores tend to have a low share of Asian population; most are not big metro locations. Chinese New Year offers our full-service floral departments the chance to do something different, to have fun and to create a new look every week. Customers expect us to give them a new way of looking at life so we do. Our floral managers have plenty of latitude. They own the process and the results. We’ve had freestanding displays by the sushi bar because it attracts adventurous people who want to try new things. We’ll team it with citrus in the produce department. We’ll pull in plenty of décor items to create a new look. We see it as a fantastic opportunity for growth.”

In the Midwest heartland in Fairfield, OH, is Jungle Jim’s, a food and entertainment mega-store. Ashley Nienaber, floral designer and buyer, reports, “We get a small bump every year, but it is not wild and crazy like Valentine’s Day. Our Asian population is small, but we still work to make sure we have what any customer wants. You can find orchids and yellow Fuji mums and lucky bamboo for the holiday or year-round.

pb

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# Making Floral A Special Place

Whether staged as a lifestyle area or presented as a store within a store, retailers will want to use the right equipment and lighting to make the floral department inviting. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CARLSON AIRFLO

**Floral merchandising units on casters allow for greater flexibility in both size and location of floral displays.**

**A** large majority of customers who buy floral products make their decision after they see the products in the store. And the design, equipment and lighting in floral departments can make the difference in capturing those important impulse buyers.

“If you don’t have a good display out there, you’re throwing away \$100 to \$200 a day in floral sales. Right now, the challenge is that in this economy, floral is one of those things people can do without,” says Mark Chenowith, director of marketing at Carlson AirFlo, Brooklyn Park, MN. The company has developed modular display units on casters that allow greater flexibility in both the size and the location of floral displays.

## A Special Place

One supermarket chain in the Heartland is finding it worth the time and expense to design the floral department not just as a place to display merchandise, but also as a special room within the supermarket. That extends all the way to bringing in furniture that invites customers to take in a lifestyle that includes indoor flowers.

“We are a lifestyle department, so we display French country furniture and antiques within floral. We keep the display soothing to the eye by using wood tones such as walnut and cherry for a more traditional presentation,” says

Michael Schrader, director of floral at Schnuck Markets in St. Louis, MO. The idea behind the successful merchandising strategy is for shoppers to see how a variety of floral products can be incorporated into their own home designs.

Few, if any, other supermarket categories are as thoroughly reliant on impulse purchases as the floral department. “There have been a lot of studies about the percentage of floral revenue that is created by impulse buys. Some of these studies estimate this number to be as high as 80 percent, and nothing will increase impulse buys like quality lighting,” says Lee Rhoades, director of sales and marketing at Baero North America Inc., headquartered in St. Louis, MO. Baero manufactures a full range of lighting fixtures including track, suspended, recessed and tube systems to suit different merchandising needs.

“The vast majority of grocery stores are illuminated by fluorescents, which create a somewhat bland white light. For a higher-end presentation and feel, floral managers should consider a warmer, higher quality light such as ceramic metal halide or our high-pressure sodium lamps. First, these lamps accentuate the colors and textures of flowers in a way that fluorescents or even LEDs can’t. But this also helps create a store within a store making floral a destination, as opposed to an area shoppers simply pass by on their way to produce,” Rhoades explains, further adding that Baero

will be introducing a new line of LED fixtures at the IFE show in Miami, including an LED fixture designed specifically for vibrant colors.

“While LED technology cannot match HID lighting in presentation like ceramic metal halide in presentation and light output, LED fixtures do offer other advantages such as long life. It is important to know that a typical HID fixture is two to three times brighter than any LED track fixture available today,” says Rhoades.

Equipment can both draw attention to the floral products and significantly add to their value. “The fixture itself adds value. You can take a \$25 arrangement and put it on a wooden crate, or you can put it on a well-designed table and it looks like a \$45 arrangement. I want the fixtures to be attractive and clean, even though the emphasis is not on the fixtures but rather on the product,” says Marcy Britigan, president of MEI Specialty Refrigeration, in La Grange Park, IL.

MEI specializes in a full range of floral refrigeration and display units. In the past few years, MEI introduced flexible display options such as nesting tables, which can expand or slide underneath each other, and the 5-in-1 display that can effectively show anywhere from one to nine wet pack floral buckets. “We’re trying to get a clean and organized look without being structured,” Britigan explains.

## The Flexible Display

Some producers are emphasizing display



**“We need lighting that is directional, because we keep changing the layout of the department.”**

—Michael Schrader, Schnuck Markets

equipment that is flexible in order to make it easy to change the size of the display — and reduce shrink — to suit the needs of different floral holidays or different levels of merchandise.

“The 5-in-1 display makes a statement for flowers, but doesn’t take up a lot of space or take a lot of time to set up. All you need to do is take the flowers out of the box and put them in the stand. It makes a pretty bold statement,” Britigan says.

The 5-in-1 can be collapsed in stages all the way down to a display of a single bucket, without making it look like you are down to the last of the flowers.

Carlson AirFlo has come up with modular units on casters that make it convenient to merchandise small floral displays. “We have units that can be put together to make one larger unit. They are both curved and straight, and they can be made into an island,” Chenowith says.

One particularly popular use for these small, mobile units is miniature floral displays near the checkout stand to encourage impulse purchases. “We’re finding that grocery stores are putting more of these smaller merchandising units near the checkout stand. This motivates impulse purchases, and retailers like the smaller units since they reduce shrink,” Chenowith says.

**Evaluate Options**

Lighting plays an indispensable role in making the floral display a special place. “Without a lighting system that captures a shopper’s attention, most of these impulse buys will be lost opportunities. Floral departments inside a larger store such as a supermarket need lighting that sets them apart from the rest of the store so that the floral department isn’t lost visually,” Rhoades says.

The light on the floral products must be both bright and yet cool enough to be easy on

the plants and the air conditioning system. “You have to have the fixtures and the lights that give you bright light,” says Bradley Gaines, floral supervisor at United Supermarkets, headquartered in Lubbock, TX. United Supermarkets has more than 20 stores in Texas.

If the floral display is changed with any great frequency, the direction of the lights must be flexible. “We need lighting that is directional, because we keep changing the layout of the department.” Schrader says. He and other retailers are finding that LED provides a combination of strong light, low heat and reasonable economy.

But before purchasing the first light bulb, refrigeration unit or display table it makes sense to have a clear idea of the sort of floral department you’re putting together. “When we get requests to design a floral department, we gather information before we put things together. You need to know if there will be design work; will it all be cash-and-carry; will there be balloons? You need to know how much workspace and refrigeration you need. We could come up with a grandiose department and then find out it’s all cash-and-carry, and we’ve wasted our time,” Britigan says. **pb**

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# COMMEMORATING SUCCESS



**T**hey came. They saw. They didn't find. Relatively quickly after Wendy Brannen became the executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee nearly six years ago, she came to two realizations. First, many people connected to the industry, as well as those outside of the produce business, are interested in learning the history of Vidalia's sweet onion. Secondly, there was literally nothing visible telling the

three-quarter-century-old history of the onion, which was named the official Georgia state vegetable in 1991.

By the time a year passed, she had discussed the idea with enough growers, packers, community leaders and local governmental officials to set the wheels in motion to establish what would become the Vidalia Onion Museum, which opened to the public April 29, 2011.

Occupying only 1,300 square feet — small by comparison to many other museums — it tells the onion's story, and includes all of the challenges and successes. While those connected to the industry will most certainly stop by, already several out-of-state tour groups have scheduled visits.

Although the Vidalia onion is known throughout North America, few realize the journey from its discovery in 1931 to today's popularity that has made it the largest vegetable grown by volume in the state with a \$115 million value, according Gary Black, the recently elected Georgia Agricultural Commissioner. Recognizing the importance of agriculture to the state's economy, he is making marketing involvement and protecting the integrity of the brand priorities of his administration.

Farmer Moses Coleman from Toombs County, which surrounds the small city of Vidalia, discovered in 1931 that onions grown in the low-sulfur sandy soil were sweeter than any others. Recognizing a potential value, he began peddling them in the immediate area at a premium. Outside this area, the sweetest onion was known as the Bermuda variety.

Gradually, the Vidalia story spread throughout Central and Southern Georgia, but progress in expanding production and broadening consumption was ongoing. It was not until over 40 years later, in the mid-seventies, that plantings would exceed 600 acres.

As the success was spreading to the point it became nationally recognized, the premium pricing was an invitation for unscrupulous individuals to mix regular onions in with Vidalias. During the decade that followed, I remember well the challenges retailers faced obtaining unadulterated product, and as a result, frequently abstained from

promoting them.

Among the challenges was determining where onions could be grown and sold as Vidalias. Numbers of Georgia farmers believed onions grown anywhere in the southern half of Georgia should qualify. It wasn't until 1986 when the state legislature passed a bill establishing a contiguous 13-county area with portions of seven bordering counties defining production area. Today, 130 registered growers can sell Vidalias, producing on about 5 percent of all the onion acreage grown in the United States.

In 1989, the Vidalia onion producers were finally able to establish a federal marketing order, creating the Vidalia Onion Committee and the ability to fund research and promotional activity. Until that time, marketing had been restricted to the harvest season and the few weeks immediately following. Beginning in 1990, the industry started experi-

menting with controlled atmosphere storage, which now approximates 20 million pounds and expands the marketing season by up to six months. This increased marketing season provides the opportunity for creating imaginative marketing programs. With the vision that marketing has infinite possibilities, Brannen has taken the Vidalia onion marketing outside the traditional commodity in-store promotion contests and producer best recipe promotions to utilize expanded media involvement.

Initially, it was a tie-in involving limes and Corona beer to be followed

last year with the notable *Shrek* promotional program. Already this year, a full large-screen ad is being shown in New York City's Time Square, penetrating an entirely new marketing dimension.

This spring, a program is being coordinated with Delta Airlines to tie in with Georgia blueberries and onions. Then, in June, the Delta program will change to tie-ins including Georgia peaches, watermelon and onions. In addition, Vidalia onions are being promoted this season by singers with Universal Music Group Nashville

Fortunately, those involved with the product are not standing on their laurels, always investigating improved varieties, handling and storage methods. Numerous process items and cookbooks continually become available. Outstanding chefs feature Vidalia regularly. Success is worth commemorating.

Commodity groups need executive directors not only with an infinite marketing vision, but the ability to assure grower and governmental support for the concepts. The Vidalia Onion Museum's successful completion can be described as just another one of Brannen's marketing visions. The greater challenge will be finding space to incorporate future success.

**pb**



Wendy Brannen, of the Vidalia Onion Committee, cuts the ribbon at the opening of the museum.

**By Dave Diver**

Dave Diver is the former vice president of produce at Hannaford, and a regular columnist for PRODUCE BUSINESS.



# TREND SPOTTING IN EUROPE



PRODUCE BUSINESS had the opportunity to discuss the European fruit market with Sven Heinsohn, managing director of Global Fruit Point GmbH, a German produce importer and distributor.

**PRODUCE BUSINESS: What are some of the latest consumer trends that you are relating to your international supply partners? Do you have any specific trends**

**that U.S. exporters should know about?**

**Sven Heinsohn:** There are a few trends happening right now in the marketplace. The popularity of organic produce continues, though at a somewhat slower pace than in the past couple of years. Convenience has also become important to time-starved consumers and has entered the German market. However, the development of these value-added products in Germany is much slower than in other markets, such as the UK. Similar to the United States, there is an increasing trend toward regional produce, though imported fruit will always be important, as many items are not available in sufficient quantities from national production. There is also a focus on certified fruit with full traceability. Food safety and residue specifications are more important than ever and a key factor for sales. GlobalGAP, HACCP, BRC, social responsibility and regular lab analysis are only some of the key words of the daily fruit business.

**PB: How often do your representatives travel to the United States and what do you focus on when you are here?**

**SH:** The management and other key persons of Global Fruit Point travel to the United States at least once a year to attend the Produce Marketing Association Convention and meet with growers, exporters and other business partners. GFP also visits U.S. pear producers in Oregon and Washington.

**PB: What challenges do you experience with produce imported from the United States? Are there many customs issues or phytosanitary problems? What advice can you give U.S. exporters to make it**

**easier for you to bring these items in?**

**SH:** The residue specifications of individual customers exceeding legal requirements are a very important issue, not only for U.S. produce, but in general. We observe a positive trend compared to some years ago, meanwhile most growers/exporters are very much aware of these requirements.

Another topic of utmost importance is the treatment with wax. In the past, forbidden ingredients were found, specifically in U.S. waxes on citrus and apples. The United States must recognize that the European market is very strict regarding certifications and residue limits. As a result, the United States has lost a lot of market share in pears and Florida grapefruit. Many years ago, California grapes were very well represented in the European market, but due to spider and insect problems the interest in these products has decreased.

**The United States must recognize that the European market is very strict regarding certifications and residue limits. As a result, the United States has lost a lot of market shares in pears and Florida grapefruit.**

**PB: Does your company participate in any U.S.-sponsored promotional programs to help your customers sell produce at the point of sale?**

**SH:** No, because the U.S. Pear Bureau gives promotion money directly to retailers and not to importers.

**PB: How do you expect the future economic situations in both the United States and Europe to affect the import of American goods?**

**SH:** Europe has been heavily affected by the economic crisis since 2008 and 2009. Germany is recovering more quickly than many other European countries, but the Southern European markets are still somewhat problematic due to the overall economic situation in the Mediterranean region. Eastern Europe, on the contrary, is developing fine. Nonetheless, the produce sector is probably less under pressure than other industries for a simple reason: people will always have to eat.

It is important to keep in mind that the development of imports also largely depends on the exchange rate of the U.S Dollar/Euro. On average, the Euro rate has increased since mid-2010; thus the dollar return to growers should be favored by this trend.

Additionally, exporters are facing increased competition from other fruit-supplying countries worldwide that are entering the European market. On the other hand, U.S. exporters are shipping their fruit to new markets apart from Europe.

**By Sven Heinsohn**

Managing director of Global Fruit Point GmbH, based in Buxtehude, Germany



# COMING FULL CIRCLE

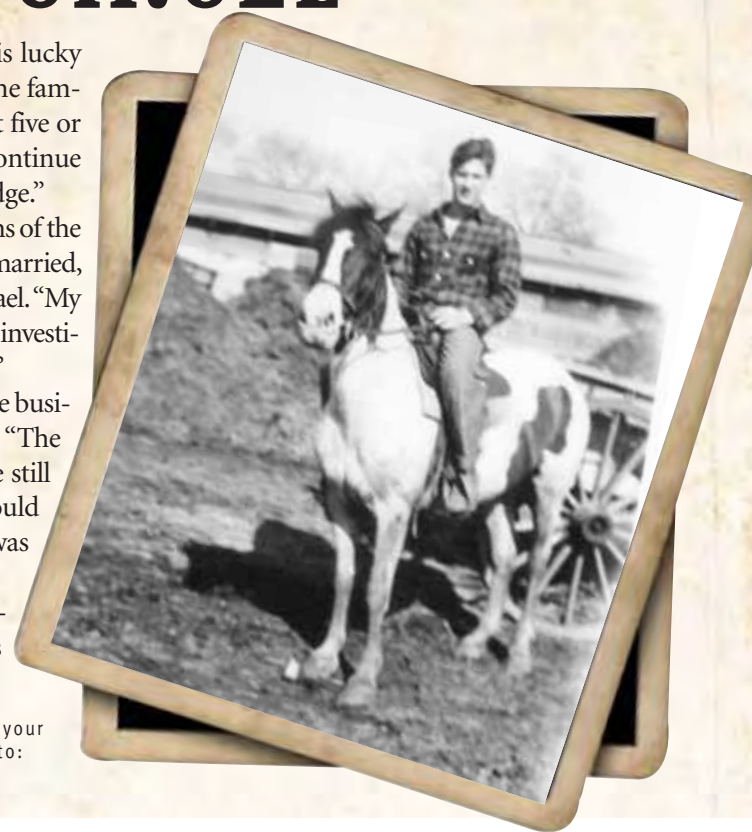
Michael Basciani, vice president of the Avondale, PA-based Basciani Foods, is lucky enough to call a living legend “Dad.” Mario D. Basciani, Michael’s father, joined the family business when he was a young man. “He started on the farm when he was just five or six years old,” says Michael of his father. “My siblings and I are lucky enough to continue to have him as an advisor. He is what gives our family business the competitive edge.”

Basciani comes from a long line of mushroom farmers. In addition to the patriarchs of the family, his mother’s family also grew mushrooms in the area. “Once my parents got married, they merged their family farms, forming what we know today as Basciani,” says Michael. “My children are the fourth generation in the business. My sons are currently in Europe investigating new growing techniques and my daughter takes care of our marketing needs.”

While many things have changed in the industry since his grandfather started the business, some things remain the same. “You can’t make mistakes now,” says Michael. “The numbers are tighter. Yields are up, but you have to work harder and smarter. We still harvest from my grandfather’s original farm. My dad, who was 16 at the time, would ride a horse that pulled along all the materials he needed (pictured at right). It was 1946, just around the time when people would begin to use tractors.”

Although he is no longer pulling compost, Mario is still involved in the day-to-day operations of the business. “He gets a review every morning and evening at his home office, and still personally receives all the bills and memos,” says Michael.

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail [info@producebusiness.com](mailto:info@producebusiness.com)



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