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GEORGIA GROWN FLORAL BUSINESS

INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT PUTTING A SPIN ON LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED
PETE'S FRUITS & VEGETABLES • HEAD LETTUCE SALES
RIPENING FRUIT • INDEPENDENCE DAY MARKETING • LOCAL VS LOCALE
NEW JERSEY PRODUCE • MICHIGAN PROFILE • GRAPE MERCHANDISING
REGIONAL PROFILE: CHICAGO • SALAD DRESSING • STONE FRUIT • PLUMS
INTERVIEW WITH SHIRLEY AXE • OPPORTUNITIES IN FAIR TRADE

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you schedule a Peel the Love event.



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PROUD



THIS MONTH'S WINNER



Owen Weller
Produce Manager
Ken's SuperFair Foods
Aberdeen, SD

Owen Weller has been working for Ken's SuperFair Foods, a family-owned grocery store headquartered in Aberdeen, SD, since 1999. Today, Weller is produce manager of the six-store chain and has a substantial history with the company.

"I was working in Grocery as a night manager," says Weller. "The owners asked if I wanted to run my own department, and

that's how I switched over to Produce."

As produce manager, Weller sets the ads and does the ordering as well as the stocking.

"I run the whole floral department," Weller adds. "I do any special floral projects for holidays and events as well."

Weller has been reading *PRODUCE BUSINESS* for about eight years.

"I like to read the entire magazine and see what's going on across the industry," says Weller.

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.

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QUESTIONS FOR THE JUNE ISSUE

- 1) What is the website for Anthony Marano Company? _____
- 2) In what year did The Consalo Group begin its family farming business? _____
- 3) What is the telephone number for Red Sun Farms? _____
- 4) What kind of fruit snack 4-pack is shown on the ad for North Bay Produce? _____
- 5) What kind of onions are showcased on the ad for Shuman Produce? _____
- 6) Which brand shows a selection of "authentic" single-served chopped salads in its ad? _____

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

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TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE 2014 FARM BILL

Ray Gilmer
Vice President, Issues Management & Communication



I guess we should be thankful that crafting a new Farm Bill only happens every few years; getting the 2014 bill finally passed was a lengthy, circuitous process — a three-year effort — that tested the dedication of everyone involved. We can't say enough about how much United Fresh appreciates the steady leadership of the Senate Agriculture Committee and the House Agriculture Committee in getting the Farm Bill passed. Thanks also go to our United Fresh members and other industry leaders who came to Washington, D.C., to meet with the members of Congress and their staffs, made phone calls, supported candidates and otherwise made their voices heard to their lawmakers.

Great job and congratulations! Now, let's leverage the power of this historic measure for the benefit of the produce industry.

The Farm Bill includes an overall investment increase of 55 percent over the 2008 Farm Bill funding levels in critical produce industry initiatives and programs, which include the State Block Grant Program, Specialty Crops Research Initiative, a new fruit and vegetable incentive grant program for SNAP recipients, and the pest and disease prevention program. The bill also maintains funding for the Market Access Program and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which United helped to spearhead in Congress more than 10 years ago to provide fresh produce snacks in schools. The federal commitment to specialty crop needs included in the bill is unprecedented and builds on the momentum begun under the 2008 Farm Bill.

When you consider the value afforded to the produce industry in research, market promotion, pest and disease programs and nutrition initiatives, the 2014 Farm Bill marks a tremendous victory for fresh produce. Plus,

it underscores how much policymakers recognize the importance of our industry to the nutritional well-being of all Americans and to the overall U.S. economy.

With a total value to the industry of nearly \$780 million, and spread among many programs, it might be hard for industry executives to get their arms around what these programs are doing to drive value for their businesses. Plus, there's the challenge of knowing how to take full advantage of some of these programs, such as school nutrition purchases, market access promotion, and block grants.

Not long after the bill's signing ceremony on the campus of Michigan State University in East Lansing, which was hosted by Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan (chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee), United Fresh started efforts to educate our members about the ways they could put the Farm Bill programs to use for their businesses. After all, that's a big benefit of this legislation — growing our industry — and there are provisions that can have a positive impact on virtually any fresh produce operation.

The United Fresh staff hit the road during our Spring Fresh Impact Tour, with nearly two dozen stops along the way across the country, to help spread the word about how the 2014 Farm Bill benefits the entire industry. There's no substitute for that face time with grower-shippers, wholesalers, processors, suppliers and others in the industry to discuss the state of their businesses and ways to put the Farm Bill programs to work.

We also created a few infographics that illustrate what the Farm Bill delivers for the produce industry. I'm not a numbers guy (math was not my strongest school subject), so for me, the graphics help tell the story of

what we've been able to accomplish — and will be accomplishing over the next five years — with this myriad of produce-target programs.

In April, the USDA announced the availability of millions of dollars in Specialty Crop Block Grants to state departments of agriculture for projects that help support specialty crop growers. A new provision for the 2014 bill, and one which United strongly supported, is the ability to provide grants across multistate regions, allowing the money to be used on regional needs without the need to parse the money out state-by-state. It just makes more sense.

The block grants are allocated to states based on a formula that takes into consideration both specialty crop acreage and production value. Nearly all states are seeing an increase in funds. Under this formula, California gets about \$20 million, Florida \$4.5 million and Washington \$4.3 million, to name a few. Even specialty crop producers in the District of Columbia have money available. Who knew we had growers in D.C.?

Don't forget about the value of the nutrition programs for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) recipients and school meals. In the new bill, there is money to provide incentives for SNAP users to buy produce. And the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is going strong at \$150 million a year. That's a lot of fresh produce for kids who might not otherwise have access to fresh fruits and vegetables at home.

Without a doubt, the 2014 Farm Bill has a lot to offer the entire industry over the next five years, but you shouldn't wait that long to get engaged. Visit United's Farm Bill page at UnitedFresh.org/FarmBill and learn more about how your business can take advantage of all that it offers.



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PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

DJ FORRY COMPANY NOVATO, CA

The DJ Forry Company announces the hiring of **Brian Sekeneske** for the expansion of its sales team. Sekeneske will work to utilize his extensive produce background in order to develop new customer relationships and enhance current long-term partnerships.



READY PAC IRVINDALE, CA

Ready Pac Foods Inc. announces the hiring of two new vice presidents in the areas of Environmental Health & Safety and Engineering & Maintenance. **Derek Bogard** will be responsible for integrating superior environmental health and safety practices and processes into the entire operational area of Ready Pac.



Kamran Lodi will focus on developing and implementing engineering and maintenance solutions in coordination with operations, internal industrial, and facilities engineering. Both Bogard and Lodi will report directly to Pete Laport, chief supply chain officer for Ready Pac.



AMERIFRESH SCOTTSDALE, AZ

Tim Meissner is named senior vice president of sales and marketing for Amerifresh. Most recently Meissner served in roles as supply chain officer and chief operating officer with Southern Specialties of Pompano Beach, FL. Meissner is responsible for Amerifresh's retail, foodservice and international sales and marketing efforts.



AYCO FARMS POMPANO BEACH, FL

Ayco Farms announces the hiring of **Daniel Ramirez Van Hoorde** as its new general manager in Mexico. Ramirez will work out of Ayco's new office in Irapuato, Guanajuato. The hiring of Ramirez and opening of the new office is yet another layer in Ayco's strategic plan designed to meet customer needs.



GOURMET TRADING COMPANY LOS ANGELES, CA

Gourmet Trading Company announces **Lauren Del Rosario's** membership with the first Fresh Produce and Floral Council (FPFC) Apprentice Program. Del Rosario has seven years of experience in the produce industry. She became interested in produce through her experience as a professional chef.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

BRAGA FRESH EXPANDS ORGANIC OFFERINGS

Braga Fresh, Salinas, CA, launches sleeved celery and celery hearts as part of the newest fresh vegetables added to its sustainable produce brand, Josie's Organics. While Braga previously offered unbranded celery, the new item allows retailers to take full advantage of the popularity of Josie's Organics — including its award winning packaging with its signature logo and polka-dots.



SETTON PISTACHIO SPONSORS 35TH ANNUAL SPORTS EMMY AWARDS

Setton Farms, Terra Bella, CA, announced its sponsorship of the 35th Annual Sports Emmy Awards. This year's award show was held at Frederick P. Rose Hall in New York City. Guests included celebrities, athletes and the most influential people in sports media.

GOURMET TRADING ANNOUNCES EARLY START TO ITS BLUEBERRY SEASON

Gourmet Trading Company, Los Angeles, CA, prepares for an early start of its California blueberry season. The company began its packing in mid-April. From now until the end of June, the company predicts promotable volumes of fresh blueberries from its California farm.



ORGANICS UNLIMITED INCREASES ACREAGE

Organics Unlimited, San Diego, CA, adds 370 acres of certified organic banana production in Michoacan, Mexico to increase its supply of bananas. This new acreage will provide an additional six to seven loads of product per week in the summer and about four loads per week in the winter.

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

NEW PRODUCTS



WP RAWL LAUNCHES KALE CHIPS KIT WITH UNIQUE FLAVOR
 WP Rawl, Pelion, SC, introduces a new product to the Nature's Greens line. The new ready-to-baked kale chips kit showcases the versatility of kale and will launch at various retailers throughout the country. The 12-ounce kale chips kit includes a chili and lime seasoning packet and pre-cut kale.

BOLTHOUSE FARMS' LAUNCHES GREEK YOGURT DRESSINGS
 Bolthouse Farms, Bakersfield, CA, launches its first traditional Greek yogurt dressing line. These items are flavorful, creamy, and low-calorie (only 40 calories per serving). The line offers new twists on old favorites; for example, Peppercorn Ranch and Bold Blue Cheese or Mediterranean-inspired flavors such as Creamy Basil and Cucumber Dill.



PICO HIGHLIGHTS NEW FRUIT VARIETIES AT LONDON PRODUCE SHOW
 PICO, the Egypt-based fruit exporter, was one of the many new product lines featured at the London Produce Show and Conference this month. Avocados, mangos and pomegranates were among the new varieties introduced.



BRIMAPACK DEBUTED AWARD-NOMINATED EXTENDED SHELF-LIFE INNOVATION
 BrimaPack, Ulf, Netherlands, is set to highlight a new shelf-life innovation at the upcoming United Fresh 2014 trade exhibition in the form of FreshCast BF, a product for broccoli and cauliflower items. FreshCast BF uses specially developed packaging film, which, when combined with BrimaPack's NicePack packing systems, can significantly increase product shelf life and freshness, helping in the process to reduce food waste.

GESEX GROWTH PLANS FOR UK
 Gesex, one of Chile's largest fruit exporters, will showcase its newest items in table grapes and stone fruit at this month's United Fresh conference. The company also seeks to improve contacts with existing customers and consolidating its position in the country. Gesex's commercial executive, Felipe Casanova, said the exporter is looking for new opportunities in the U.K., particularly for its key product range.



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PRODUCE WATCH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NATIONAL WATERMELON ASSOCIATION LAUNCHES MARKETING VEHICLE

The National Watermelon Association, Lakeland, FL — in cooperation with a small group of growers and shippers, two paper manufacturers, and graphics support from the Board — has created a new marketing vehicle that aims to increase watermelon sales at retail. A Pre-Print bin is now available for the summer 2014 season.



WISH FARMS OFFERS YEAR-ROUND BERRY PROGRAM

Wish Farms, Plant City, FL, is now offering a year-round supply of conventional and organic strawberries and blueberries. With the Florida strawberry season completed, focus turns to the California strawberry season and Florida blueberry season. This will be the company's first year of growing organic strawberries in California.



APIO EAT SMART INTRODUCES NEXT GENERATION OF STIR FRY

Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA, is announcing the release of its two newest superfoods products: the Eat Smart Shanghai Blend Stir Fry Kit and the Eat Smart Kale & Red Chard Stir Fry Kit. With cooking directions on the back, the package includes a recipe for using the vegetables as the basis for a heartier main dish with soba noodles and pork.



RUMA FRUIT OFFERS LIMITED-SUPPLY OF FIDDLEHEAD FERNS

Ruma Fruit and Produce, Everett, MA, has been offering a limited supply of fiddlehead ferns since April 28 and an increasing supply as the season progresses. In addition, the company offers retail clamshells in 4-ounce and 8-ounce pack sizes. This year it also added a consumer friendly resealable pouch in the 8-ounce pack size.

MOONLIGHT JOINS SUN WORLD'S STONEFRUIT PROGRAM

Sun World International LLC, Bakersfield, CA, names Moonlight Sales Corporation, headquartered in Reedley, CA, as its newest licensee, enabling the Moonlight family of companies to access and expand Sun World's renowned peach, plum, nectarine and apricot varieties. The appointment follows recent decisions by Sun World to bolster its stone fruit-breeding program and to expand its California presence.



NEW C.H. ROBINSON TAGLINE ADDRESSES MARKET DEMANDS

C.H. Robinson, Eden Prairie, MN, announces the launch of a global tagline, "Accelerate Your Advantage," which represents how the company allows shippers to advance their goals, outpace competitors, and achieve a faster, more efficient supply chain. The new tagline reinforces the ongoing dedication of its employees and emphasizes the benefits of working with C.H. Robinson.



NATURIPE FARMS FEATURES DISNEY CHARACTERS ON NEW PACKAGING

This spring, Naturipe Farms of Salinas, CA, releases new packaging featuring Disney Princess characters and a themed eBook including recipes and activities for young consumers. Naturipe Farms will introduce 1-pound clamshells of strawberries featuring well-known Disney Princess characters on-pack. Included on the label is an offer for a free Disney Princess recipe eBook, which is downloadable through a QR code.



FARMINGTON FRESH PARTNERS WITH TAJIN FOR FOODSERVICE SNACK

Farmington Fresh, Stockton, CA, signed a deal with seasoning blends leader, Tajin International Corp. for a cross-merchandising opportunity to include single serve Tajin packs with single serve packs of fresh-cut fruit for foodservice. The all-natural seasoning provides a "zing" to fruits and vegetables and amplifies the existing flavor of foods it's sprinkled on.



CALIFORNIA AVOCADO GROWERS COMMIT TO HAND-GROWN QUALITY

Growers for the California Avocado Commission, Irvine, CA, share a proud mandate: a commitment to quality, reliability and good agricultural practices. From April through Labor Day, independent operators, chains and onsite foodservice companies rely on California Avocado growers to deliver creamy, handcrafted fresh California Avocados to enhance seasonal menus and LTOs (limited time offers).

MARKET FRESH'S NEW LOOK FOR BRIGHT FUTURE

Market Fresh Produce (MFP), Nixa, MO, announces the launch of its new logo. This logo represents the fresh-from-the-farm message that MFP's products truly embody. With the bright green color and simple barn graphic, MFP is confident this logo will catch the eye of consumers across the country.



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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* Consumer Tracking Study 2013
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GLOBAL PLATFORM TRANSFORMS PROCUREMENT PARADIGM

By James Prevor

President & Editor-in-Chief



As United Fresh and the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) review their on-again/off-again cooperation with a unified event in Chicago, one can only wish the parties well. There is substantial reason to believe that the combined event will be significantly more successful than such events would have been if done separately. FMI represents a highly consolidated industry, and its active membership is

mostly C-suite executives, whose procurement focus is on things such as massive IT systems and front-end systems, which are vital but a tad dry. Most importantly, the Top 20 of its membership is so large that any vendor will do custom presentations at a drop of a hat. The size curve drops so dramatically that it is not clear the vendor community even wants to pursue them.

The produce industry is diverse and fractured, and United's participation adds life and color to what would otherwise be a dry FMI event. The industry is wedged in this position because of the wholesalers, distributors, brokers, exporters, etc., and the commonalities of these folks have very little to do with the Top 20 supermarket chains.

As a short-term expedient, it was probably wise of United to coordinate with FMI, but when one thinks of the supermarket industry, one thinks of the famous line from William Butler Yeats' poem, *The Second Coming*, written in the aftermath of the first World War where the very foundation of the order that ruled the world was destroyed in the massive carnage of the "war to end all wars . . . Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."

Wal-Mart is the mighty leader, with its volume dwarfing all that surround it. Yet the titan lives in the shadow of giants that have fallen before it: The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, Sears, Roebuck and Company and others. If someone came along with a good offer to sell every supercenter, wouldn't the wise course be to sell? After all, only a slight pivot of sales to online models would decimate all brick-and-mortar retailers with their high-fixed costs and lack of location flexibility. And Wal-Mart's greatest asset — countless millions of square feet of retail space — would instantly become a massive liability.

The great tie that unifies mature markets around the world is the rise of the hard discounter. We see it most strongly in the U.K., where ultra-efficient supply chains simply can't be forced to give more blood — but when everyone is ultra-efficient, there is no competitive advan-

tage in being efficient.

In the U.K., the retailers were being clever eliminating brand loyalty and brand equity by focusing on private label product. Then they turned around and found that ALDI and Lidl could do private label too. Suddenly, there was no way for consumers to compare accurately between chains. There was also nobody to make the investment to persuade the next generation to build the category.

So everyone is cheap, everyone sells private label products that can't be compared easily, and everything seems the same. What's left for retailers to make continuous price "investments" for competitive edge?

The demand among retailers is transparency, but that factor almost always translates into a vendor reaction to avoid investment. Transparency in the supply chain translates into retailers not allowing producers to get the kind of return on invested capital that encourages more investment. As a result, the vendor community won't be able to

raise money. It is a dark vision of gradual decay as sunken investments are patched together.

The whole method of procurement is being transformed. What is really involved in a global branding initiative — such as C.H. Robinson's move to Robinson Fresh? They unveiled this new strategy at The London Produce Show, and with good reason. It is not a problem to be Rosemont Farms, Timco Worldwide or FoodSource if you are just

selling regional chains or even national chains. However, if a firm wants to go to Wal-Mart or Costco and say it wants to make a global tender for business, it needs a global platform. Marketing expresses the strategic direction of the firm.

Buyer receptivity to this is driven by a search for consistent standards — especially on food safety, traceability and sustainability. Branding is becoming more crucial than ever, because it establishes a commitment to supply chain responsibilities.

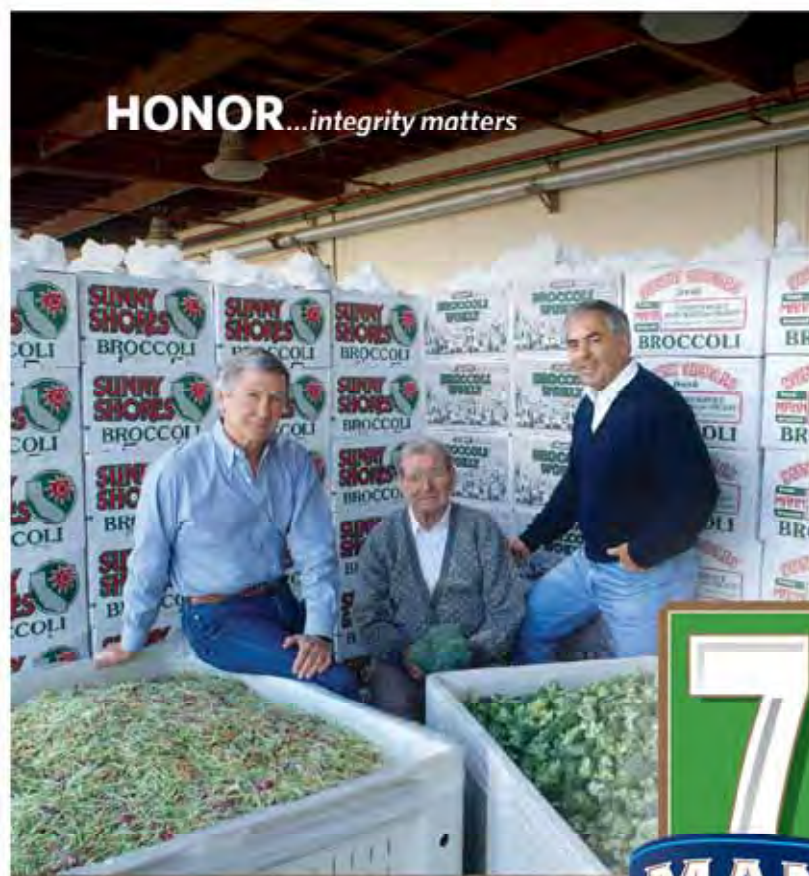
Look at the supply base being transformed before our eyes. Think of a product such as avocados. There was a time when it was perfectly viable to be a marketer just of California avocados. Now it is not just a matter of finding a counter-seasonal source; it is having 10 sources: Mexico, Peru, Kenya and so on.

One would despair, but this new procurement paradigm is Schumpeterian "creative destruction" at work. It will destroy the retail base as we knew it; it will destroy the supply base as we knew it. But through the haze, a new global vision is emerging, with different ways of sourcing and selling products, and also ways consumers will find beneficial. The challenge itself is to be the one who sees through the haze. **pb**

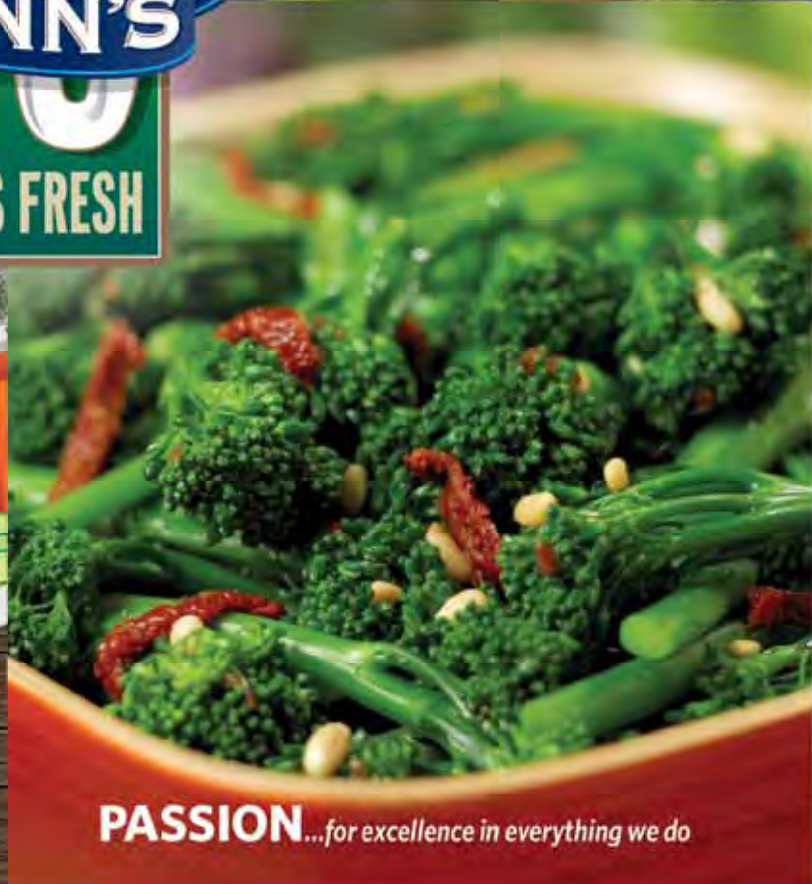
Global sourcing of produce will change the way retailers choose their supply chain partners.

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QUALITY...people, products and service



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MANN'S
75
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Menu Analysis Shows New Twist On Old Favorites

BY MAEVE WEBSTER, SENIOR DIRECTOR, DATASSENTIAL

There's no question produce is playing a larger role in foodservice. Driven by several macro trends including the continued, and expanding, presence of better-for-you behavior, increased focus on local sourcing, ongoing price pressures with multiple proteins, and improved availability of a wide range of varieties, both operators and consumers are placing a greater emphasis on produce.

But, with an endless bounty of produce options available, chefs and other foodservice operators are looking to existing menu trends to gauge consumer interest and to ease customers into more innovative, adventurous produce options.

New Versions Of Old Favorites

The top-menus produce has stayed fairly consistent over the past few decades — onions (92%), tomatoes (86%), peppers (85%), and mushrooms (80%) have become basic, essential ingredients on the menu. As menu innovation both impacts and responds to consumer demand for new food experiences, operators are introducing new varieties and unique new options to increase interest, create new flavors, and leverage on-trend world cuisines.

But how does an operator keep the menu fresh and evolving without losing the appeal of those long-standing customer favorites? The answer is to find new and unique varieties of those very same customer favorites, giving the consumer a familiar, enjoyable ingredient while adding interest with new flavors, textures, and visual appeal.

Take mushrooms, for example. The vast majority of restaurants menu at least one item featuring mushrooms. As consumers became more comfortable with mushrooms, operators branched out, adding Portobellos (18%), Crimini (3%), and wild mushrooms (9%). Now, some of the fastest growing mushroom types are even more exotic — varieties like Black Trumpet, Hen of the Wood, and Oyster mushrooms.

Last year's intense focus on kale (5%) can be traced back to the growth in menuing and appeal of spinach. As spinach (59%) saturated the market, operators looked for

another dark green vegetable with an equally healthy perception that could be used in a wide variety of applications. Enter the year of kale and its rapid proliferation on the menu.

You can see this same type of menu evolution occurring with a wide variety of produce. Tomatoes transitioned from standard, often unnamed varieties to quality-driven, brand name varieties like San Marzano. Operators are also leveraging a rainbow of heritage varieties as well as countless hybrids featuring names as colorful as the fruit itself: Mortgage Lifter, Cherokee Purple, Green Zebra, and Bull's Heart.

Looking Abroad For Inspiration

While restaurants and other operators have an ever-expanding selection of domestically-grown fruits and vegetables available to them, the growth of world cuisines in the U.S. is providing even more produce inspiration — and more options. Americans are increasingly exposed to "new" cuisines such as Peruvian, Korean, Scandinavian and Filipino and, in turn, discovering new types of produce that were previously unknown and unavailable.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the growing array of peppers, hot and sweet, available on today's menu. Operators are experimenting with new varieties from Central and South America, like Aji (<1%), Cascabel (<1%), Arbol (1%), and Guajillo (1%), while Ghost peppers (<1%) are delivering incredible heat from India. Meanwhile, Spain's milder Piquillo (1%) adds a sweet heat to dishes as does the Shishito pepper (<1%) from Japan.

Fruit is not immune to this trend, with chefs scouring the globe for new, more adventurous options. Restaurants have introduced unique citrus varieties including Yuzu and Buddha's Hand from Asia. As operators continue to experiment with sweet and savory combinations, the use of berries in savory applications is likely to increase — think berries from Scandinavia, such as Lingonberry and Cloudberries, adding a sweet and tart component to heritage or wild meats.

Digging Into The Archives

While much inspiration comes from abroad, some creativeness is driven by history, as on-trend chefs seek inspiration from recipes and ingredients that were popular decades, even a century, ago. Now everything old is new again. Items such as pickled vegetables and hand-foraged herbs, or "retro" dishes using deviled eggs — even Prohibition-era cocktails and speakeasies are back.

Which means, of course, that produce follows suit, with "classic" produce items used to create an authentically and accurate dish — vegetables like sorrel, salsify, watercress, and leeks, or fruits like kumquats, persimmons, and quinces. And as these ingredients find their way into operators' kitchens, chefs are getting more adventurous with them; rhubarb, for example, can be found in everything from an old-fashioned strawberry rhubarb pie to innovative savory and beverage applications.

Key Takeaway

Inspiration can come from anywhere. It's important to look at macro trends to understand how chefs are leveraging particular ingredients. Though produce certainly helps to elevate the perceived healthfulness of a dish, the ever expanding selection of fruits and vegetables available to restaurants provide an even more expansive palate from which to experiment and create.

Produce creates outstanding visual appeal, an endless array of textures, and a rainbow of colors. Whether drawing inspiration from heirloom varieties or looking abroad for authentic touches, produce can be a solid base for innovation.

Note: All percentages are penetration or percent of operators' menuing from the annual Chains & Independents MenuTrends database, which covers just under 5,000 unique menus, from the largest national chains to small independent restaurants.



DataSential is a leading provider of trends, consumer behavior, and B2B insights for the food industry

Looking For A Bigger Win

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

If the industry is going to get serious about using foodservice as a venue to boost consumption, the trade needs to invest in serious research to understand the behavioral effects of different produce offerings in restaurants.

This piece of research indicates two things clearly. First, there are boundless opportunities for individual companies to promote intriguing new items in the foodservice sector. Chefs yearn for innovative items by which they can distinguish their cuisine from others, and, especially in the white tablecloth sector where price points are high, chefs actively seek to differentiate their offerings from what patrons could get at more moderately priced chain restaurants.

Second, this research gives precious little credence to the idea that it is easy to increase total produce consumption or that the joint PMA/NRA/FDA effort, launched in July of 2009 to double produce consumption in foodservice, has had any impact at all.

Most of these exciting new items appear in less than 2 percent of all menus. This is because they are used solely in specific ethnic dishes or because they are used solely by white-tablecloth chefs. Since, say, Thai restaurants are only a small percentage of all restaurants and white-tablecloth restaurants are less than 1 percent of the U.S. foodservice scene, neither of these approaches can effectively move the needle on consumption.

When there is a real breakthrough, as with kale, this research explains clearly the dynamic:

Last year's intense focus on kale (5%) can be traced back to the growth in menuing and appeal of spinach. As spinach (59%) saturated the market, operators looked for another dark green vegetable with an equally healthy perception that could be used in a wide variety of applications. Enter the year of kale and its rapid proliferation on the menu.

This trend is great for anyone with a specific interest in selling kale, but for anyone interested in either the commercial

interests of the produce industry in expanding sales or increasing public health through dietary change, there is nothing here. Some restaurants want to innovate, so they replace spinach with kale. Where is the win there?

Yet a paucity of data, plus an urge to self-congratulatory presentations, has led most assessments of success or failure on the issue of produce in foodservice to focus on facts of questionable relevance — such as menu mentions — or “case studies” that don't assess all the relevant variables.

So a chef shows that his restaurant reimaged a dish, replaced a 1,500-calorie breaded Veal Parmesan on an ocean of spaghetti, covered it with cheese and with a few ounces of grilled veal and some vegetables. The restaurant announces that the new dish outsells the old. But the study never discusses whether it has changed eating habits or whether the same people who bought the Veal Parmesan are now switching their orders. It is quite likely that those who wanted the mega meal have switched to the equally gluttonous lasagna, and the grilled veal and vegetables are a switch from the salad set.

THE PMA/NRA/FDA initiative was doomed from the start, because nobody had baseline data on how much produce was used in foodservice; therefore, nobody will be able to say what happened to usage in 10 years.

Furthermore, nobody is doing the kind of research that would really tell us if menu changes in restaurants make a difference. First we have to know if changing dishes can really change eating habits in the restaurant. Do people switch from the 16-ounce Veal Parm over pasta to the 3-ounce grilled veal and steamed vegetables if given the option? But that is not enough if we are interested in public health. Maybe the larger serving satiates hunger, and those people skip dessert. Maybe the fewer-calorie serving makes people feel they ate virtuously and so they can indulge in a banana split. Or maybe the lower-calorie choice leaves people raiding the fridge at 2 a.m.

Few are inclined to fund or conduct this

kind of research, so at chef conclaves they give each other awards for reimaging dishes without any evidence that their efforts make any difference at all on produce usage or public health.

None of this takes anything at all away from chefs who use produce in an innovative manner or vendors and producers who

If the industry is going to get serious about using foodservice as a venue to boost consumption, the trade needs to invest in serious research to understand the behavioral effects of different produce offerings in restaurants.

work to introduce new items. If we didn't do that, produce would be a bore, and sales and consumption would ultimately decline. It is just like saying that putting tail fins on a car may switch people to that model, but it probably won't increase the overall number of cars sold over a long period of time.

So if the industry is going to get serious about using foodservice as a venue to boost consumption, the trade needs to invest in serious research to understand the behavioral effects of different produce offerings in restaurants. Otherwise every kale triumph will come at the cost of a spinach failure, and we will have accomplished little or nothing.

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JIM PREVOR'S

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A STORY HALF-TOLD: Putting A Spin On The Long-term Unemployed

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 04.30.2014

We've never met Abe Gorelick, but Annie Lowrey, Washington bureau reporter at *The New York Times*, has made him the poster child for the long-term unemployed in a piece titled, "Out of Work, Out of Benefits, and Running Out of Options":

BOSTON — Abe Gorelick has decades of marketing experience, an extensive contact list, an Ivy League undergraduate degree, a master's in business from the University of Chicago, ideas about how to reach consumers young and old, experience working with businesses from start-ups to huge financial firms and an upbeat, effervescent way about him. What he does not have — and has not had for the last year — is a full-time job.

Five years since the recession ended, it is a story still shared by millions. Mr. Gorelick, 57, lost his position at a large marketing firm last March. As he searched, taking on freelance and consulting work, his family's finances slowly frayed. He is now working three jobs, driving a cab and picking up shifts at Lord & Taylor and Whole Foods.

"I'm not in my basement, unshaven, unshowered, drinking a bottle of Scotch a day," Mr. Gorelick said. "I'm out there working these jobs, meeting people and trying to make something happen. But it is exhausting. It is stressful. It is difficult."

We wish Mr. Gorelick well, but Ms. Lowrey did a disservice to her readers in simply running the parts of the story that seem to have fit with the narrative she wanted to present, because something is very wrong with this story.

First, she didn't ask any of the logical and obvious questions that a reader would want to know to determine if this is really a public policy problem or if this is simply a choice that Mr. Gorelick has made. Simple questions: Is Mr. Gorelick willing to relocate? Has Mr. Gorelick insisted on a salary

We wish Mr. Gorelick well, but Ms. Lowrey did a disservice to her readers in simply running the parts of the story that seem to have fit with the narrative she wanted to present, because something is very wrong with this story.

minimum for accepting a new professional position and what might that be? Is he willing to change professions, say, from marketing to sales?

Second, if Mr. Gorelick is willing to do all that might be necessary to get a new professional position, there is still something off about this report. Mr. Gorelick attended the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and has a master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Chicago. These are among the top business programs in the world. Since he is 57 years old, many of his classmates are most likely wealthy and in important positions in business.

Mr. Gorelick is in marketing, so we can assume he has cultivated and retained many relationships. So if he is willing to do what it takes to reestablish himself, what does it say about the way Mr. Gorelick is perceived by people who have known him a long time that not one of these captains of industry is prepared to offer their friend and classmate a position? The reporter here didn't seem to interview anyone to find out why they were choosing not to extend Mr. Gorelick any offers of employment.

Third, it is not clear why Mr. Gorelick needs a job at all. Marketing involves lots of project work, and an esteemed professional active in the field for 30 years — now able to offer bargain prices as he works from his house without rent or overhead — should be able to make a living with his own firm. Look at a guy such as Dick Speszano. Had Vons not been acquired by Safeway, he would have probably stayed employed, but when the luck of the draw

turned against him, he leveraged a lifetime of knowledge, contacts and connections and made his own luck. That Mr. Gorelick can't make this happen is odd and tells us that there is more to this story than we are being presented.

Fourth, the piece is quite oblique about Mr. Gorelick's financial situation. It says that he is the family's "primary breadwinner" but not whether his wife made 49% of their earnings or 2%. It says he has had to wipe out his retirement accounts, but not what kind of cash reserve he had built over his decades in business. It says he struggled to cover his mortgage, but not how much the mortgage is; or whether he had a mortgage at age 57 because he had bought an extravagant home; or refinanced to use the money imprudently; or addressed anything about why he is so broke at 57 when he supposedly had such a successful career.

There is mention that Mr. Gorelick has considered selling his home, but there is no mention of how much equity the family has in the home; or of whether it is larger than they need; or in a very expensive neighborhood.

The piece doesn't identify Mr. Gorelick's wife, but an obituary in *The New York Times* for Samuel Eckstein mentions his son-in-law, Abe Gorelick. Mr. Eckstein's daughter, now named Laurie Gorelick, appears to own Laurie Gorelick Interiors. Now we have no way of knowing how profitable a business this is, but it seems well established, and it seems that Mr. Gorelick could at least take over marketing this family business and help make it more profitable.

And the family does seem to have op-



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tions. Laurie Gorelick not only went to Wharton undergrad herself, she also is an attorney, having graduated from New York University School of Law, but she has elected not to practice.

They don't seem to be facing destitution. Laurie Gorelick has tweeted about her intention to become a snowbird in 2016. And Jordan Gorelick, who seems to be their son, studies at Colgate University, an elite private school and has won recognition as a DJ.

Fifth, there is no mention of family or friends. The fact that he and his wife both went to Wharton out of high school indicates a high achieving family. It seems odd that nobody should have any position or projects to give Mr. Gorelick or any ability to extend any help so he doesn't build up credit card debt. If family and friends know something about Mr. Gorelick that makes them not want to extend help, this tells us something important to know in evaluating the situation.

The article discusses an experimental program in which some long-term unem-

A husband with an MBA from the University of Chicago and a wife with a law degree from NYU seem a particularly weak case for federal aid.

ployed are given career counselors:

Mr. Gorelick was paired with the career coach Edward Lawrence, whom he has met with about 10 times to talk through his resumé, outlook and job search over coffee at Panera Bread or in the local library. So far, Mr. Gorelick has not landed a full-time position. But he says the sessions have helped him remain an attractive candidate, with phone and in-person interviews taking place.

"He knew nothing about me and had no preconceived notions," Mr. Gorelick said. "He could look at my work and give me constructive comments in a very objective manner. I think that in and of itself is extremely valuable."

This is all very nice and might be of some utility. It is, however, odd that a mature marketing professional would need this much help. And although it is good to know how people who don't know you might perceive you, it is much more likely that a 57-year-old professional will find a job with someone who does know him, has many pre-conceived notions, etc.

Basically these pre-conceived notions, based on decades of watching someone work, are a 57-year-old's greatest asset — unless of course the preconceived notions are negative.

For individuals, it is easy to draw lessons from a story like this:

- **Save money — both so you can live if your income gets cut off and so you have the flexibility to take a new job.** You might need money to relocate or to carry family expenses until a new job, which might be commission-based, can start to kick in.

- **Minimize fixed costs such as home and car payments for the same reasons.**

- **Maximize learning and networking.** People such as Dick Spezzano, Bruce Peterson, Bob DiPiazza, Reggie Griffin, while actively employed, they became chairmen of PMA or United. This certainly broadened both their learning and their contacts, which enabled them to build consultancies when

they ended full time employment.

- **Conduct yourself — at all times — in a way that would make people want to be associated with you and want to hire you.** Lots of us are now teaching our children about the dangers of posting things on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. We warn that one day, images of debauchery could come back to haunt them. Here is another secret: Although worrying about what strangers think, it may be even more important what your friends and family think about you. Do they perceive you as honest, hardworking, prudent, thrifty, willing to go the extra mile, loyal, etc.? Would they gladly vouch for you because they see the risk as minimal? Or do they think you are fundamentally lazy, not interested, counting the days until vacation?

For society, the story is hard to read without more information. The author of the article seems interested in making it a federal case:

In Washington, the plight of the long-term jobless has largely faded from the policy conversation. At the moment, the federal government offers virtually no help to the 3.8 million Americans who have been out of work for more than six months. The maximum duration of unemployment insurance payments fell from as long as 73 weeks to 26 weeks in most states in January.

Yet this couple, a husband with an MBA from the University of Chicago and a wife with a law degree from NYU, seems a particularly weak case for federal aid. They have already been given a blessing in terms of an elite education that we will never be able to offer most people.

Of course, it would be nice if everyone could make a lucrative living doing whatever he or she wants, wherever they want to do it. But this couple has been given many tools to make a living — an Ivy League education, law degrees, ownership of a business, etc. The reporter just didn't dig deep enough to tell us why Mr. Gorelick is in such a difficult position.

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Shirley Axe, Health & Wellness Manager For Ahold USA, Discusses Her Commitment As A PBH Ambassador

Interview conducted by Carol M. Bareuther, RD

In the past seven-and-a-half years, Shirley Axe, in her role as health and wellness manager for Ahold USA (a 770-store chain headquartered in Carlisle, PA), along with a creative team and Supermarket Registered Dietitians (SRDs), developed a variety of programs. All are designed to educate customers about eating healthfully, including consuming more fruits and vegetables. Creatively and constantly touting the Produce for Better Health (PBH) Foundation's Fruits & Veggies—More Matters message has earned Ahold USA and its five banners — Giant Landover, Giant Carlisle, Stop & Shop, Martin's and Peapod — Champion and Role Model awards from PBH. Axe herself has been named a PBH Ambassador and was presented with the coveted Ambassador Excellence Award. What's more, and most impressively, since starting these programs, Ahold USA has increased its produce sales.

PRODUCE BUSINESS talked with Axe about Ahold USA's partnership with PBH, produce-related activities in and out of store and how retail produce staff can best work with nutritionists to sell more fruits and vegetables.

PB: What is your role as a PBH Ambassador?

Axe: As a PBH Ambassador you agree to spread the messaging of the Produce for Better Health. That doesn't mean just to the people I work with on a daily basis, but to others you feel have an interest in eating more fruits and vegetables for good health and nutrition. For example, if I have a vendor that I'm working with on a promotion, I inform them of the program: 'Do you know the information they provide?' or 'Are you aware that they are nonprofit?' or 'You can find out what they can do for your business and in turn how you can help them.'

PB: How have Ahold banners earned the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters "Champion" status and/or top-level recognition of "Role Model" every year since 2008?

Axe: We take the More Matters message and incorporate it into much of our marketing materials.

For example, in-store, the logo is on our produce bags, on our produce department signage and on products that meet PBH's criteria — such as bags of our private label apples and oranges. We also put this message in print, such as in our quarterly *Kids Healthy Ideas* magazine. The magazine targets kids, ages 8 to 12, and is free in-store. It can also be downloaded from our website. Additionally, we incorporate the message on in-store radio and on materials that go out to the community — such as our "Passport to Nutrition" kits.

PB: What is one example of an initiative you spearheaded to win these awards?

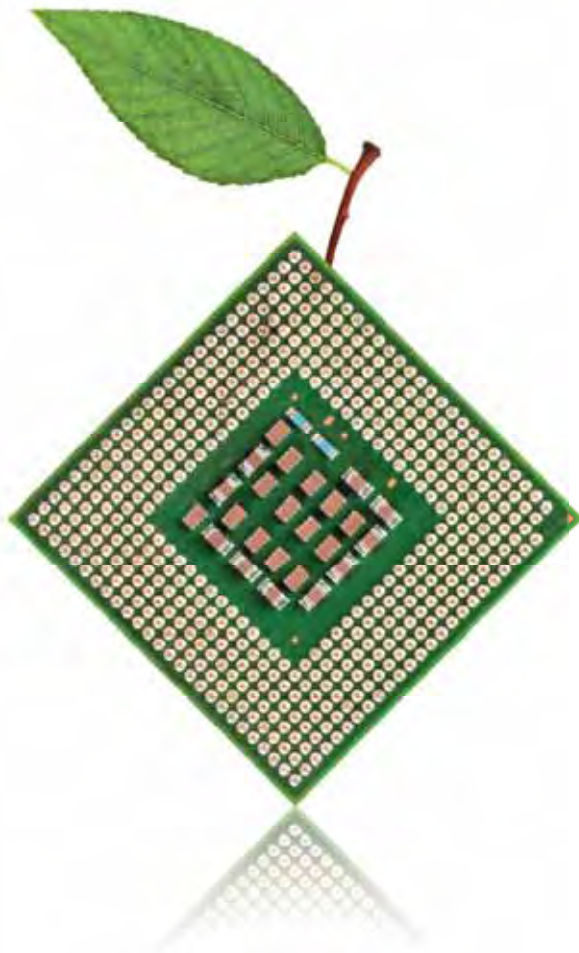
Axe: Our "Passport To Nutrition" kit. We originally developed it three years ago. At that time, it was only web-based. You could go on our website to play the games and do the activities, or you could download it. Last year, we took it to another level and relaunched the program by turning it into a kit. It contains activity books for 30 students, a teacher's guide, a sheet of stickers, a MyPlate poster and a DVD that has additional activities. Activities include riding a bike and learning about energy balance; why it's important to drink 100 percent fruit juice compared to a beverage that isn't; and how to make your plate look like "MyPlate." We send the kits, free of charge, to schools and youth organizations. In the first six months of the relaunch (from last July through December), we reached more than 260,000 kids.

PB: In what ways do Ahold USA's 10 SRDs (Supermarket Registered Dietitians) interact with the produce staff?

Axe: We refer to our SRD's as nutritionists, and they do a variety of things. For example, they know what is going to be featured in our circular ad ahead of time, so they can incorporate these items in



Shirley Axe
Health & Wellness Manager
Ahold USA



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their tours. Or, when they are preparing for an in-store activity, they can go to the produce department manager and say, 'Hey, I've got a group of 15 coming in for a class, and this is what we are going to talk about. What is available to sample?' The produce staff can then prepare the item or items to sample. The nutritionist talks about why they're important and how to get more servings into a daily diet. There's a nice back and forth relationship between our nutritionists and the produce managers and his or her staff.

PB: What is the best way for produce teams to work with nutritionists or SRDs in joint initiatives?

Axe: Communication is important. There's a lot of folks who work in Produce that don't recognize the health benefits of some of the products they are stocking. Especially the part-timers. So, when the nutritionist walks through with a group and says, 'Did you know that a pomegranate has this nutritional benefit,' these opportunities educate the produce staff at the same time. Then the staff can pass this knowledge on to the customers.

PB: What initiatives have you found particularly effective at increasing produce sales?

Axe: Any time the nutritionists conduct in-store tours and classes. I think every one of the nutritionists that's worked in a clinical situation before tells us that the store nutritionist position is their dream job. It's kind of like being a kid in a candy shop, but on a different level. All the healthy foods, including fruits and vegetables, are right at their fingertips. They are interacting with customers right at the point of sale when they are deciding what to put into their shopping carts. They can affect that process. They can talk to the customers and ask questions.

So, while our nutritionists spend lots of time in individual consultations and conducting in-store classes and store tours, the time they spend on the actual sales floor engaging with customers is huge. They build a relationship with customers, and that builds loyalty and brings customers back in the front door.

PB: How have you worked with More Matters to develop programs in-store?

Axe: We look at all of the materials,



Marty Ordman, 2013's Chairman of the Produce for Better Health Foundation Board of Trustees and Dole's Vice President of Marketing and Corporate Communications, presents Axe with Produce for Better Health's Ambassador Excellence Award.

such as the tool kits PBH produces. We may not use the actual tool kits, but these resources certainly give us ideas as we brainstorm and develop our own programs. For retailers that may not have the staff or the creative teams that we have, I think toolkits and other PBH materials are a great help. It's a valid resource, and people know that.

PB: What was your journey like to become Health and Wellness Manager for Ahold and what is your staff like?

Axe: I started 24 years ago as a part-time cashier when my children were getting older. That's when I got hooked. I took the store manager training program and worked as an assistant store manager in charge of perishables for a while, so I'm very familiar with produce. From there, I worked in special projects, then in advertising and marketing before I was recruited to run the health and wellness program. So, I have a great background in knowing what will work in-store and what won't.

Beyond that, I have an in-house dietitian here in the support office. She teaches me and keeps me straight on all the regulatory issues. I have a marketing specialist that assists with the logistics and execution of pieces. She is also a school teacher by education, so that comes in handy. We have a creative and design team downstairs, including copy-

writers. There are 10 in-store nutritionists right now. That doesn't sound like a lot when we have nearly 800 stores, but we utilize them in a variety of ways. This includes in-store, in our print publications, out in the community at wellness events, at gyms and at appearances for local TV.

PB: How do you see the role of nutritionists increasing produce consumption in-store?

Axe: It's really two-fold. Firstly, the need is there. We had a vision of providing health and wellness information as well as education to all customers. Our services are free to our customers. That's a huge variable right there. Secondly, while the nutritionists can provide information and education, they can also sell more products.

PB: What new Fruits & Veggies—More Matters initiatives will you undertake in the year ahead?

Axe: We have some new programs that we're probably going to roll out in the third or fourth quarter of this year. We are strongly focusing on meals. We know families are eating more meals at home, and we want to impact that. We are looking to help build recipes and meals for our customers. That's what they tell us they want, and that's what they are going to get!

pb



MEET THE CLASS OF 2014



Ben Alviano, 37
Canadian Business Manager
Mann Packing Inc
Salinas, CA

Hometown: Ontario, Canada
Hobbies: Hockey; Golf; Traveling;
 Family activities

Personal: Married with 2 children

Community: Fund Raising Committee for Big Brothers Canada; Coach for Young Amateur Hockey

Motto in Life: Make it happen; don't wait for it to happen.

Professional Accomplishments: Starting in produce a little over two years ago, Alviano was attracted to the industry's fast-paced environment, high consumer focus and family-work atmosphere. Before becoming Mann Packing's Canadian sales manager, he was director of national sales with Weston Bakery. Prior to that, he held other key account and sales management roles with the Pepsi Bottling Group, P&G and Magna International. In his current position with Mann, he achieved consecutive double-digit growth rates in his first two years. In 2013, he received the Ontario Produce Marketing Association (OPMA) Fresh Award for work furthering the fresh produce industry in Canada.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I was looking for a culture change from the traditional CPG [consumer packaged goods] environment, and there was an opportunity with

Mann Packing to manage the Canadian business.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Living in Toronto and being more than 2,500 miles from our fields. I really enjoy understanding the harvesting and processing of our value-added vegetable products and how it translates to finished product on shelves.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Consistent focus on food and safety commitment from large and small suppliers and retailers.

Q: What has inspired with your work in the produce industry so far?

A: The ability to give back to the community through distribution and education of quality food.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Vegetable kits and superfoods.



Peter Barone, 34
Retail Replenishment Manager
Robinson Fresh
Eden Prairie, MN

Hometown: Salinas, CA

Hobbies: Airplane flying; Gold Coast Rods (a classic car and hot rod club); Cal Poly Mustangs Basketball; Washington State Cougar Football

Personal: Married

Community: Relay for Life; The Salinas Interna-

tional Airshow; The AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am golf tournament; The U.S. Open; Charitable car shows; Central Coast Young Farmers and Ranchers; Assistance to support food banks, hospitals, and care facilities across the country.

Motto in Life: In life you only have complete control of your attitude and effort. By choosing a positive attitude and giving your all on a day-to-day basis, you foster the best chance of success regardless of your circumstances.

Professional Accomplishments: In 2003 he started from the ground up learning the produce basics of commodities, logistics, and supply chains as an appointment loading coordinator for FreshKist Produce. After building his base roots, he was hired at FoodSource in 2004 on a retail replenishment team. Today he manages the Robinson Fresh West region retail replenishment team out of Monterey, CA, which includes 14 individuals with national distribution and replenishment capabilities. His team touches numerous produce and floral commodities seven days a week. 365 days a year.

In his current position, he manages strategic customer relationships, drives efficiencies and revenue through replenishment services, manages the replenishment team to execute at a high level including maintaining fill rates and supply assurance, and strategizes with the business development team to establish and utilize the current retail replenishment model as an asset for all C.H. Robinson service lines. During his tenure at FoodSource, he was selected to participate in the C.H. Robinson 2009-2010 KASP (Key

Account Sales Program) class.

He is currently one of five people selected to be a mentor in C.H. Robinson's pilot 2013-2014 AMMP (Account Management Mentorship Program). Because of his knowledge of the retail replenishment channels, he has been involved with the setup of C.H. Robinson's Atlanta, GA, Nazareth, PA, and Taunton, MA service centers allowing for same-day national distribution capabilities through these warehouses into key areas of the country.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: Growing up in the Salinas Valley it was hard not to have a friend who either had a summer job or parents in the produce industry. Occasional trips to the fields, coolers, or sales offices were frequently in order and these generated an interest in produce. When it came time to apply for college, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and their Agribusiness program seemed like the right fit. Ultimately my Cal Poly experience and personal relationships with friends who had taken the produce path lead me to my own career in the produce industry.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: Whether it's getting a lime with my beer or veggies with dinner, it's all about supporting the industry. Produce is a part of most meals in the Barone household; however beside my goal of supporting the industry, I credit my wife, Katrina, for the majority of our produce consumption on a daily basis.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see the standard definitions regarding the use of business types more closely watched in the industry. The current terms such as "grower" are often misrepresented by organizations using the term as a marketing ploy thus creating confusion, and ultimately creating additional costs and layers, in the industry. As the produce industry continues to develop it is important to create transparency throughout, while not adding additional complexities to the process.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Over the course of my career, I learned the importance of acknowledging and utilizing the team around me. I now understand I don't need to know 100 percent of the answers myself and it is OK to rely on a network of subject-matter experts who have the ability to help. Building and keeping trusted relationships in multiple facets of the industry is something I wish I knew when I walked in the door my first day.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: The industry will see the retail market expand further into small format or c-stores. These chains will become more efficient in supply-chain management leading to more aggressive price points and improved quality on the shelves.



Brian Bengard, 40
Regional Sales Manager -
Foodservice West
Mann Packing Company, Inc.
Salinas, CA

Hometown: King City, CA
Hobbies: Snow Skiing, Golf, Hunting

Personal: Married

Community: Supports Pioneer Day, Heritage Foundation, 4-H, Jack's Helping Hand

Professional Accomplishments: A fourth generation agriculturalist, Bengard was born and raised on a cattle ranch just southwest of King City, CA. He worked in various agricultural jobs through school and during his studies at Cal Poly where he majored in crop science with a minor in ag business marketing.

Bengard entered the produce industry directly with an internship at Meyer Tomatoes during his college years. Santa Maria Seeds in King City hired him right out of college. After five years at Santa Maria, he broke out on his own with a wholesale distribution company, Solid Gold Produce, and a gourmet retail store, Parkfield Wine & Produce. After several years on his own, he returned to the grower/shipper side with a position at Tanimura & Antle and then with Nunhems USA (a vegetable seed company). During his time at Nunhems, he helped Mann launch two revolutionary branded products into foodservice.

In 2012, he began his current position at Mann and worked on at least six new branded produce item launches. His current position involves working with Mann's distribution network in the western U.S. and Canada. In addition to servicing the distribution network, he is also engaged in product awareness with restaurant chains both on a regional and national scale. Mann's also utilizes his seed experience to facilitate new products.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I started out hoeing weeds and moving sprinkler pipe in the mornings for SoMoCo Farms and then moved to the fresh market tomato packing shed in the afternoons for Frudden Produce while in fifth grade. The Frudden and Bengard families have been friends for several generations. Upon high school, and after several summers of moving pipe, my summers were spent driving tractor for Rusty Cauley at Lonoak Farms, another friend of my father.

My summer work history continued with a stint at vegetable transplant specialist, King City Nursery thanks to Bob Martin and David Gill. My final experience during college ended with an internship with Meyer Tomatoes. I felt like I had an entire career in Ag before I even graduated from college. There was never any doubt I'd return home to work in agriculture.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I'm looking forward to increasing market penetration for our branded items. These are our future. The days of beating each other up over

prices on commodity items are over.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Increased awareness and understanding of consumer "fear topic" items such as local, food safety, sustainable, GMO, organic, etc. I'm on the street with our distributors, having these conversations in kitchens or in the front of the restaurant, and I'm shocked at the lack of understanding of these terms. There is almost no secondary explanation to the definition of these terms to those outside of the industry.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: The depth of the industry was unknown to me. I was so entrenched in the production side, I never considered the facets of the industry beyond the harvesting stage.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: One of my most gratifying experiences was during the launch of the Tesoro Tomato by The Produce Exchange. At that time, I worked for Nunhems, the seed breeding company behind the InTense tomato brand varieties. Marty Mazzanti, my customer and friend, is a true produce marketer. Marty took that tomato from one fruit to a national retail and foodservice explosion. Never, have I worked with someone with such passion for our industry. Marty's approach to the business truly inspired me and serves as a role model for my business endeavors.



Ian Bessel, 37
Director of Business
Development and
Food Safety for Produce
Birko
Henderson, CO

Hometown: Wellington, FL

Hobbies: Gardening, Fishing, Camping, Spending time with family

Personal: Married with two kids

Community: Volunteer member of the University of Florida's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni & Friends Board of Directors; Charitable campaigns with the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association to benefit the Redlands Christian Migrant Association

Motto in Life: Work hard; play hard.

Professional Accomplishments: Bessel became involved in agriculture after graduating from the University of Florida and initially worked for Zeigler Bros in the animal feed end of the ag industry. He transitioned to the produce industry with a position at ABC Research Laboratories in Gainesville, FL, as the business development director for produce and seafood. During this time, he managed ABC's client base in produce, seafood and animal feed market segments and increased assigned market revenue by more than 50 percent while consistently exceeding sales



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goals. He joined Birko in August 2013 as the director of business development and food safety for produce. In this role, he works with companies seeking to improve food-safety programs through the use of technology, equipment and chemistry. He visits facilities across the country to understand their specific needs and challenges and leads a team of Birko experts in developing a customized solution for that facility.

He recently earned his HACCP certification through the University of Georgia and is a graduate of the Emerging Leaders Development Program, sponsored by the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association. He also is a part-time instructor for Northeastern University in the graduate program in Regulatory Affairs of Food and Food Industries. He serves on a number of produce industry committees, including the United Fresh Produce Association's Food Safety and Technology Council, and formerly served on the Produce Marketing Association's Produce Safety Science and Technology Committee and the Produce Safety Alliance Working Committee.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: Every chance I get. I eat produce every day and am fortunate enough to grow some of my own fruits and veggies in my backyard. My love for gardening and consuming produce has even been passed down to my kids who also have a love for both eating and growing produce. My

grandmother often jokingly tells me, "You should have been a farmer."

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: The biggest challenge I face in my job is helping companies in the produce industry navigate the changing regulatory landscape of food safety while managing the cost impact of implementing new programs. The produce industry definitely wants to provide safe, delicious fruits and vegetables, and I have the ability to help them do so in a cost-conscious manner that makes good business sense.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: As we see FSMA implemented, it seems likely the landscape for food safety in the produce industry will be very dynamic. I expect to be very busy helping produce companies implement and improve their food safety programs. I anticipate having a continued role in making it possible for Birko's customers to not only meet, but also exceed, the new regulatory requirements.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see the produce industry continue to make strides around improving food safety. The ultimate objective for us all should be to entirely eliminate the incidences of foodborne

illnesses attributed to produce every year.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: As an industry, we have the job of feeding a growing global population with fewer available natural resources such as land and water. This is going to present some major challenges going forward. I believe the next big trends on the horizon are going to be all about efficiency and reducing waste in every step of the produce supply chain to allow us to provide nutritious, safe and sustainable produce to feed the world.



Peppe Bonfiglio, 36
Senior Account Manager
Mastronardi Produce/SUNSET
Ontario, Canada
Hometown: Kingsville, ON
Hobbies: Running; Fitness; Music; Traveling

Personal: Married with two children

Community: As a parent to a child with Autism, Bonfiglio focuses energies on events that engender support for the understanding and cure of this affliction. He also participates in the MS walk annually.

Motto in life: It's not quantity of life that matters but quality.

Professional Accomplishments: Growing up in an agricultural community, Bonfiglio had plenty of

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summer jobs, which first introduced him to produce. After graduating from college he began his career at the H.J. Heinz Company in accounting. During his three year tenure, he realized the accounting field was not the area that suited him well, so he turned to the produce industry. He took a job at Lakeside Produce as a key account manager where he learned the greenhouse industry from the ground up.

After spending five years with Lakeside Produce, he took his current position at Mastronardi. In this position, he is responsible for developing new accounts, growing profitable existing sales, attending trade shows, and category oversight of designated commodities and specialties. Since joining Mastronardi, he demonstrated the ability to help retailers succeed growing their fresh produce categories. He works to educate retailers on the benefits of greenhouse growing, the flavor profiles of different tomatoes, and how they each appeal to different customer needs. He has facilitated impressive year over year growth and developed key strategies to boost sales and implement effective advertising. He has also successfully launched exciting products as well as new packaging with customers. He has participated in the PMA emerging leader program and won the Innovation Sensation award during the program in Arizona. He is also a past winner of the PMA 5 K race.

Q: How did you get your start with the produce industry?

A: Growing up in the largest concentration of greenhouses in North America, it was easy to fall into this industry. From summer jobs to my current role, I would not be in any other industry. Every day is a different adventure.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: Being a marathon runner and having fitness as a huge part of my life, my vegetable intake is very high. My family easily eats our five to 10 fruits and vegetables daily. Having access to fresh vegetables from our gardens and greenhouses makes it that much easier.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more uniform specs and guidelines. If we could have greater collaboration, we could focus on the greater good of more consumption.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I work for an innovator in the greenhouse industry, so I go to our president Paul Mastronardi. Also being part of the PMA emerging leaders program, I ask my colleagues in this program.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: I believe online sales will be a huge factor for the produce industry; this is where you will see most of the growth in sales. Also, I feel locally grown produce will continue to grow as consumers want to know where their produce comes from.

“The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.”

— Jamie Bowen, Idaho Potato Commission



Jamie Bowen, 31
Marketing Manager
Idaho Potato Commission
Eagle, ID

Hometown: Boise, ID
Hobbies: Camping; Fishing; Exercising; Golfing; Movies; Reading

Personal: Married

Motto in Life: The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

Professional Accomplishments: Born and raised in Boise, ID, Bowen always had a passion for the state and what Idaho offers. After receiving a degree in business marketing from Boise State University she went to work for Tamarack Resort in marketing for three years. When the resort closed its doors, she saw an employment opportunity for a marketing assistant at the Idaho Potato Commission. Out of 500 candidates who applied, she was selected for the position.

Over the next two years, she worked tirelessly in the promotion of Idaho potatoes and assisting the vice president retail, Seth Pemsler, and the vice president foodservice, Don Odiome. Two years later, she was promoted to domestic marketing manager. Her main responsibilities are to aid the promotion of the entire Idaho potato industry by marketing, advertising, attending trade shows, and other promotional support. She also works on Eastern Produce Council Idaho potato events and presentations.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: The Farm to Fork movement is gaining momentum, and I think it would benefit our industry if we moved in this direction wholeheartedly.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I go to family and close friends — they are my rock.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: It never hurts to ask. The worst that can happen is you are told no, but at least you tried.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: My two bosses. I learned so much about marketing and the produce world in general from the two of them. I truly do feel inspired to be the best I can be. I learn something new every day and that's the most I can ask for in a career.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: Getting my promotion. I have also worked very hard to unite our team, and that has really paid off. I think our team is the strongest it has ever been.



Carson Britz, 31
Director of Procurement
Apio, Inc.
Guadalupe, CA

Hometown: Fresno, CA
Hobbies: On-air personality for a country radio station in San Luis Obispo; Singing (classically trained singer)

Personal: Married to high school sweetheart

Community: Jewish Community Center Federation of San Luis Obispo

Motto in life: Lead yourself before leading others.
Professional Accomplishments: Britz has been involved in California Agriculture all his life and worked with a variety of crops. Dating back to 1948, his grandparents started a fertilizer company in Five Points, CA, which eventually grew into production of many different crops and other businesses centered on agriculture.

Britz started with Apio in June of 2009 as a field representative, entailing harvest coordination, food safety monitoring with the harvest crews, harvest estimates, and gathering data on new varieties. After two years, he moved into a food safety position where he managed Apio's food safety program for all the growers, harvesters, and outside shippers of raw product to the company. In November of 2013, he was promoted to his current position and is now responsible for the implementation and management of a comprehensive vegetable sourcing program for three continents, and a variety of states.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

I grew up working with my family in many cropping systems. Most of this time was spent with my dad at our packinghouse and in the fields where our family still grows and ships lots of stone fruit and citrus varieties.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I take pride in the fact that I'm contributing to people's good health and longevity.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see stronger partnerships between retailers and shippers to assemble programs providing mutual and lasting benefits for all parties.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I look to my wife, peers, co-workers, friends, and members of my California Ag Leadership family.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: Completing the California Agricultural Leadership program, and being promoted to my current position.



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Adam Brohimer, 39

**Vice President
Fusion Marketing
Chatsworth, CA**

Hometown: Omaha, NE

Hobbies: Keeping aquarium fish for the past 18 years; Landscaping/gardening projects; Watching college football and major league baseball

Personal: Married; 11-month old son

Community: Orange County Rescue Mission's mobile health clinic; Possible pending trip with his church to Malawi in Africa for the purpose of helping with water projects and school building.

Professional Accomplishments: In his position at Fusion, he authored and implemented Fusion Marketing's corporate marketing and sales plans as well as initiated and developed company relationships with trade press. He built relationships and communicated strategic insights with "C-" level executives and initiated and launched Fusion's co-marketing relationship with one of the world's largest privately held consumer research firms.

Previous to Fusion, he worked as account manager with Perishables Group Incorporated in Laguna Hills, CA, from 2003 to 2006. His expertise included category development, supply chain management, activity based costing, as well as research and marketing services. He conceptualized and executed numerous consumer research projects including online and in-store surveys, space audits, best-practices research, trade surveys, industry quarterly reports, contribution analyses, cold chain study, complementary lift analyses, category business plans and consumer panels.

From 2002 to 2003, he was an MBA Intern with Information Resources Incorporated in Irvine, CA, where he analyzed brand response for Chef Boyardee and Banquet's Homestyle Bakes using Infoscan Analyzer for a \$1.6 million account specific marketing program to understand the effects of trade and consumer spending and provide recommendations for the client.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: If you had asked me five years ago, I would have been able to give you a clear outline of my goals and expectations. I have taken to heart the lesson that life leads — despite my best plans, I would love to be a business owner, but I am perfectly content to see where the river of life flows.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I am very excited to see the evolution of the PLU system in point-of-sale data into a UPC-style format for random weight/bulk items. I think this improvement in the data will lead to tremendous advances in insights for the produce industry. It is my hope that the produce industry sincerely leverages the opportunity this development will present.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I talk to my dad, my wife and some close friends both inside and outside the industry. I find the outside of the produce industry perspective to be very helpful. It helps keep me from being too insular and narrow in my thinking.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Everything! Also, never mention price recommendations to a retailer.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: The next big trend is actually a lot of little trends to manage. The explosion of information and sources in the past decade or two has led to the need to understand consumers more. There is no such thing as "the produce consumer." Today's consumers are far more difficult to categorize and reach. TV, radio and magazine ads just won't cut it anymore. The same is true of messages. No one single message can or will appeal to the consumers an organization needs to win over. This is not a new trend, but it is an accelerating trend. Micro-targeting will be an ever increasingly critical component to successful consumer marketing as time progresses.



Jeremy Burris, 37

**Vice President of
Sales and Sourcing
Colorful Harvest
Salinas, CA**

Hometown: Plant City, FL

Hobbies: Fishing; Golfing; Beach; Spending time with family; Church

Personal: Married with one daughter (age 6) and one son (age 2)

Community: Plant Rotary Club Secretary (Member 12 years); Board Member for Code Enforcement City of Plant City; Deacon Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Plant City; Volunteer for The Florida Strawberry

Motto in Life: Work hard, pray hard and play hard.

Professional Accomplishments: Burris got his start at Wish Farms in Plant City as a sales rep and worked his way up to vice president of fresh produce sales and sourcing in July 2012. His main focus was on growers and national retail and wholesale accounts. He was tasked with also helping approve small grower loans and advances, finalizing details of marketing agreements for growers, forecasting harvest volumes of production to sales staff and helping with operational decisions. He was also challenged to look into his "crystal ball" and establish prices for ads with the company's retail and other customers.

At the time Burris started, Colorful Harvest only had about 100 acres of strawberries in Florida. He was able to bring the company to a substantial increase of 385 acres. He also brought along some new national retail accounts such as Food Lion, Hannaford, Ahold, Publix, Harris Teeter, ALDI and others to complement the acreage increase. One of his first hires at the vice president level was Lee Cobb, hired on to help build the

blueberry program in the U.S. With Cobb's help, they put together a 12-month blueberry program that was nonexistent before Burris was hired. The first year, they were able to bring on blueberry growers in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Michigan and worked with growers in Chile for the first time in company history. Sales in the company's berry program have increased by \$5,000,000 with this evolution in strawberries and blueberries.

Under his direction, a 20-acre Florida spring vegetable program in 2012 evolved to a 280-acre spring vegetable program in 2013 and 300 acres in 2014. This added an extra 120,000 cases and \$1,000,000 in sales revenues to the company's annual program in Florida. He has also added planning processes to help with putting retail accounts on ads. The company now has a system in place for estimating production, estimating the market prices for the fruit, allocating products to retailers and keeping it at a profitable level on all packages.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: A lot. I get to take blueberries, strawberries and veggies home while those products are in season. Nothing is better than being able to enjoy what our growers produce. My mother was big on squash, peas, beans and greens growing up. My wife now makes sure we have a salad, fruit or some vegetable item every day at our nightly meals.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Making all parties happy in every transaction. It has to be good for our growers first, retailers/wholesalers/foodservice customers second, and finally it has to be good for the owners and investors of our company. I have found that being honest and knowing that "bad news will not get better with age" helps tremendously.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: More programs offering incentives to Americans to eat produce. I think we also have a good opportunity to promote produce to youth. For example the Florida Department of Ag took over the school lunch programs. Currently our youth are now being introduced to all sorts of Florida fruit and vegetable products. It's a win for the growers, a win for the school district, and a win for our youth since they are eating healthy and will now be introduced to produce they may not be able to get at home.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: My Mom and Dad. My father runs a cow calf operation in Plant City. I grew up on a working cattle ranch. We had horses, cattle, tractors, citrus and hay fields. I was behind the wheel of a tractor probably at age 10 or younger. I was also very active in FFA as an adolescent. The FFA really helped me get to know more about opportunities in the agriculture industry. The FFA was also

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instrumental in preparing me for public speaking, making presentations to retailers and growers, and giving me the confidence to speak to people every day.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: Building our grower and customer base at Colorful Harvest. We're relatively new in Florida. Having growers and customers alike follow you to a new company is extremely humbling and something I will never take for granted. One of the hardest things to do is keep repeat business. Having that repeat business is a priority for me on both the grower and customer level.



Thomas Vincent William Consalo, 28

President

**The Consalo Group
Vineland, NJ**

Hometown: Vineland, NJ

Hobbies: Health and wellness; Surfing; CrossFit

Personal: Married

Community: Consalo Foundation for Sandy Relief; South Jersey Healthcare Foundation; Vineland Rotary Charities; The Vegetable Growers' Association of NJ; The Aaron Ploch Memorial Fund; Cumberland County College Foundation;

Carolinas Healthcare Foundation; Landisville Produce Scholarship Fund; The Herremans Foundation; Philabundance; Agricultural Leadership Fund; Brittany Rodio Foundation; Foundation Teljeunes; Our Lady of Mercy Academy; St. Augustine Preparatory School; One Little Step; Girl Scouts of America; The Ellison School; St. Joseph's Church; Gateway Community Action Partnership; The Four Diamonds Fund; Goals for Gazzara

Motto in Life: Make your own luck.

Professional Accomplishments: Consalo was born into the industry with a family who has been farming since the 1920s. He was educated at Philadelphia University where he earned his master's degree in business. While finishing his graduate degree, he was given opportunities to work with Fortune 100 companies from California to China. However, after gaining some experience outside of produce throughout his studies and internships, he knew produce was meant to be his career. He returned to his family business in 2008 working as a manager in operations as well as sales. At that time, he also started another division for the company with storage and distribution services for fruit companies, and by the end of the year they had secured business with several reputable importers including the largest importer in the U.S.

In early 2012, he successfully negotiated the buyout of CF Farms by The Freshwave LLC. Later in 2012, he was named vice president of The

Freshwave where his responsibilities included day-to-day operations of the company including production, sales, farm management and grower relationship. He was responsible for a 15 percent growth in company sales yearly during his time as vice president.

In 2013, he founded The Consalo Group with the objective of taking certain lines of sourcing and distribution in his family and integrating the latest growing, shipping, traceability, food safety, private labeling and merchandising services, as well as research and development toward a more sustainable environment for the future of the industry. His current position is one of myriad responsibilities. He works to maintain long-term relationships with clients as well as growing partners. He has been able to efficiently manage operations and reduce costs to remain a competitive force in the produce industry while effectively growing the business in both sales and margins. He is passionate about implementing new technologies and techniques parallel with the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI), category management systems, direct store delivery and food safety.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: This industry has been in my blood since the womb. My great grandfather started farming in 1927, so my entire family grew up on tractors

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and forklifts. I first started marking packages and making up boxes when I was 8 years old and have done everything from quality control in the field and loading docks, to procurement and operations, sales and purchasing, and now utilizing all of those skills to oversee our companies as a whole.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: Tons. I am passionate about health and wellness to a point of ridicule at times in our office. In the past, I have lived both vegan and vegetarian but I now balance a moderate diet of meats and proteins and healthy portions of fruits and vegetables. Between my wife and I, we go through a case of kale a week just from juicing. Every morning, I make a smoothie of kale, carrot, apple, kiwi, parsley, celery and a dollop of raw honey. We keep our refrigerator in the office full of fruit for healthy snacking throughout the day. My daily snack is a handful of blueberries, which sometimes turns into a full pint. I always keep in mind that regardless of how hard I work or workout, a balanced lifestyle is a healthy lifestyle. When I'm eating healthy and working out regularly, that's when I am firing on all cylinders both physically and mentally, which is a must in such a fast-paced business.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more support for sustainable practices in our industry. We can better utilize our earth's resources with the technological advances we have seen in recent years. I would like to see legislature address issues like labor, transportation, immigration, education, and healthcare that directly impact farmers and those in our industry, because our industry is unique compared to others regarding those issues. Ideally, we need to find better ways to properly utilize our resources on our planet for a brighter future for mankind. We continue to deplete resources like water, phosphorus, oil, and the list goes on. If we have a way to do business with less impact, or even a positive impact, we need to look further and get more funding to get some of these things off of the ground.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I like to take things as they are and as they come. I don't like to look back with any type of regret because I look at every single situation no matter how good or bad as a learning experience. Earlier in my career, I would get worked up over things that cannot be controlled — that doesn't do anyone any good.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: My biggest source of inspiration has always been, and will always be, my father. My dad was not only my inspiration in the industry but has had the most impact on my life as a whole over any other person or thing. Growing up, the most time we spent together was on the farm, the loading

dock, or in the office. He was the hardest working individual I have ever seen and would stop at nothing to help anyone in or out of the business. He taught me to always do my best, to never leave anything to be desired, to let it all hang out. There is not one moment, not one thought, or one decision I make that doesn't have my father considered; even if it be something he would disagree with, I always make sure I stay true to what I was taught and what brought me here.



Chris Cordero, 38
Vice President/COO
Babé Farms, Inc.
Santa Maria, CA

Hometown: Santa Maria, CA
Hobbies: Sports; Listening to music; Barbecuing for friends and family

Personal: Married; Two sons (ages 2 and 4)

Community: The Special Olympics; Hats for Hope (supports women with breast cancer); The Boys and Girls Club; Fresno State Alumni boosters; Local food bank; St. Louis de Montfort Church.

Motto in Life: "If you want to be successful, it's just this simple. Know what you are doing. Love what you are doing. And believe in what you are doing." — Will Rogers

Professional Accomplishments: While attending college, Cordero worked as an intern at Babé Farms, doing everything from working in the field with production and harvest crews to assisting in the sales office. After graduation, he was offered a full-time position with the company as sales coordinator and managing the company's IT systems. Over the years, he has taken on various tasks and special projects to help wherever needed — including a stint as procurement manager, working with outside growers and managing the raw product needs of the company.

He then was moved to vice president of sales and began managing daily sales and executing the annual sales plan. From there he moved to vice president of operations while still presiding over the sales side of the business. In this role, he assisted in other areas including procurement, food safety, production and cost analysis. As vice president/COO, he is responsible for the general management of the company's financial and administrative functions, as well as sales and marketing performance.

He is a member of the United Agribusiness League (UAL). He is also a member of the Grower Shipper Association of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo County where he represents the company at bi-monthly meetings to discuss topics including labor, food safety and water regulations affecting growers locally.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I didn't expect to work in produce, but with relatives involved in the industry and having lived in an agricultural community my whole life, I always had a great appreciation for it. My uncles, Wilbur Souza and Greg Pedigo, were founding partners of Babé Farms along with Frank and Judy

Lundberg. At first, I was a little hesitant about coming to work for family, but 14 years later, I'm still here; I wouldn't have it any other way.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: Two to three servings daily. I usually start my morning with a shake (almond milk, protein powder, spinach or kale and strawberries). Then veggies and a salad with my lunch and/or dinner.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: We are small family-owned company and don't have some of the resources the larger companies enjoy, so we're forced to wear many "hats." This can make for a lot of stress at times, but it's also what I enjoy the most about my job. It's never boring.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I see a great future with Babé Farms. This company was founded by a group of tough-minded visionaries who took a big risk on growing specialty vegetables nobody had really heard of back in the early 1980s. Through my role as vice president, it's my vision to continue the success story, grow the business, and expand our opportunities while maintaining superior quality, innovation and genuine customer relationships.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: It's already started, but I see automation and the potential of outsourcing of product to Mexico becoming even more important to the future of produce companies, especially here in California. The conversion of ag land, rising production costs, a decreasing labor supply, and the advent of regulations aimed at limiting consumer and environmental concerns, has made it more difficult for suppliers to produce in a cost effective manner.



Latina Creason, 37
Produce Merchandiser
Naturipe Farms
Salinas CA

Hometown: Pineville MO
Hobbies: Horseback Riding; Reading; Bike Riding; Fishing

Personal: Married for 20 years with three kids

Community: Various youth activities; Coaches baseball and softball; Volunteers with local 4H chapter; Christmas family charities.

Motto in life: To be understood, you have to take the time to understand the people around you.

Professional Accomplishments: Creason's career began at the Sam's Club Home Office where she replenished for the fresh meat category. Later she moved to the Wal-Mart side of the business to replenish in multiple perishable departments, then moved to a buyer's assistant once again for fresh meat. Along the way she took time to learn the basics and everything she could about the retail business from accounting, system databases, and supplying short shelf-life items as well as sharpening her analytical skills. After eight

A photograph of a pineapple plantation. A person wearing a green polo shirt, a grey baseball cap, and a silver watch is reaching out to touch a pineapple plant. The plants are tall with long, pointed, silvery-green leaves. Several pineapple heads are visible, some showing their characteristic diamond-patterned skin. The background shows a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds.

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years, she left the company to work for a textile company, where she quickly realized the slow pace of textiles was not for her.

She accepted a position to replenish berries for Naturipe Farms and began a produce career. The transition from replenishing meat to produce was rather seamless and she was quickly promoted to business analyst. As an analyst, she was able to provide detailed information to help grow key accounts for Naturipe Farms and worked closely with the account manager on top accounts. She was also able to provide insight for the accounting department to recover lost dollars. At this point, Creason was promoted to category manager for the Wal-Mart account. As produce merchandiser, she travels the country training produce associates about everything from packaging to proper care and handling of a perishable item.

Q: What is the most valuable aspect of your career journey?

A: I am lucky to be one of the few who have had the privilege to work several sides of the business from replenishing items to selling them back to a company that started my career. If I could give anyone advice it would be to embrace your current position in life — whether it be in your career or your personal life — and build on the basics. Without taking the time to learn the basics at the beginning of my career and building on

them, I certainly would not be who or where I am today.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Lower cost to bring more fruit to the lower income households

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: What a big part the weather would play in my career in produce.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: Achieving goals I have set for myself.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: My analytical skills to project and advise on how to increase sales for Naturipe Farms



Kevin Delaney, 29
**Director of Marketing/
 Corporate Social
 Responsibility
 Procacci Brothers Sales Corp.
 Philadelphia, PA**
Hometown: Malvern, PA

Hobbies: Competitive Amateur Golf; Guitar; Skiing

Personal: Married with a 3-year-old daughter

Community: Volunteers with the Mid-Atlantic Blind Golf Association

Motto in Life: Work hard and dream big.

Professional Accomplishments: Delaney joined Procacci Brothers in 2007 and was tasked with learning the business from the ground up. After recommending fundamental changes to the workflow process that served to greatly improve operational productivity, he was named special projects manager in 2008. Over the next nine months, he worked on high priority projects across the wholesale/distribution segment of the business. As demand from business customers grew for greater transparency, he developed and implemented a code of business conduct governing all corporate relationships with vendor-suppliers, customers, and business partners. He took the lead role in rewriting the company's mission statement and core values.

In 2009, he was made director of corporate sustainability & productivity. In this role, he was credited for establishing the company's first comprehensive corporate social responsibility program that would span across the company's growing, packing and sales operations in the U.S. and Mexico. Additionally, he successfully recommended and led the development/implementation of a warehouse management system for GS Distribution, Procacci's direct store

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delivery division. To increase efficiency across all companies and produce more valuable data to the owners, he streamlined the company's group of vertically integrated companies to operate on the same inventory/accounting systems. The project was executed across five states and into Mexico and provided invaluable information and accountability throughout the organization, prompting increases in measurable productivity and efficiency.

In 2012, he was promoted to director of marketing. His responsibilities include the development and execution of the organization's marketing strategies while continuing to lead the direction and design of the company's corporate social responsibility program. After successfully launching the company's first e-commerce site, he is now focused on growing the core business by identifying growth opportunities with both existing and new customers.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I was a senior in the Food Marketing Co-op program at Saint Joseph's University. I began interviewing for my final internship when a good friend passed my resume to Procacci Brothers. I didn't know anyone or anything about the produce industry, but I was really impressed when I saw Procacci's operations. Shortly after I began my internship, I had the opportunity to attend the PMA's Fresh Summit through the Jay Pack Career Pathways Program. Between the internship and experience at Fresh Summit, I was hooked.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more women in leadership roles throughout the industry. I have a tremendous amount of admiration for industry leaders like Jan Delyser, Cathy Burns, Dan'l Mackey Almy, Frieda and Karen Caplan, Lisa McNiece, Mayda Sotomayor, and others.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I've learned that information is key in this industry. Staying posted on trade news and identifying emerging trends enables you to stay ahead of the curve.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: Developing the company's first comprehensive corporate social responsibility program is my proudest accomplishment.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Technology is going to continue to evolve and shape our industry. On the supply chain side, technology is going to make us more efficient and enable us to work smarter. At the retail level, consumers will have more information at their fingertips and more non-traditional ways to buy fresh produce.



John Michael Dmytriw, 36
Director of Sales
Index Fresh, Inc.
Riverside, CA

Hometown: Aliso Viejo, Ca.
Hobbies: Mountain biking; Road biking; Spending time with family;

Watching son play soccer

Personal: Married with a 14-year old son

Community: Make-A-Wish Foundation

Professional Accomplishments: Dmytriw's first taste of the produce industry came in 2000 when he joined BuyProduce.com as a regional account representative. His was a sales support role and he worked with growers to ensure their pricing and daily availability was up to date. He also assisted in online software training for those who required it.

He began working for West Pak Avocado in 2001 as a sales manager. While at West Pak, he spent the majority of his time working on new business development aimed toward value-added services such as bagged avocados and ripening programs. He was tasked with building a new book of business for the company, which he successfully did.

By 2008, this new business accounted for roughly 28 percent of sales. That year he also joined Index Fresh as director of sales. He is responsible for sales forecasting, ad planning, market pricing, sales budgets and travel. He worked with team members to help ensure quarterly and year-end goals were reached. In the marketing and advertising area, he works with advertising agencies, both internal and external, to help promote the company's family of brands. He is responsible for new business development, domestic and foreign grower relations and international sales support. He has increased annual sales by 1.8 million packages a year. He also is a newly appointed Board of Director at the California Avocado Commission.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I believe your body is only as good as what you put in it. I eat fruits and vegetables on a daily basis. I love to drink them even more. I eat and drink more than a half-pound on a daily basis.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Spending as much time with clients as I would like. I truly enjoy working with each and every one of my customers. Unlike many other industries, when you're selling produce you have the opportunity to work with many of your customers on a daily basis. Because of this — strong bonds are formed.

Q: Where do you go when you need advice?

A: My customers are a wealth of great information and advice. It's interesting because I find many of us have the same questions and concerns. Men and women with true grit in their bones built the produce industry. Showing a softer side and asking for advice or help is not the easiest thing to do at times. When I need business advice, I pay a visit to my chief executive, Dana Thomas.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: That the phrase, "Let me check my inventory" from a buyer actually means, "I don't need anything." I have guys who have been saying that to me for 14 years and still haven't bought anything. All kidding aside, I truly believe there are people that value good information and superb service over low pricing and a poor service level. I used to think being the most aggressive won the business. Although this is true in many cases, others view a strong partner as one who cares about their business just as much as their own. If you want to attract quality partners it all starts with you, the salesperson.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: I believe social media will force buyers and seller alike to further push the envelope with regard to their consumer outreach efforts. Consumers are thirsty for knowledge. In a nutshell, we want to know where our food comes from. Live video feed and real-time market updates are something I can see taking center stage amongst consumers. We are already seeing this with QR codes on produce. A shopper can take a picture of the code and be directed immediately to that shipper's packinghouse or farm. We will continue to see much more down the road.



Chris Dock, 37
Strategic Account Manager
C.H. Robinson (CHR)
Eden Prairie, MN

Hometown: Plymouth, MN
Hobbies: Golf; Spending time with family; Outdoor activities

Personal: Engaged; An 8-year-old daughter from first marriage

Motto in Life: Everything happens for a reason.

Professional Accomplishments: Dock's first job was as a produce clerk at Rainbow Foods when he was just 16 years old. During his eight years at Rainbow, he worked his way up from produce clerk to produce manager and was able to put himself through college.

After graduating college, he started his career at C.H. Robinson and held many different roles from business analyst, to sourcing manager and most recently various account manager roles. Currently, he is the strategic account manager for one of the company's largest produce customers and also supports some of the teams for other strategic sourcing accounts.

His main focus is produce sourcing products and services and he manages a team of more than 15 people to support these customers. As part of this role, he creates multi-year account specific strategies, creates annual account budgets and strategic account plans to guide the account. Dock utilizes business analytics to support and add value to the customer, anticipates customer needs to provide solutions, introduces strategic supply chain ideas that create competitive advantages for the customer, develops customer relationships with senior exec-

utive leadership, defines and communicates responsibilities for account team and aligns CHR network to the accounts entire organization.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I would say I eat more than the average person. My fiancé always gives me a hard time because whenever we go to the grocery store I always have to buy more produce — whether we need it or not. If it looks good it seems to find its way into my grocery cart. For example, the other day I went shopping to pick up a few of the basics, like bread and milk, and came back with 4 pounds of strawberries, six Atualfo mangoes, two cantaloupe, and a couple of avocados. This wouldn't be so bad, but I already had a fridge full of produce from shopping days earlier. I guess in the end, I would rather have too much at the house instead of not enough.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Developing a customer specific strategy allowing us to not only retain/grow our business with that customer but to truly add unique and measurable value to their organization. In my current role, I have a large team that supports the business. Getting everyone aligned to a common strategy is fun but challenging at the same time. The challenging part of this is understanding where the customer is at today, what pressures they are going to face in the coming years so we can develop a strategy that will work for many years instead of a moment in time. At the end of the day, getting a team to rally around a strategy that is going to win long term, even when there are short-term bumps in the road, is one of the most rewarding and enjoyable parts of my job.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Food Safety! Consumers today question if their food is safe and big steps need to be taken to help in this area. It's true we are better than we were a handful of years ago, since some large retail and foodservice companies have increased their requirements, but we still have a long way to go.

Requirements are great but it doesn't ensure the product served at the dinner table comes from a field meeting those standards. The complexity of our supply chain makes it very difficult to truly hold people accountable to strict requirements on purchase order level. There needs to be connectivity that allows quality control to verify food safety compliance when they are inspecting the product. Until this happens, there will continue to be people who take shortcuts that can have a negative impact on all of us.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: The number one thing I wish I could teach account managers working for me is what happens at store level. The store level execution issues. How product can be merchandised to make it more appealing to consumers and ulti-

mately sell more. The challenges the stores face based on packaging. The impact of different price points at retail. How inventory at store level should be handled to optimize freshness. We try to recreate this with frequent store visits, but it's not the same as working in a store. My retail experience helped me understand the last leg of the supply chain and gave me a broad base of knowledge about all the commodities.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: Ever since I started in this industry I have been extremely passionate about it and how the business always changes. No two moments in time are ever the same. It is fast paced and your ability to manage what's happening in the supply chain is the difference between success and failure.



Fernando Balart Espinosa, 29
Marketing Manager for North and Latin America
Chilean Fruit Exporters Association (ASOEX)
Santiago, Chile

Hometown: Santiago, Chile

Hobbies: Sport-aholic (specifically soccer and outdoors); CrossFit training; Movies; Theater

Personal: Engaged

Motto in Life: Be persistent and positive. Drawing good energies to you and your future goes hand in hand with helping the less privileged.

Professional Accomplishments: Espinosa majored in business in advertising from a respected University in Chile (Universidad del Desarrollo) and spent two years in the ad industry. Desiring a new challenge, he applied to work for the Chilean Fruit Exporters Association (ASOEX), a nonprofit private trade association whose members represent 96 percent of the fruit volume exported from Chile.

He started as a marketing coordinator and just three months later was presented with an opportunity through the resignation of one of his bosses. He became the Association's marketing manager for North and Latin America in October of 2009 and has accomplished a great deal since. His responsibilities include managing, fielding and supervising more than six global promotional and marketing campaigns for Chilean Fruit in North and Latin America, as well as working hand-in-hand with the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association office, based in San Carlos, CA.

He also is responsible for researching and implementing brand positioning for the Chilean fresh fruit industry. He planned and implemented participation in major international fresh fruit trade shows including PMA Fresh Summit, CPMA in Canada, Fruit Logistica in Berlin and Asia. He implemented marketing and promotional campaigns in North America including nationwide spot TV campaigns, online and print advertising, international buyer delegates and food editor visits to Chile, trade and foodservice programs, consumer recipes and research devel-

opment. He also implemented product specific programs in Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, Colombia and Brazil. He developed strategic planning for emerging products and newly formed commodity boards such as the Chilean Blueberry Committee, Chilean Kiwifruit Committee, Chilean Citrus Committee, Chilean Cherry Committee, North America Promotion Committee Board and Latin America Promotion Committee Board.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Chile is recognized as a world-class fruit supplier, and it's a challenge is to maintain that position in the midst of growing competition. My biggest challenge is figuring out strategic directions and programs, in conjunction with the private and public sectors, which permit our country to remain in this position.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I enjoy traveling a great deal, even if it means traveling 29 hours to Asia for a full week or 10 hours to the U.S. for just a couple of days. My job is pretty intense with travel and it's one of the things I enjoy the most, even in my personal life. I'd honestly travel anywhere.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: To continue to help grow business for Chile. I believe Chile is full of potential and one of the leading economies in South America. It's just a matter of time until my beautiful country becomes an even bigger player in international trade.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: More than knowledge, I wish I had developed the much-needed soft skills to survive in the fruit industry. I specifically mean, patience, tolerance, keeping a cool head in a stressful environment and a clear long-term vision. However, I'm glad I've been able to develop these skills throughout the years. My goal is to continue learning and becoming a well-rounded professional.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: I'm moved by potential. I see huge growth potential for the Chilean fruit industry and I'm honored to make a small contribution for a long-term goal. On another note, international trade is one of my big motivations, since it allows me to move in a multicultural arena and learn from other backgrounds and ways of thinking.



Jeff Greene, 40
Vice President of Operations
Hollar and Greene Produce
Co. Inc.
Boone, NC

Hometown: Boone, NC

Hobbies: Anything football; Snow skiing; Activities with his kids

Personal: Married for 17 years; Five children

Community: Deacon for 20 years at Mount Vernon Baptist Church; Sunday School teacher; Chair of benevolence committee; Founder and volunteer of his church's sports ministry (Equip Ministries) serving more than 100 families by offering football, baseball, soccer, and volleyball to the community; Coaches youth teams; School volunteer

Motto in life: Plan for working another 40 years, but live like I only have a day.

Professional Accomplishments: Greene has spent his entire life in produce, being born into a 50-year-old family business. While continuing to keep the family business involved in his life during college, he put most of his attention on playing college football. He left Appalachian State University as a starting football player and captain, as well as a business management graduate. His first official post-graduate job at Hollar and Greene included sales and customer service to chain stores. For the past 10 years he has held his current position and has been critically involved in all aspects of operations for the company including customer relations, employee productivity and strategic business plans.

Under his leadership, Greene enabled Hollar and Greene to make the transition with two of the top national chain stores into co-managed replenishing. This allowed the company to grow rapidly with these two major chains while using Greene's negotiating skills on the yearly contract pricing. The volume these chains used enabled Hollar and Greene to increase acreage on four major growing areas to year-round. Greene is leading the way for the company to be known as a category professional in the cabbage industry. He has become a go-to source for most major chains concerning specs, containers, varieties, and any other issue concerning cabbage. He serves on the Leafy Greens Council and spent two years as president of the North Carolina Chapter of United Fruit and Vegetable Association.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: Because of the chance to work with my hero, my Dad, in the family business. I grew up thinking cabbage was the top of the pyramid on the food chain. From a young age, I was involved in the family business. I loved to go out in the fields and enjoyed the whole process of getting cabbage from the field to the market. As I grew, I learned to work with all levels of employees in the produce business. At the age of 16 being able to drive around to look at cabbage was cool and exciting. As I matured, I tried to balance my life into three areas: Faith, family and football. I accepted and took pride in our family business of supplying cabbage to the world.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I try and eat cabbage every day. I love all fruits and vegetables as well.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: More regulations each day. Also, as I learned more about the produce industry, I truly began to

understand what running a family business actually required. There have been so many ups and downs over the past 20 years. But, at the end of the day, and 20 years later, I love this ride and enjoy the business.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I am where I want to be and doing what I want to do. I get to work alongside my brothers and father in a family environment with employees that possess the same values as mine, to accomplish a goal we could not do alone. Our team goal is to supply the world with cabbage while following the Golden Rule, and I love it.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: To improve the quality of life for my family, friends, and customers.



Eric Halverson, 36
Executive Vice President
Black Gold Farms
South Grand Forks, ND

Hometown: Grand Forks, ND

Hobbies: NDSU Bison Football; Hunting; Family

Personal: Married with three daughters (ages 8, 6 and 4)

Community: Calvary Lutheran Church

Motto in Life: Always strive for excellence.

Personal Accomplishments: From a fourth generation family farm, Halverson's position as executive vice president gives him responsibility for strategy, business systems and technology. Black Gold Farms is a multi-state potato production organization that raises in excess of 20,000 acres of potatoes in 11 states. Halverson's responsibilities include taking a leadership role in the company and general business management. He is training with his father (who will be retiring in the next 12 months) to take the helm as chief executive. He is a member of the Association of Agricultural Production Executives (AAPEX).

He attended the Potato Industry Leadership Institute in 2008 and was elected by classmates to serve as the Grower Leader for the 2009 class. Halverson was elected to the represent North Dakota on the United States Potato Board (USPB) in 2008. In 2009, he was elected to the Administrative Committee, serving on the International Marketing Committee. In 2013, he was elected to the Executive Committee of the USPB and served as Co-Chair of the International Marketing Committee.

He helped with the design and implementation of the Black Gold Systematic approach protocols, one of the systems that helped Black Gold Farms win the National Potato Council Environmental Stewardship Award in 2008. He represented the USPB on a trade mission to Vietnam in 2011 and was chosen as a panelist on the Sustainability Panel in the General Session at the 2012 Potato Expo in Orlando. He was named as one of the 2012 "40 under 40" list by

Business Watch Magazine of North Dakota and was awarded *Spudman Magazine's* Emerging Leader Award in 2013.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I expect to help lead our business to further growth. We look to achieve growth by providing value to our customers through service, quality, and competitive pricing.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see the industry take a larger role in educating consumers on how their food is produced.

Q: What do you know now that you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Having a good idea is often the easy part; execution of the idea separates those who excel from those that don't.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: My involvement in the United States Potato Board.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Consumers demanding more information about where their food comes from.



Norma Hollnagel, 36
International Sales Manager & Administrator
Ethylene Control, Inc.
Selma, CA

Hometown: Kingsburg, CA

Hobbies: Running; Spinning; Being a cheerleader for her children

Personal: Married with three kids (ages 14, 11 and 9)

Community: Selma Cares, which helps local families in need.

Motto in Life: The only one we are in competition with is ourselves; be better than you were yesterday.

Professional Accomplishments: Hollnagel has been in the produce industry for more than 13 years having started her career with Ethylene Control. She previously worked in banking, where she helped many companies in the produce industry. She started with Ethylene Control in August of 2000 as administrator and three years later was promoted to international sales manager and administrator. While managing daily operations at Ethylene Control, she earned her college degree in May 2013, receiving a bachelors degree in communications. She now manages most daily company activities, including all sales and administration. She also manages accounting and maintains production inventory. She assists and maintains an active Ethylene Control presence in The Kiwanis Club of Selma, The Lions Club of Dinuba, The Big Fresno Fair, and The California Grape and Tree Fruit League. In

previous years she has assisted Ethylene Control president, Dave Biswell, with donations and collections for CGTFL. She also works with TEDx, a program of local self-organized events, bringing people together for growth experiences.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I love the diversity in our customers. I get to learn about many cultures and customs. It is especially interesting when I learn about a new fresh commodity I haven't seen in the United States.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would love to see the water situation in California improve so that our crops can flourish to their potential. I believe everyone in our industry would prosper from that.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I go to our president who is the pioneer for our industry in ethylene gas removal in fresh produce and floral. I also talk to my partner in life, my friend and my supporter (my husband) who is also in the produce industry.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Throughout the years, I have accumulated extensive knowledge on fresh produce and the effects of ethylene on many commodities. It all is helpful for my field of work. I suppose I could have wished for the experience and knowledge, but that came with time and dedication.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: One of my top accomplishments is to have graduated from CSU Fresno with a bachelors in communication, while being a single mother of two with a full-time job at Ethylene Control. I also worked very hard to get our product approved for use with organics. We are OMRI-Certified and therefore have a greater fresh produce customer base that we can help. Finally, I am proud that our president just received the Supplier of The Year Award for 2014 by the California Grape and Tree Fruit League Growers and Shippers.



Julia Inestroza, 35
Marketing Director
Gourmet Trading Company
Los Angeles, CA

Hometown: Porterville, CA
Hobbies: Modern art; Wine; Community involvement; Blogging

Personal: Married, One daughter

Community: Board member for Early Alert Canines, which provides diabetic alert dogs to type 1 diabetics; Board member for the Emerging Ag Technologies Pathway at Strathmore High School; Volunteer for the Diabetic Youth Foundation summer camps; CDFA Specialty Crop Block Grant Review Committee member; Trustee

for the W.P. Bartlett Scholarship Trust, providing roughly \$100k annually to needy students pursuing a four-year college degree; Finance and Thrift Bank board member — a bank for the socially disadvantaged and “unbanked.”

Motto in life: Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.

Professional Accomplishments: Inestroza grew up working on her family's citrus, avocado and olive farm in the San Joaquin Valley. After earning her bachelor's degree in economics, she took a job at Agribuys (now Foodlink) where she worked with people from various food industries. During this time, she was accepted to the California Ag Leadership program. In the middle of the two-year program, she took a job with Gourmet Trading Company to handle all of their marketing. During her 10 years with Gourmet, the company has grown substantially. The company has won a Marketing Excellence award from *Produce Business*, as well as the Ameristar and Worldstar packaging design award for its two-piece asparagus box.

Two years ago, she and her husband moved to her family's ranch to take over operations from her father. She has continued to work with Gourmet Trading Company on a part-time basis. In addition to these two jobs, she also teaches micro and macro economics at the local community college. She serves on the PMA new member committee as well as the PMA's exhibit advisory committee. She is a member of the California Citrus Mutual marketing committee and a member of the new varieties committee with the Citrus Research Board.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I was “born” into it. I actually worked so much on the family farm that I swore I was going to go to college to be a banker. My job at the dot com Agribuys exposed me to people from the various food industries. I was instantly drawn to the fresh produce people, and was hooked back into the industry. I thought I wanted to escape, but I am so happy to be back in it.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: My husband is a trained chef, and we often base our meals around fresh produce.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Balancing everything and transitioning from “marketing” to “farming” and all the other things going on. It all leads to a richer base of knowledge so I can do all the jobs better.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: More technology used across the board, and more advocacy for the “mainstream” growers out there. Let's not just talk about local or organic.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I call Minos Athanassiadis. He was the person who made me realize I really loved the fresh produce industry while at Agribuys, and who encouraged me to stay in the industry.



Amber Kosinsky, 30
Director of Marketing
Wish Farms
Plant City, FL

Hometown: Auburndale, FL
Hobbies: Paddle Boarding; Certified Les Mills BodyPump and CXWORX exercise instructor; Cooking and Blogging

Personal: Single

Community: Event organizer and co-chairman of the Inaugural Strawberry Picking Challenge charity event, which raised \$75,000 for Redlands Christian Migrant Association in 2014; Participated as a contestant in the 2013 Plant City Rotary Club's “Annual Dancing with the Locals” charity event to raise funds for defibrillators in Plant City police cars; Volunteer Assistant and Advisor to the University of South Florida Sundoll's Dance Team
Motto in life: Remember the past, but live for the moment while keeping your eye ever forward to the destiny you create today.

Professional Accomplishments: Kosinsky graduated from the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications with a Bachelor of Science in Advertising and a Master of Science in Management from the University of Florida Warrington College of Business. She worked in the areas of Sports Marketing and telecommunications before moving back to Florida to be closer to her family.

In 2011, she joined Wish Farms. As director of marketing for Wish Farms, she manages all consumer and trade marketing including public relations, consumer affairs, digital and social media, website management and content creation, and trade show and event coordination. From concept and planning to implementation and reporting, she directs and communicates all marketing efforts for the company. She also oversees internal communications with employees and growers through monthly newsletters and crop reports.

Currently she represents Wish Farms as the vice president of the Ag Institute of Florida, a nonprofit corporation dedicated to promoting the value of Florida agriculture to the public and elected officials. She serves as the treasurer of the Florida Blueberry Growers Association. She also participated in the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association's Emerging Leadership Development Program.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Part of this challenge is deciding the most productive and cost effective way to market to our three different audiences — customers, growers and consumers. All segments are very different and require a different plan of action.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Every day is different, and every season brings new opportunity along with new challenges. Gary Wishnatzki, the owner of Wish Farms, is very marketing-minded and open to creative ideas. I appreciate the platform he's given me to develop the Misty the Garden Pixie brand and create my own unique role within his company. It's exciting

to know that a department of just one person can benefit an organization and hopefully make an impact in the industry.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Maintaining a reliable workforce. Labor relations is a complex issue and involve the public perception of our industry. While we have made great strides at the state and federal level, we must have a continuous improvement process that includes individual farms. I would like to see a unified industry effort to help growers by providing suggested action plans or best practices for recruiting, maintaining and communicating with workers. I would like our produce industry to help with additional resources to research the psychology of our workforce and share recommendations for our growers to implement in their own operations.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: In February 2014, we hosted our Inaugural Bright House Networks Strawberry Picking Challenge charity event benefiting Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA). In its first year, we hit our goal of raising \$75,000 for RCMA. We had the support of 45 corporate sponsors and an attendance of over 350 people from the community. Twenty local Florida strawberry growers from 16 different farms were represented and volunteered as team coaches. Twenty celebrities, media reporters, and political leaders participated in the contest including Adam Putnam, Florida Commissioner of Agriculture; Dan Raulerson and Jake Raburn, Florida State Representatives; and Fred McGriff, former MLB player and all-star. The support from the industry and the community was tremendous! I am extremely proud of this event because I coordinated the fundraising, promotion and day-of details from start to finish. It was certainly a labor of love that will only get bigger and better next year!

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: The fresh produce industry has adopted branding as a component of its marketing matrix and overall business strategy. Many produce organizations are investing more money into branding products to consumers. I see this strategy increasing amongst the fresh produce industry in the coming years.



Shannon Leigh, 32
Customer Group Manager,
Western United States
C.H. Robinson
Eden Prairie, MN
Hometown: Woodbury, NJ
Hobbies: Golf; Pilates

Community: Organized Ongoing Toiletry Drive Collection; Food Banks

Motto in life: Just own it.

Professional Accomplishments: Leigh has spent nearly a decade in the produce industry and

currently serves as customer group manager, transportation for the Western U.S. Division of C.H. Robinson. She is accountable for the financial, sales and people management as well as the direction of the customer account management and sales teams within the transportation side of the business.

She began her career at C.H. Robinson in 2005 in the Northeast Division, located in Paulsboro, NJ. The following year she relocated to the Monterey, CA, Division shortly after the transportation division was created. She began working on the Western Growers Transportation Program, developing transportation solutions for hundreds of grower-shippers throughout the western United States. In 2007, she was promoted to sales manager within the region and in 2010 was promoted to transportation manager.

Leigh has spent a great deal of time and energy during her career participating in internal as well as industry related personal development and leadership programs. She is a 2009 graduate and key award recipient of the C.H. Robinson KASP program, a prestigious internal program exclusive to C.H. Robinson targeted toward business leaders within the company. In 2011, she graduated from Leadership Salinas Valley, Class XXIX. Most recently, she became the first C.H. Robinson employee to enter into and complete the very prestigious California Agriculture Leadership Program (CALP). CALP is an advanced two-year leadership program developed for emerging leaders within the agriculture community of California. She graduated this past January and participated in Class 43.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Creating sustainable business platforms for companies through the use of transportation. When transportation can help a shipper differentiate beyond the sale of product by providing an additional service to the customer and offer a more multi-tiered solution, we've created a sustainable program in which they can do business, and that is the most satisfying part.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I will continue to pursue additional leadership roles, not only within C.H. Robinson, but also within the industry at large. I want to continue to expand my capacity as a leader within the produce space as well as advocate for our industry at higher and higher levels.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I'd like to see more consumer awareness through education. With all the issues facing agriculture today — including water, labor and food safety, both in California and nationwide, it comes down to a greater pursuit to create consumer advocacy for our industry. That begins with accuracy and depth of information.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Building on my strengths, learning through experimental situations and trial and error has made me who I am today. If I had to choose something, I suppose I would have liked to have the wherewithal and a greater sense of self-awareness within my developmental areas early on. It certainly would have expedited my learning curve on the business, industry and my own improvement opportunities.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: I am most proud of accomplishing the California Agricultural Leadership Fellowship. The rigorous 16-month commitment from a time and travel standpoint, as well as the focus on critical thinking and challenge to expand my capacity to think larger was the biggest task I ever tackled.



Brett Libke, 39
General Manager – East Coast
The Oppenheimer Group
(Oppy)
Coquitlam BC, Canada
Hometown: St. Louis, MO

Hobbies: Exercising; BBQ-ing on his smoker; Playing with his kids

Personal: Married with two kids

Community: Represents the Oppenheimer Group on the Board of Trustees for the Produce for Better Health Foundation; Chairs the PBH Donor Committee; Member of the PBH Executive Committee; Supports the United Way (American Heart/Stroke); NJ Boxer Rescue; Autism and Rheumatoid Arthritis walks.

Mottos in Life: Learn from yesterday, live for today, and dream for tomorrow. Never stop competing.

Professional Accomplishments: Working out of Oppenheimer's Newark, DE, office, Libke's general manager role combines his previous role of director of sales with overseeing the East Coast operations.

He currently provides effective leadership and support to the company's eastern U.S. sales team, which operates from offices in Newark, DE, Tampa, FL, and Chicago, unifying their efforts to optimize service.

Libke began his produce career in a logistics job with C.H. Robinson in the St. Louis office. In early 2003, he relocated to Chicago for a dual role as produce manager and account manager. Libke was accountable to the Regional GM for produce in the Central Region as well as responsible for the development and growth of the largest retail account in the region.

In August 2011, after 14 years with C.H. Robinson, he moved to The Oppenheimer Group at their East Coast hub in Newark. Within his first year, he became their director of sales for the eastern U.S. In August 2013, Libke took his current position.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I love leading the sales team at Oppy through both good and challenging scenarios. I like

providing direction, developing talent and making sales that benefit both our growers and customers.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: My wife and/or peers.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I wish that I had the same level of emotional intelligence that I have now when I first started in the business.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: Being named general manager and sales director for Oppenheimer's East Coast offices (Chicago, Tampa and Newark, Delaware) and representing Oppy with the PBH and being asked to join their Executive Committee.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: I believe people will continue to expand their horizons and eat more produce items and varieties than they do today — especially since North America is more multi-national than ever before. Additionally, I believe more produce will be consumed away from home and on-the-go and that some of the packaging trends we are seeing in Europe will make their way to the U.S.



Joshua Logsdon, 35
West Coast Sales Manager
Giro Pack, Inc.
Vidalia, GA

Hometown: Yakima, WA

Hobbies: Skiing; Golf

Personal: Married with three children

Community: Donates a minimum of 10 percent of income to charity annually. Each year the recipients differ, but the choice is always based on life circumstances. Past donations include: Doctors Without Borders; Cystic Fibrosis Foundation; Local organizations dealing with migrant worker health, welfare, language and well-being. Local Rotary club including positions of leadership on multiple committees and a three-year rotation on the board of directors; Rotary Paul Harris Fellow; Former board member for La Casa Hogar, a local organization committed to the successful transition of new immigrants to life in the Yakima Valley — particularly women and children.

Motto in life: "Have the courage to follow my heart and intuition; they already know what I truly want to become. Everything else is secondary." — Steve Jobs

Professional Accomplishments: Prior to starting his career in the produce industry in Yakima, WA, Logsdon was a landscape architect in Denver. He was fortunate enough to work on some major projects around the country including the Denver Broncos Mile High Stadium and more than five national parks. In 2006, he joined Giro Pack in Yakima and became a full-time salesman. Since then he has progressed from a salesman in the

Northwest to Northwest manager, regional manager and now West Coast sales manager. He helps cover an area that includes 12 western U.S. states and four western Canadian provinces and fills in as needed in other states.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: Though I enjoyed landscape architecture, I wanted a more significant learning curve in my professional life. In the fall of 2005 two of my closest friends from high school called and asked me to move to Yakima to help build their produce equipment business. The only catch was they could not offer me a salary. I moved to Yakima with \$3,000 in my pocket, a commission-only job offer, and the opportunity to create something new. I disregarded the noise of those around me who said I had made a bad choice. In 2006, I officially joined Giro Pack.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Keeping up with the pace at which we have grown. Our sales growth is very steep and that comes with a variety of staffing and management challenges.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I expect to be in an international role. My family and I will spend two months at the end of this year in Santiago, Chile, on a sabbatical with the goal of learning Spanish and creating international opportunities to continue the growth of my career, as well as foster a unique cultural opportunity for my family.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: My wife, who is my sounding board. She is an amazing woman, who in her own is deserving of this recognition, especially if it was offered for a high-profile, executive vice president who willingly gave up her career to be home with three kids.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Packaging will reshape the produce department. I envision a produce department no longer full of packaging brands from X, Y and Z company but a department resembling the animals in a zoo, where the lion packaging correlates to gala apples, hippo packaging correlates to peaches, giraffes to cucumbers, monkeys to bananas, etc. This will attract the kid/mother consumers that retailers want and our country needs to get back to a "healthy" status. Some side effects of this will be decreased health issues, reduced health care costs, healthier individuals, more productive workers, and more active lives.



Meg Miller, 31
Director of Public Relations
Produce Marketing
Association (PMA)
Newark, DE

Hometown: Pilesgrove, NJ

Hobbies: Running; Hiking; Biking

Personal: Married with two boys (5 years old and 7 months)

Community: Serves as the public relations officer for local Woodstown FFA Alumni Association; Selected to serve as a 2011 vice chair of the National Milk Producers Federation Young Leaders Council; Received the 2010 Young Cooperators award through the Land O'Lakes Young Leader program; PMA Foundation for Industry Talent's Emerging Leaders Program in April; Public Relations Society of America; Washington Agriculture Communicators Network; Alliance for Food and Farming's Communications Committee; Produce Traceability Initiative's Communications Working Group.

Motto in Life: Go big or go home.

Professional Accomplishments: Miller's career has revolved around agriculture from the start. While attending college, she worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, first with the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, and then the Natural Resource Conservation Service. After graduating from college, she was the communications manager for Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association in Philadelphia. Working under the 'got milk?', '3-A-Day,' and 'Fuel Up to Play 60' brands, she was responsible for communicating national and local strategic initiatives to more than 7,200 stakeholders in the Mid-Atlantic region.

In August 2010, she joined the Produce Marketing Association as public relations manager, implementing elements of PMA's public relations programming and leading the development of its social and new media efforts. In 2012, she was promoted to director, and is currently responsible for driving the association's public relations initiatives in support of its strategic plan, including corporate communications, stakeholder relations, crisis preparedness, issues management and media relations.

She played a key role in the growth and development of PMA's member communications vehicles including its social media presence and video newscast, PMA TV. She delivered successful public relations campaigns for major PMA milestones, including PMA's 2011 rebranding, its 2013 strategic plan, and its 2012 Fresh Summit which resulted in 21,000 industry attendees from more than 60 countries, and a 200 percent increase in media participants. She continued to raise PMA's visibility with the consumer media, highlighting industry initiatives, with the goal of increasing produce demand. In the past year, news coverage has increased by more than 70 percent. She is leading the public relations strategies for the partnership between Sesame Workshop and PMA. Forged by the Partnership for a Healthier America — with Honorary Chair First Lady Michelle Obama — this collaboration sets the stage for an industry movement to promote fruit and veggie consumption to children ages two to five and their millennial families.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: *Forbes* published an article in January that said, "Millennials believe the success of a business should be measured in terms of more than just its

financial performance, with a focus on improving society among the most important things it should seek to achieve." I couldn't have said that better myself. I have a moral obligation to work for an industry that has a product I truly believe will improve society. Fresh produce certainly fits that profile. It gives me the drive to make a difference.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Consumer confidence in fresh produce is eroded with every food safety concern. Our industry can change that with advances in prevention and improved detection technologies to reduce the risk. We all know that food safety issues impact not just one company or commodity, but the entire supply chain — most of all, public health.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: Julie Koch, PMA vice president of member relations, and Dr. Bob Whitaker, PMA chief science and technology officer.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Don't let perfection be the enemy of good.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Advancements in technology will have a great impact on agriculture, and the future will be shaped on how quickly the industry adapts those new advances. Population growth and fresh produce opportunities are another important area.



Kenichi (Kenny) Mills, 34
East Coast American Market
Division - Sales Manager
House Foods America Corp.
Garden Grove, CA
Hometown: Pleasanton, CA
Hobbies: Movies; Cooking; Traveling; Spending time with family

Personal: Married; 8-month-old son.

Professional Accomplishments: Mills was hired in November 2005 by House Foods America as a sales representative for their new factory located in Somerset, NJ. House Foods America is a subsidiary of Asian spice manufacturer House Foods (Japan), which manufactures tofu and shirataki. Working from the New Jersey office, Mills initially handled just a few accounts, mainly local distributors in the Metro New York region as well as calling on small chains and independents. He spent a great deal of time in the field doing cold calls, merchandising and demos.

Currently, he handles accounts that include wholesalers, mass retail, and club stores. He also supervises two other sales representatives who play a major role in the company's operations in both the Midwest region and the Natural/Organic side of the business. Additionally, he works with regional brokers and the company's marketing department on local events, regional advertisements, and national trade shows. When he first started at House Foods, the company's market

share in New York was 7 percent. Today it is about 40 percent.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: After I had graduated college in 2002, I moved to Tokyo to immerse myself in the culture and the language. Even though I'm half Japanese I embarrassingly could not speak or write the language, so I was enrolled in language school and worked part time to make ends meet. It was an unforgettable time of my life. In 2005, I decided to move back to the U.S. to find a "real" job. I could have moved back to Northern California (where I was originally from), but being in my mid-20s and still wanting some adventure, I moved to New York City. After a few weeks of job-hunting, I found an opening at House Foods, which was very close to completing its tofu factory in Somerset, NJ. They were looking for someone in sales for the East Coast. I felt it was a perfect fit for me since I didn't want to completely forget what I had learned in Japan, and I was to be put in charge of bringing this Eastern food to Western diets. I've been working in the produce industry ever since then.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: My challenge, as well as my hope, is to try to get more produce departments in conventional supermarkets to understand that tofu isn't just some "hippy vegan" food. It is actually a staple in many Asian diets and is still growing in demand. You can instantly see a difference between an Asian supermarket and a conventional American supermarket when you look at how tofu (as well as many other Asian produce) is merchandised in the produce department. Even though parts of the U.S. have a very small Asian and Asian-American population, other areas have a large and growing population. In addition, more people of all ethnicities in the U.S. are eating more Asian cuisine than before thanks in part to media outlets — such as the Food Network and the growth of Asian menus in the U.S.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Aside from seeing more ethnic produce (especially more tofu) in conventional supermarkets, I'd also like to see more Millennials in the produce industry.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: I'm most proud of having contributed to the growth of my company's business in the Northeast, particularly in Metro New York. I'm also proud of some of the relationships I've developed with my colleagues, brokers, and customers over the years. I've learned so much from them and I hope they learned from me as well.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: I see more ethnic/multicultural produce, more food labeling and more non-GMOs. I also think there will be more snacking, particularly of fresh

foods. I think packaging will play an essential role here.



Daniel J. O'Connor, 38
Asst. Category Manager of
Produce/Floral
TOPS Markets LLC
Williamsville, NY
Hometown: Sardinia, NY

Hobbies: Agriculture; Woodworking; Camping; Boating.

Personal: Married with three children

Community: Various humanitarian missions during nine years of active service in the United States Marine Corps. Work ranged from building towns and schools in developing countries to U.S. projects involving hurricane/destructive weather relief; Guest speaker at various schools and senior centers; Hosted numerous events with the Catholic Church; Served on the town board as a zoning officer; Guest speaker/trainer to the local Boy Scouts of America

Motto in Life: Honor and Commitment

Professional Accomplishments: O'Connor began his civilian career with C&S Wholesale where he rapidly learned the art of perishable distribution. After three years, he was offered a position as produce inspector for TOPS Markets. In addition to attending various stakeholder conferences for state & global GAP policies, he rapidly became a key resource for product and industry knowledge.

Two years ago, he was offered a position as assistant category manager of produce/floral. His responsibilities included providing all merchandising plans and direction to stores. He is also the manager for all dressings, juice, nuts, and tropical, as well as all other dry lines. He is responsible for direction to TOPS' 160 stores and four field merchandising specialists in terms of weekly ad and quarterly planning. He recently completed the Penn State Corporate Leadership Challenge and is currently taking part in the Acosta Category Management Program.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: Produce is served with every meal and all snacks in my household. In our home, let's just say, that my family has "had it all" from leeks to lychee fruit.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Produce itself is the biggest challenge. With ever-changing conditions, availabilities, and innovations across the industry, the greatest challenge is to stay ahead of it all. The fast pace requires the ability to remain flexible and constantly creative. As consumers become more savvy with their growing demands, it's our responsibility as leaders to work with the grower and shipper community to remain a constant source of innovation.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Produce is always in motion, truly, a very dynamic industry. It's a true challenge to adapt to those changes and evolve them into our weekly

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market strategy — that's the most enjoyable part of my job. I take great pride in being the "point man" between growers/shippers, merchandising strategies, and our 160 store teams. My respect and appreciation for strong leadership and true teamwork (enabling others to act and collaboratively achieve the goal) has been one of the key elements in the strength of our team.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: In my opinion, we all need to do a better job with media exposure. Media is a huge part of communication and information for the youth of our nation. Not only social media, but televised as well. By coordinating the efforts of the various commissions, we can join forces to enhance our exposure as an industry. It is rare that we as an industry show our passion on something other than a display bin, Twitter message, or Facebook page. Just look at Wonderful Brands success — a direct result of brilliant marketing.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: The transition from an active-duty Marine to the business world was my finest accomplishment. It has given me an opportunity to take my "mission oriented" mindset and apply it to becoming a leader in the produce industry.



S. Garrett Patricio, 36
Chief Operating Officer,
General Counsel
Westside Produce
Firebaugh, CA

Hometown: Fresno, CA

Hobbies: Golfing; Snow skiing;

Swimming; Exercising; Reading; Traveling

Personal: Married; two daughters (ages 5 and 7)

Community: St. Anthony's Catholic Church; St. Anthony's School; Children's Hospital Central California; California Ag Leadership Foundation; Catholic Charities of Fresno.

Motto in life: Live each day to the fullest.

Professional Accomplishments: After graduating from college with a degree in accounting and law school with an emphasis in taxation, Patricio began work as an attorney and certified public accountant in the tax mergers and acquisitions department of PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP in San Francisco.

In 2005, he returned home at the request of his father and began working at Westside. Initially, he worked solely in operations with a focus on strategic planning. He started the company's spring melon program in 2006, partnering with local growers to pack, market and ship cantaloupes in Arizona, and honeydews in Texas. This allowed Westside to become a six-month melon shipper fulfilling the needs of numerous retail and foodservice partners.

In 2008, he overhauled the company's food safety program with greater emphasis on bottom-up education and training, risk management, mitigation and validation tech-

niques. Between 2009 and 2011, he put his law degree to use spending a considerable amount of time dealing with employment law during labor shortages and unionization activities. Most recently, he has focused on corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

In 2012, he instituted a demand response program with on-site smart grid management and monitoring. In 2013, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District approved his grant application to replace 25 tractors with newer, cleaner, Tier 4 engines that will significantly reduce emissions. It is expected that before July 2014, Westside Produce will achieve energy independence with the completion of a 5-acre solar project.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: Upon starting my career, I truly believed my future was in the corporate world, but life has a funny way of pulling you back to your roots. My father's partner and mentor passed away in 2004 and a year later, my father asked me to return home to work alongside him for a trial period of three-years. Three years turned into nine and despite leaving for a brief period to work for a Fresno law firm, the time has been challenging, rewarding and fun.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Dealing with seasonality is a challenge. Winters are quiet and afford us the opportunity to plan, prepare and refine, but finding, training, and engaging 500 employees is daunting. Financial planning, budgeting and tax preparation are relatively straightforward since we can obtain an actual snapshot of performance, but managing cash flow in a seasonal operation is unique and always a challenge. The worst, however, is the mental and emotional letdown after the spring, summer and fall harvests. The energy and excitement of harvest is tough to define, but visible in everyone's eyes. The day you begin laying-off hard working people is the first sign the season is coming to an end. Fortunately, it's cyclical so we'll get to do it all over again next year.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Being from drought-stricken California, I'd like to see continued improvements in water resource management and supported technology. Being a shipper of produce across North America, I'd like to see continued developments in transportation and freight forwarding.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: In 2011, the California melon industry was severely impacted by a deadly listeria outbreak in Colorado. The California Cantaloupe Advisory Board (CCAB) acted quickly and called for a statewide vote of all cantaloupe handlers. It established the only mandatory food safety program in the U.S. produce industry that invited government auditors to inspect all aspects of its

operations. I served as chairman of the Guidance Committee. We were responsible for engaging food safety specialists, compiling relevant research, and drafting comprehensive risk based metrics dealing with environmental assessments, water use, soil amendments, worker health, hygiene and training, harvesting and cooling best practices, cold storage and transportation. In less than nine months, the document was completed, along with two audit checklists for announced and unannounced audits.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Drones, optical sensitivities in mechanical harvesting, critical thinking and risk-based food safety audits, as well as food waste reduction strategies.



Bill Pollard, 34
Director of Produce
Dollar General
Goodlettsville, TN

Hometown: Springfield, IL
Hobbies: Golf; Hunting; Water Sports; Traveling; Cooking

Personal: Single

Community: Dollar General Literacy Foundation, Ole Miss Alumni Club

Motto in Life: You only have one life; make it a good one!

Professional Accomplishments: Pollard began his produce career with United Fruit & Produce in St. Louis, MO, where he was initially responsible for the purchasing of all the packaging supplies needed for retail and fresh cut. During his six years with United Fruit & Produce, his responsibilities expanded into the buyer side where he was responsible for categories such as apples and pears, grapes and cherries. From there he took on a sales role, working with many different retailers and foodservice accounts in the Midwest.

In 2011, he accepted a position as a replenishment buyer with Save-A-Lot out of St. Louis, MO. He was responsible for the replenishment of several commodities in 15 distribution centers and worked closely with the senior buyers. After less than a year, he was promoted into the senior buyer position responsible for the fruit category, working with more than 30 SKUs. In the fall of 2012, Pollard accepted the responsibility of produce sales manager in addition to his buying responsibilities. In late 2013, he accepted the position of director of produce for Dollar General in Goodlettsville, TN, where he is part of a team with the opportunity and challenge of growing Dollar General Markets, currently operating 130 market stores in more than 12 states.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I usually eat two to four servings per day. There is nothing like the summer months with all the homegrown corn, watermelon and Athena cantaloupes.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see immigration labor improvements to ensure we have the workforces needed in order to harvest for the needs of our country.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Patience. It takes time, knowledge and experience to become great at what you do in the produce industry.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: Being invited to participate in the United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Program. This program has allowed me to learn more about the produce industry, work on my communication and public speaking skills, interact and engage with industry experts, and build a strong network of produce industry partners.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: I think that we will continue to see a strong emphasis on food safety, packaged items will grow each year. With our economy where it is today, retailers will have to continue to find ways to find value for our customers.



Jonathan Raduns, 33
Fresh Produce Retail
Merchandising Consultant /
Owner
Merchandise Food LLC
(MerchandiseFood.com)
Somerdale, NJ

Hometown: Basom, NY

Hobbies: Visiting farmers markets; Culinary travel; Espresso; Cooking

Personal: Married with two sons (ages 1 and 7)

Community: Stratford Presbyterian Church; Involved in development, marketing, and special events of the K-12 Stratford Classical Christian Academy; Helped coordinate a program in 2013 raising nearly \$35,000 to bridge the gap between tuition and operating expenses

Motto in Life: There's always room for improvement.

Professional Accomplishments: Raduns grew up on a vegetable farm in Western New York between Rochester and Buffalo. He was hired by a direct farm marketer with a full line of retail market crops planting, harvesting, and retailing in many suburban open-air markets. He helped significantly grow sales through better mass merchandising, great customer service, and refined visual merchandising techniques. He graduated from the Rochester Institute of Technology with a degree in food marketing and distribution and began trading frozen fruits and vegetables with Batters International Food Corporation. He participated in Wegmans Food Markets management training program as a team leader in fresh produce.

His passion for helping farms and retailers improve profits and merchandise led him to found Merchandise Food LLC, a retail and merchandising consulting company aimed to help

retailers improve financial results. Additionally, he is an active associate of Freshxperts, an international fresh produce focused consultancy founded by Anthony Totta and Ron Pelger of Power Produce.

His team provides professional advice on management, operations, marketing, and in-store visual merchandising ideas and solutions. He collaborates with the client's team to reinvent themselves and implement and monitor new ideas to increase profits. Examples of reinvention of fresh produce business includes Center City Philadelphia's premier specialty food store DiBruno Brothers, Southern New Jersey's signature agri-tourism farm Johnsons Corner Farms, and Buehler's Fresh Foods.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I grew up surrounded by fields and never looked back. My brother and I sold fresh produce by the side of the road as little kids. I was later mentored by Dr. Francis Dornoy, owner of Dornoy Farms in Oakfield, NY, and Chair of the Hospitality and Service Management Program at Rochester Institute of Technology. From a very young age I was influenced by his innovation and vision for the fresh industry.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I typically have a minimum of two to three vegetables with a main meal. I love broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, onions, and garlic. I'm regularly at supermarkets and farmers markets, and our family hosts a locally grown food-buying co-op from Lancaster, PA, farms.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more professional writing on the topic of fresh produce operations at a deeper level than is currently available. I would also like to see a trade "school" with formalized training programs for fresh produce managers. I believe many retailers need to learn improved visual merchandising techniques to help drive sales. Many managers are stuck in the stores and have little access to outside perspectives and ideas.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: I am most inspired by two things. First the underperformance of an organization offers many opportunities for improvement. Many retailers do not know what they could be capable of if they focus on shrink management, operations, and refined merchandising. Secondly, I have been inspired by my mentorship under Eric Voigt, produce manager at Wegmans Food Markets. Eric taught me many of the skills and merchandising techniques I use to help other retailers today. I could not have pursued this venture without this experience.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Fresh produce retailers will continue to explore

glass-door case merchandising. This will present new opportunities to save energy costs, shrink, and require innovation to merchandise visually. LED lighting will continue to drive sales and innovation within departments. Retailers may continue to use natural/reclaimed wood in merchandising fixtures, which is a hot trend right now as seen at Whole Foods Markets.



Charles Sardo, 37
Northeast Region Sales
Manager
Ventura Foods
Brea, CA

Hobbies: Kids' sporting events; Cooking; Working on the yard

Personal: Married; Three kids (ages 7, 6 and 4)
Community: Coach youth baseball; Youth Sports Community Fundraiser volunteer; Supporter of Father Chuck's Challenge, a local charity partnering with Food for the Poor to help provide the world's poorest with sustainable food, clothing, and water.

Motto in Life: Have passion in everything you do.
Professional Accomplishments: Sardo began his career in the industry after a produce manager at Genuardi's recruited him from a cashier's position. During his Genuardi's tenure he advanced to the position of assistant store manager, produce. In 2002 he began working for Fresh Express Brand Packaged Salads as a retail sales operation manager. His responsibilities included managing day-to-day retail operations for the Mid-Atlantic region. Additionally, he managed all store level execution with regional broker partners to develop shelf-planning standards with special focus on item assortment, product placement, pricing, and on-shelf consumer programs. In 2006, he was promoted to Mid-Atlantic regional manager with responsibilities for all HQ and retail sales activities in the region for Fresh Express packaged salads and Chiquita Brands healthy snacking items.

In 2011, he joined Ventura Foods as its Northeast regional sales manager for retail brands working out of Norristown, PA. His current role is managing all headquarters and retail sales for Marie's branded salad dressings and Dean's branded dairy dips. He oversees all business operations of Ventura Foods' consumer product sales including production planning, print advertising, category management, sales operations, and consumer marketing for Marie's. He works with broker partners to establish market and account plans to drive innovative and sustainable category growth. He is a member of EPC and NEPC.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: As long as the kids save me some, I eat a good amount of fresh fruits and veggies every day.

Q: What do you have now you wish you had when you first started your career?

A: Vision. If I could go back 20 years I would tell myself anything is possible and to keep an open mind.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: Passion. There is no shortage of passion in the produce industry, and I love being in that environment.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: While I have many years ahead of me in the food industry, my biggest accomplishment so far is my mission to start giving back. I was so fortunate to have great mentors along my journey, and last year I was privileged to be a volunteer mentor for PMA's Career Ambassador Program. I look forward to serving in additional capacities to help mentor our industry's future leaders.

I'm also proud of the people I have had the privilege to work with. I have gained so much knowledge from being surrounded by amazing people. I am truly the better person thanks to their mentoring, friendship, and candidness. Many of these people remain fixtures in my life today.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: The Millennial consumers are ushering in the biggest trends. This group of consumers is setting new standards and trends for not only fresh produce, but for all consumable food products. Their wants and needs will continue to drive new and innovative products to market. The biggest trends I see from this group are convenience, sustainability in products, and looking at labels with focus on real, premium ingredients.



Megan Schulz, 27
Marketing & Communications
Manager
Giumarra Companies
Los Angeles, CA

Hometown: Colorado Springs, CO
Hobbies: Traveling; Swimming;

Hiking; Music festivals

Personal: Single

Motto in Life: Be true to yourself and others.

Professional Accomplishments: During college, Schulz applied online for a summer marketing assistant position with the Giumarra Companies. She continued working for Giumarra into her senior year and following graduation. In 2010, Giumarra asked her to move to Los Angeles to work at its headquarters full time. During her tenure with Giumarra, she has held various positions in marketing, communications, event planning, and customer account management. Her role eventually evolved into marketing and communications manager, where she focuses on the company's brand, Nature's Partner, and company-wide marketing. Currently, she manages Giumarra's advertising, public relations, communications, and web presence, including its websites. She also oversees events such as trade shows and works closely with the sales divisions to support and assist with grower and customer marketing.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: It depends on the day, but I eat a lot of salads. I always have fruit with breakfast and as snacks. I eat avocado almost daily. My other favorites are pineapple, figs, cherries, beets, sugar snap peas, and parsnips.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see the produce industry step forward as experts instead of letting independent bloggers and interest groups speak for produce. We grow, we know. Key areas might be educating consumers about how to make choices appropriate for themselves and their lifestyles with regard to purchasing decisions like organic versus conventional, GMOs, etc.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I wish I had been more accepting and embracing of criticism at a young age.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: I am proud of helping gain leverage in the market for our growers with Fair Trade certification and producing our company video, which featured some of these growers. The resulting video did a great job communicating who we are, and I had the opportunity to meet amazing growers during filming. I also really enjoyed planning an event for Giumarra at the Georgia Aquarium in 2011. It was very rewarding to see how much our growers and customers seemed to enjoy themselves.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Continued consumer interest in health can only mean great things for produce. I think flavor will be key. Consumers are so curious now, they want to try new products and different varieties of their old favorites. It will be important to offer consumers the flavors they are looking for, while also educating them on new and unique ways to eat their favorite produce.



Jesse Sepulveda, 35
Tropical Fruit Sales
Vision Produce Company
Los Angeles, CA

Hometown: Los Angeles, CA

Hobbies: Basketball; Football; Chess; Spending time with family

Personal: Married; two children (ages 1, 4 and 6)

Motto in life: Work hard; play hard.

Professional Accomplishments: In early 2010, Sepulveda was recruited by Bill Vogel, then president of Tavilla Sales, to learn procurement with the intention of one day taking over procurement for the tropical fruit department and also to assist in sales. He had previously worked in the rental car industry for eight years. During his first year with Tavilla, he sold about \$750,000 and traveled multiple times to Mexico, from mango region to mango region, learning every step of the busi-

ness from harvesting to packing. In his second year, he sold around \$1.5 million, increased to about \$3 million in his third year, and last year he hit close to \$4 million. Currently, he is on pace to sell \$5 million in 2014. For the past year and a half, he has been given the role of managing the mango commodity for what is now Vision Produce Company. He procures and sells mangos 52 weeks out of the year for the company. He also manages its Mexican pineapple program along with some lime programs.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: You can truly work 24 hours a day, if your body allowed you to. The biggest challenge is juggling all there is to do on a daily basis.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: The flexibility, the travel, and that it's constantly changing. It's never repetitious.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: More standardized packaging.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: My family and kids. The produce industry, if you work hard, can be lucrative. My motivation truly comes from providing for them.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: I'm most proud of earning the trust from upper management and to have been delegated the responsibilities I have within a four-year period.



Shreenivas Shellikeri, 38
Senior Category Manager
Loblaws Inc.

Brampton, Ontario, Canada

Hometown: Dharwad, Karnataka State, India

Hobbies: Reading; Music (currently trying South Indian classical percussion instrument); Traveling

Personal: Married with two children (2 years old and 5 months)

Community: Director at Samskrit Bharati, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the exposition of the richness and beauty of the Sanskrit language and its relevance in the modern world; Occasionally volunteers in a local Hindu temple

Motto in Life: Never give up and never get hung-up. Actions define you, not words.

Professional Accomplishments: Horticulture has been one of Shellikeri's favorite subjects during his schooling in agricultural marketing and economics. Research projects he completed for his two Masters of Science degrees were closely connected to produce industry issues. His interest in produce transpired to part-time work during 2000-2001 when he began his food retail career with FoodWorld Supermarkets in India.

In 2002, working with Future Group's Food Bazaar division, he managed an imported fruit

business in addition to grocery categories. He joined Loblaws Inc., in 2007 as a senior category manager to look after the ethnic grocery business. Realizing the importance of fresh produce and the exciting opportunities, he accepted the role of senior category manager in the produce business unit in 2009.

In his current position, he looks after the procurement of various ethno-cultural produce and tropical specialties. In addition, he works closely with merchandising, marketing and store operations teams to bring the programs to life. He and his associates are very proud of their ethnic and specialty produce offerings that cater to many demographics such as Asians, South-Asians, Afro-Caribbean and Filipinos. By delivering consistent quality and supplies, the category has posted industry leading sales growth and department penetration.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: A lot. Being a vegetarian, produce is an integral part of food culture. I must note that the variety and consumption has gone up since 2009.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: The ethno-cultural and tropical specialties I look after are very much in demand and to some extent are trendy, however, there is a void of consistent and quality supplies in line with cultural preferences, detailed information on nutritional/health benefits, and easy recipes.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Greater research and industry collaboration on different aspects of specialty crops. This is not limited to growing and marketing of such crops, but exploring nutritional and health aspects.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: First, the ability to work closely with farm and farming communities; second, the ever-changing dynamics of this industry; and third, great colleagues/teams that I am fortunate to work with.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Health, convenience, aging population, changing food culture, and dominance of the discount format. Clearly the produce industry has an important role to play.



Marion Tabard, 39
Director of Marketing
Turbana Corporation
Coral Gables, FL

Hometown: Nantes, France

Hobbies: Traveling; Skiing; Tennis; Cooking

Personal: Married

Professional Accomplishments: Born and raised in France, Tabard graduated in 1996 Magna Cum Laude from the École Supérieure des Sciences Commerciales d'Angers (ESSCA), one of France's

top 20 business schools.

In 1999, Tabard joined Turbana as marketing manager developing and managing all aspects of advertising, promotions, and sales support, and served as the cultural and linguistic liaison between the banana-producing countries in Latin America and the distribution channels throughout North America. In 2001 Tabard became the company's marketing director, leading marketing and communication strategies and initiatives in North America. Since then, Tabard has been instrumental in establishing the Turbana brand as one that exemplifies social responsibility. Tabard's initiatives include partnering Turbana with "One Laptop per Child" to improve education in classrooms throughout rural Colombia. She also conceptualized and provided direction to develop QR codes that connect North American consumers to the farmers in the banana-growing regions of Colombia. The QR codes show consumers exactly which farms their bananas come from and how their banana purchases help raise the quality of life in the banana-growing regions of Colombia.

Tabard has also been instrumental in leading philanthropic initiatives in the U.S. that help Turbana's retailers give back to their own communities. Tabard has helped bring healthier food choices to U.S. schools through the "Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools" program. Her other initiatives include raising funds for breast cancer awareness with the Pink Ribbon Produce campaign, as well as empowering students to eat smart and be active through the "Fuel up to Play 60" campaign, an in-school nutrition and physical activity program launched by the National Dairy Council, The National Football League, and United States Department of Agriculture.

Most recently, Tabard has led the launch and on-going expansion in the United States of the Growing Smiles, Sharing Goodness (GSSG) movement, which exemplifies and promotes the socially responsible values of Turbana. The GSSG encourages people to eat smart, be active, and get involved in their communities. GSSG has already made a significant impact engaging a growing number of communities throughout the Northeastern United States.

As one of the produce industry's most recognizable women leaders, Tabard is a member of the United Fresh's Nutrition and Health Council and sits on the Marketing and Branding Committee for Fyffes. She is a recipient of the Award for Excellence from Ahold USA (2002) for her creative efforts.

Q: How did you get started in the produce industry?

A: I was working for a French luxury brand but realized I wanted to take advantage of living in Miami to work in a more multicultural environment. At that time Turbana was looking for someone to coordinate their marketing efforts and serve as a cultural and linguistic liaison between the banana producing region in Colombia and the distribution channels in North America. My career move to the produce

industry was one in the right direction. For me it wasn't necessarily about the product itself, rather about the brand's messages and the positive efforts as an organization.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Often people outside the industry do not realize that marketing a produce commodity goes beyond the product. The implications revolve around important themes such as inspiring a healthier lifestyle, caring for our environment and supporting our growing communities — topics that are far greater than the product itself and that after all these years still keep me passionate.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Be less traditional, more innovative, get inspiration and fresh ideas from outside the industry.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I often look outside of the industry for fresh perspective when needed. Reaching out to thought leaders in other industries that have encountered similar marketing or business challenges can provide valuable insight.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: I've been most inspired by the realization that one company can contribute so much to the world through its produce. I continue to be inspired by the incredible impact our products have on the whole supply chain, the environment, our communities throughout the U.S., and our communities in the growing regions of Colombia. I am also continually inspired by the strong core values and the history of Turbana. The well-being of the growing regions has always been at the core of our business. Particularly the work and commitment of our social foundation, Fundauniban, which helps our growers, their families, and the growing community, build a sustainable framework for a better quality of life.



Lori Taylor, 33
The Produce Mom
 Indianapolis Fruit Company
 Indianapolis, IN

Hometown: Indianapolis, IN
Hobbies: Youth sports enthusiast; Britney Spears fan; Half marathon runner

Personal: Married with two sons (ages 6 and 4)
Community: Coach for Peewee Baseball; Classroom Mom and Teaching Assistant; Board of Directors for the IMPD Officer David S Moore Foundation; Wellness Board Member for Indianapolis Public Schools; Community Partner & Volunteer for Little Red Door Cancer Agency; Committee Member for Leukemia & Lymphoma's Society Man & Woman of the Year Campaign; Supporter & Volunteer for the Find Your Favorite Heroes' Foundations; Catch the Stars; Graham Rahal Foundation; Dwight Freeney Foundation;

Kasey Kahne Foundation; George Hill Rising Stars; Vacation Bible School coordinator & volunteer at St. Barnabas Catholic Church; Certified Pilates Instructor for Girls Scouts of Indiana

Motto in life: As long as I'm serving the Lord and my family, the rest will fall into place.

Professional Accomplishments: Taylor started her career in Fresh Produce in 2005 at Indianapolis Fruit Company. She was hired to work with the company's Hispanic sales division but her customer base grew to include many types of retailers. Her language skills permitted her to get involved with some buying. Her transition to the marketing department occurred in November 2011 when she "sold herself" to company management despite lack of experience. When she was told her salary was budgeted as a loss — because there was no tangible return to IFC from marketing expenses — she spent nights researching industry trends and offerings for consumer marketing and came up with the idea for creating a single destination with a relevant voice for consumers.

In January 2012 the first *TheProduceMom.com* blog post was published. Today Taylor and the blog continue focusing on educating consumers and increasing the consumption of fresh produce. *The Produce Mom* family of vendors, retailers and restaurants has empowered the delivery of unique campaigns and interactive, insider information to consumers. Taylor is building a network of celebrity and community advocates for fresh produce consumption through Find Your Favorite Heroes. She is educating school kids with Find Your Favorite, and she educates shoppers in grocery stores and restaurants with *The Produce Mom Picks*.

In the blog's first year, it had 169,000 site visits. Its web traffic is growing rapidly and it's now experiencing around 100,000 hits per week. Taylor has hosted four industry Twitter parties averaging 7.6 million impressions per event. More than 70 percent of its web traffic is social media referral with the majority of this referral traffic coming from Pinterest. Taylor and the blog are used by local news affiliates for correspondence and contribution. She is booked for an entire year on the Indianapolis morning show, *Indy Style*, with an estimated live viewers reach of 35,000. She has received multiple recognitions and awards including Walt Disney Kids Concern: 2014 & 2012, Fruits & Veggies — More Matters! Industry Champion: 2014, Most Influential Dame (Indiana Social Media Summit): 2013, Well Dunn Award (WNBA Citizenship Award): 2013, *The Packer* 25: 2013, and Woman of Influence (National Center of Excellence in Women's Health): 2012.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I hope we can grow *The Produce Mom* to create a national culture of consumers — there is a *Produce Mom* in ALL of us! I would like to see Find Your Favorite in every elementary school across the U.S., *The Produce Mom*-branded product available at retailers, Produce Mom Picks

offered on more restaurant menus, and I would really love to grow *The Produce Mom* to the point where we have created new jobs and opportunities for others to find a career in the fresh produce industry.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more businesses do what Indianapolis Fruit Company has done for me. Employees of all backgrounds should have the opportunity to present new ideas to executives. There are a lot of family-owned businesses in this industry, and I think they all could learn quite a bit from Indy Fruit. I'm not a member of the ownership family but my ideas were welcomed and supported — and look where we are today. Through *The Produce Mom* we've built a brand that is a benefit to the industry, retailers, consumers and schools across the nation.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: The ability to lead and influence is more important than your title.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: I'm inspired by the goodness and relevance of our industry. I have confidence in being a part of this industry — we fuel the world with the most nutritious and delicious foods, and we are the ultimate stewards of the land. I feel good about what I do in my professional life, and I enjoy my job. People search for a lifetime to find a career that is rewarding — I will never leave this industry. It's not always easy, and the tenacity of my colleagues and peers motivates me to constantly try harder and think deeper about the quality of my contribution to our supply chain.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: The construction, launch and expansion of Find Your Favorite.



Caitlin Tierney, 29
 Produce and Floral
 Purchasing Manager
 Fresh and Easy
 El Segundo, CA

Hometown: Farmington Hills, MI
Hobbies: Singing; Cooking; Bike Riding; Going to the beach with friends

Personal: Single
Community: Midnight Mission (meal services, food donation drives, counseling, education, training and job placement, shelter, and medical and personal hygiene care to the city's homeless population)

Motto in Life: What you see is what you get.
Professional Accomplishments: Tierney began working in the produce industry in 2006. She was going to college and working as a produce category assistant at Spartan Stores Corporate Office in Grand Rapids, MI. During that time, she assisted

produce managers with ordering and education and finally promotion on various programs. Through her hard work and strong efforts, she was guided into a buyer role.

After six years at Spartan Stores, she was offered the opportunity to become a senior produce buyer for Fresh Direct in New York. While there, she assisted Fresh Direct in buying directly from growers instead of using their local terminal.

In 2012, she relocated to California to accept the job of produce and floral purchasing manager for Fresh and Easy, the American division of TESCO. As a purchasing manager for Fresh and Easy, she selects vendors, SKUs, negotiates pricing, plans promotional strategy, manages new labels and artwork, forecasts, and executes programs such as its famous "Farm to Store in 24 Hours or Less."

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Purchasing both produce and floral. When there is a break in produce, there is a holiday in floral, so you never really have time to breathe.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Negotiating and behavioral trends. I love learning about the elasticity of retail, organic versus conventional, etc.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more processed organic products, improved on-the-go packaging with product already washed and ready to eat, and more taste differential in grapes, berries and melons.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: I'm inspired to help change the environment of produce purchasing to ensure partnerships lead with a win-win mentality and move away from playing the market, which hurts growers and eventually the consumer. If vendors and retailers plan a calendar and set the future of the category together to grow opportunities for not only retailers, but vendors as well, everyone wins.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Rhubarb, Brussel kale, fresh kits for juicing and smoothies, and candy-style fresh convenient items.



Angela Bezon Tiwari, 32
Political Affairs Manager
United Fresh Produce
Association
Washington, D.C.
Hometown: Elba, NY

Hobbies: Avid homemade beer brewer (with husband); Grows hops in New York; History

Personal: Married

Community: Member of the The New York State Society and the Society of Virginia (social and civic organizations that celebrate the culture, history,

traditions, and people of each respective state); Women in Government Relations, Inc., a non-partisan government relations association in the Washington area.

Mottos in Life: Failure is not an option, and life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain.

Professional Accomplishments: Tiwari has always been passionate about her agricultural roots. Her earliest jobs include weeding onions and riding a cabbage transplanter. During school, she interned for U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer (NY) in his regional office in Rochester and interned with United Fresh before accepting a full-time position as part of United's government relations team.

As political affairs manager at United, Tiwari oversees all aspects of the association's grassroots advocacy efforts, including leading the Washington Public Policy Conference. Since taking the helm of this event, she has increased industry participation by 92 percent. She also oversees the association's Political Action Committee (FreshPAC) and other industry-involvement activities. Tiwari assists United's President with its Board of Directors, works with its extensive roster of volunteer leaders, coordinates the Winter Leadership Meetings—including the Foundation Golf Tournament and Produce Legends Dinner, spearheads United's Women in Produce program, and supervises the Internship Program.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I was born and raised in the fresh produce industry on a cabbage and onion farm in upstate New York. While attending college at SUNY Geneseo, I had the opportunity to intern at United Fresh Produce Association. It was the perfect fit to use both my political science degree and love for the fresh produce industry. While in Washington, I got "Potomac Fever" [a desire and passion for Washington D.C.'s political scene] and knew the nation's capital is where I wanted to start my career. Two days after graduation, I packed up and moved to D.C.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I am extremely lucky, as I have my personal "trifecta" I count on. When at home in upstate New York, I go to breakfast at the local diner with Maureen Torrey Marshall of Torrey Farms, Inc. She has helped guide me through many big life decisions. Another mentor and friend, Victoria Backer, always takes the time to hear my perspective and deliver constructive feedback all while providing me a sense of encouragement. Lastly, Tom Stenzel, who is a true visionary for our entire industry. Tom's open door policy, listening ear and belief in empowering his staff has motivated and inspired me.

Q: What do you know now that you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I wish I knew the power of simply introducing yourself to new people and networking with them. Early on, I was shy and didn't want to "bother" important leaders by asking questions. I

learned that folks in our industry are very open to sharing their perspectives and that every conversation is an opportunity to learn.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: Becoming lead of the Washington Public Policy Conference; being featured in *The Produce News*, *Generation Next*; being honored by my peers with the United Fresh Team Spirit Award; and recently participating in the United Fresh Produce Executive Development Program.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: I am inspired by the conversations I have with our members. Our industry is full of passionate, enthusiastic entrepreneurs, and it is impossible to not get energized. I want to provide a platform to help drive the growth and success of our industry.



Katiana Valdes, 28
Marketing Manager,
New Business Development
Del Monte Fresh Produce
Coral Gables, FL
Hometown: Miami, FL

Hobbies: Painting; Boating; Traveling

Community: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Motto in Life: Sometimes it's the things that scare you most that are most worthwhile.

Professional Accomplishments: Valdes majored in marketing at the University of Notre Dame and started at Del Monte in 2008 as a marketing coordinator. In that position, she was in charge of trade shows, promotions, and media relations. She was later given the opportunity to coordinate new product and business development as an assistant marketing manager and then promoted to marketing manager of new business development in 2013.

In her current role, she is in charge of leading new product and business opportunities for Del Monte Fresh. She helps coordinate the development process for new products, whether a fresh-cut item, banana packaging, or one of the company's value-added items. She ensures the process is moving forward during all stages from research through launch. She also helps in field research and communicates trends and opportunities. She has led several new product introductions and is considered to be the in-house marketing expert for the e-commerce, convenience, vending, and foodservice channels.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I love marketing and selling products that are truly good for consumers. Because of new technology and distribution, the industry continues to evolve. With a new generation entering the workforce, moving up the ladder, and adding to the experience and expertise of other generations, new and innovative ideas continue to shape the industry. We are now finding fresh, wholesome products in places no one ever dreamed of 10 years ago, and there still are so



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"There aren't many industries where you can market a product and truly feel good about what you are selling. We are selling fresh, wholesome products that will benefit all consumers."

— Katiana Valdes, Del Monte Fresh Produce

many opportunities to expand consumption.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: Del Monte Fresh has been a great place to start and grow my career. We have truly talented and knowledgeable upper management who have given me many opportunities. They really care about developing young talent. I have been fortunate enough to enjoy open door communications with many directors and vice presidents at Del Monte Fresh.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: It doesn't matter what you did in college. Your college career will only get you a foot in the door in the real world. You can go any direction you want once you have that degree. Learning on the job, truly caring, and being passionate about anything and everything you do is the best way to grow and excel.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: There aren't many industries where you can market a product and truly feel good about what you are selling. We are selling fresh, wholesome products that will benefit all consumers. The most exciting part is how we continue to find new channels and avenues to help us reach more consumers and increase consumption.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Fresh-cut fruits and vegetables have only touched the surface of potential. There are still so many more exciting things I believe we can do with fresh cut because of new packaging and mixes. Consumers are becoming more aware of and inclined to purchase these items as the category evolves. In addition, the growth and awareness of new varieties of vegetables and fruits continue to help increase produce consumption. For example, avocados, gold pineapple, unique melon varieties, broccolini and other specialty exotic fruits and vegetables are now mainstream.



Chris Wada, 33
Director of Marketing
Wada Farms Marketing Group
Idaho Falls, ID

Hometown: Idaho Falls, ID
Hobbies: Family, Traveling, Food
Personal: Married; 2-year old son

Motto in Life: Happiness is within.

Professional Accomplishments: After growing up on the family farm in Idaho, Wada spent eight

years pursuing education and work experience in California and Hawaii. Desiring to join the family business, his professional career in produce began in 2007 working at the company's sales and marketing office. During the past seven years he's had various responsibilities, which led to his current position as director of marketing. Wada Farms Marketing Group is one of the largest marketers of fresh produce and the exclusive marketer of Dole potatoes, onions and sweet potatoes. Wada's main responsibilities include market research, strategic planning and project marketing to retail, foodservice and export customers.

His industry involvement includes serving on the U.S. Potato Board since 2012. He also was recently appointed to the Executive Committee as well as being named co-chair of the Domestic Marketing Committee. He is involved with various other industry organizations including the Idaho Potato Commission, National Potato Council, and participation in the Potato Industry Leadership Institute.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I was born into a family business. Established in 1943, the Wada family planted their roots in Idaho — so naturally potatoes are a big part of our identity. The family ties and respect for my parents were part of the attraction to the industry, but also the opportunity for me to contribute through the lens of marketing within an office setting. I have a great level of respect for the effort and commitment it takes for the privilege of being called a farmer.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Strategy versus tactics.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: To have a healthy work/life balance.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Increased supplier and customer collaboration.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Narrowness broadens the appeal.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: Being part of something bigger than yourself. Also, the concept of marketing has been evolutionary within our company structure and the building momentum just increases my passion for the job.



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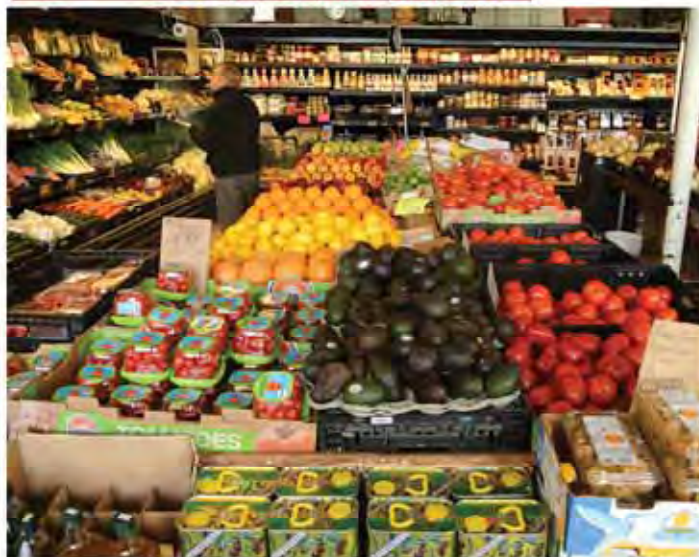
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Pete's Fruits & Vegetables

How a small family-run market survives in the competitive grocer business. BY DINA BERTA

Despite the availability of larger suppliers for his business, caterer Adde Bjorklund always makes a stop at Pete's Fruits & Vegetables in Denver's Hilltop neighborhood to fill his shopping list for upcoming events.

"It's a small neighborhood store; they have good product and good prices," says Bjorklund. "But it's not just that. It's the service. The friendship. They talk to customers about what they need. This is the way it should be."

Pete's Fruits & Vegetables, near the intersection of South Holly Street and East Cedar Avenue, remains just as authentic as the day Greek immigrant, Pete Moutzouris, bought the small market and hung his name on the door nearly 30 years ago. Produce is stacked on the original wooden tables that were there when Pete first turned his key in the door. He still uses cardboard to label prices. He has never advertised in newspapers or local fliers.

There is no point of sale system just a cash register that prints itemized receipts. Employees, like longtime cashier Doris Demos, know prices by heart.

Cantaloupe?

"Two 99-a-pound," shouts Demos.

Pickles?

"Ninety-nine cents," she calls out.

Pete's has survived while other neighborhood markets quietly closed over the years, because they were unable to compete with larger grocers, such as King Soopers or Whole Foods Market. Friendly customer service, community support, and strong relationships with wholesalers and local farmers enabled Pete to compete successfully

against the large chains.

A few years ago, the Moutzouris' took over the deli next door to Pete's after the previous tenant failed to pay taxes. Over the years, Pete's expanded from about 3,000 square feet to 5,000 square feet, including the deli and a meat market. Produce occupies the majority of the space.



(L-R) Pete Moutzouris and son John Moutzouris

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Now Pete's sons, John and Ted, have found a way to further expand the business. In April, they purchased one of the last remaining small, neighborhood grocers in Denver — Spinelli's Market, a 20-year institution in the Park Hill neighborhood less than 5 miles from Pete's.

"When we were growing up, there were a bunch of little markets, and they all disappeared," says John. "To me, Spinelli's was the only one left that reminded me of our market. We had to take it over and keep it going."

Founded by Park Hill resident Jerry and Mary Ellen Spinelli, the store sells fresh produce and Italian food products while maintaining a busy deli and catering business. The Moutzouris' combined Spinelli's signature offerings with Pete's Greek, Jewish and Mediterranean regional specialties.

The Moutzouris' kept the Spinelli name, and they retained all the employees. Their immediate goal was to preserve customer loyalty. Pete notes that Spinelli's had a strong community following similar to his store. "I couldn't believe the amount of business he [Spinelli] did out of that little place with no parking lot," says Pete. "The amount of support from the neighborhood had me worried. I couldn't sleep at night. I kept wondering if people would come back if Spinelli's was not there."

But as the weeks went on, and customers learned Spinelli's was remaining a family-owned operation, Pete says business did not suffer.

The Moutzouris' freshened up the store, cleaned the floors, let in more light and added produce. They plan on replacing the aging coolers as well. "They are the same old coolers we used to have at Pete's, until a few years ago when we secretly replaced them with taller, newer, multi-shelved units," says Ted Moutzouris.

"We didn't tell our father, we just waited until he went home and then worked all night to put the new ones up," recalls Ted.

John explains that he and his brother wanted to improve the presentation of Produce as well as increase capacity in the store. "You have to adapt," says John. "We have to stay current. I liked the displays I saw in other stores. When I was a kid, and walked into the little markets, you could smell the produce."

Pete's was not negatively impacted when Whole Foods entered the Denver markets. The Austin, TX-based chain has higher price points than Pete's. The Moutzouris family has never tried to make Pete's a high-end, specialty market; instead, they focus on price and freshness.

From the beginning, Pete managed good relationships with suppliers. His first big wholesaler, Denargo Market, allowed him to purchase on credit a month in advance, which was unheard of at the time — given the perishable nature of fruit and vegetables.

"I asked [the wholesaler] later, why he trusted me," remembers Pete. "He says, and this is the truth, 'When I look someone in the face, I can tell what kind of person they are.'"

At the age of 67, Pete is still active with the business. "I'm here triple-seven," he says. "That's from 7 in the morning until 7 at night and seven days a week."

He has not stopped his daily visits to local farmers and wholesalers to negotiate purchases. Cooseman's, Domenic Farms and Federal Fruit (now closed) have been regular, larger suppliers. But he frequently buys from smaller family farms around the state, including Japanese farmers near Brighton, CO, who have raised corn and onions since the late 1940s.

"He wants to see what he is getting," says John of his father's business style. "He never says, 'Give it to me' over the phone. He never says, 'Bring it,' and if it looks bad then sends it back. People ask him, 'How do you get such great prices on produce?' He tells them, 'I've been doing it for 30 years. I know the people.

I know when to buy and how to buy. That's the magic.'"

The organic section is minimal. Pete's offers organic lettuce and prewashed, packaged Organic Girl salads for \$1 when Pete can get promotional prices from the wholesaler.

"If we have to buy organic at full price, then we can't compete with Whole Foods on price," says Pete. "They buy so much in bulk. To beat them in price, we would have to sell it at cost or at a loss."

The demand for organic produce is higher at Spinelli's, given the demographics of the neighborhood, explains Pete.

Spinelli's sandwiches and deli to-go orders are a strong part of the market's business, much more so than the produce; while at Pete's, produce sales account for the majority of the store's annual sales of approximately \$1 million.

As the only Greek market in the city, Pete's also carries imported olive oils, six kinds of feta cheese, and five kinds of Greek cheese.

The deli also offers Pastitsio (a Greek lasagna) Moussaka (eggplant and ground lamb), Fasolakia (oven-roasted Greek green beans and veggies), and, of course, Baklava (a sweet, flaky dessert). Cashier, Demos, actually makes a Greek custard, which the store sells as well.

Demos has worked at Pete's for 15 years. She is one of a handful of employees who have been at Pete's for several years.

"Finding and keeping good employees has been the one area where it has been difficult to compete against larger grocery chains," says John. As a small family market, they cannot afford to offer the health insurance and higher salaries like bigger companies can.

"So, we end up doing a lot of the work ourselves," says John. "The good thing, though, is it keeps us all together. I'm lucky to have a job where I can come see my dad and brother every day. It's good; we work together as a family."

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The Fourth of July week, as a percentage of the California Season (April-September), represents 4.5 percent of sales and 4.6 percent of volume in IRI reporting retailers.

Red, White And Green

Getting the most firepower out of your Independence Day marketing. **BY KEITH LORIA**

Independence Day is around the corner, which means produce departments are gearing up for millions of shoppers who will be buying items for Fourth of July parties, barbecues and picnics.

"It's by far the single most important holiday for us," says Gordon Hunt, director of marketing and communications for the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB), based in Orlando, FL. "We keep our fingers crossed about the weather and hope it's bright, sunny and really hot, which is always good for sales. The Fourth represents approximately 20 percent of our season. Everyone expects to have watermelon on that day, and it's when most of our commercially productive areas are in season."

Kathleen Preis, marketing coordinator for the Mushroom Council, headquartered in San Jose, CA, says over the past few years, mushroom consumption in summer has picked up considerably as Portobellos have become something of a grilling staple at Fourth of July barbecues.

"It's a really nice alternative for the holiday over the hot dogs and hamburgers," she says. "We have upped our summertime promotions to create retail sales lift, to increase shopper awareness and to build impulse purchases and consumption of mushrooms."

Jan DeLyster, vice president of marketing for the Irvine, CA-based California Avocado Commission, says the Fourth of July holiday is extremely important to the avocado category

— with volume increasing 98 percent over the past four years.

The Fourth of July week, as a percentage of the California Season (April-September),



PHOTO COURTESY OF DOLE

“Berries stay fresher, longer if kept refrigerated up until use. Retailers can help ensure their customers are purchasing the best possible berries by using refrigerated display tables or monitoring the rotation of berries displayed on dry tables.”

— Kyla Garnett, Naturipe Farms

represents 4.5 percent of sales and 4.6 percent of volume in IRI reporting retailers.

“The Fourth of July timing is in the sweet spot of the California season, and consumers purchase more avocados in the summer months than any other time of year,” says DeLyser. “The Fourth of July holiday now ranks in the Top 3 avocado consumption events annually along with the Big Game (Super Bowl) and Cinco de Mayo.”

Kyla Garnett, marketing manager with Naturipe Farms, Salinas, CA, says Fourth of July is a great holiday to promote fresh berries since blueberries, strawberries and raspberries are at their peak — making availability, quality and flavor ideal for the celebration.

“This year we expect high volume and superior quality and flavor, especially for blueberries,” she says. “One good point to make, especially during the summer months, is the importance of keeping the cold chain with berries. Berries stay fresher, longer if kept refrigerated up until use. Retailers can help ensure their customers are purchasing the best possible berries by using refrigerated display tables or monitoring the rotation of berries displayed on dry tables.”

Bil Goldfield, director, corporate communications for Dole Food Company, located in Westlake Village, CA, says anytime a retailer can make produce fun and compelling, it’s a win-win situation for Dole since its mission is



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

Revolutionary Recipes

The National Watermelon Promotion Board makes available a number of what they call “Star Spangled” recipe favorites, including those for watermelon cupcakes, watermelon margaritas and watermelon treats for infants. All can be found at watermelon.org/Recipes.

In addition to the more than 1,000 recipes on dole.com that show the versatility of fresh fruit and vegetables, there are a number of compelling new banana and pineapple appetizers, side dishes, salads, sandwiches smoothies, entrees and desserts at dole.com/peelthelove, which is designed exclusively for the Peel the Love Tour.

The California Avocado Commission has many produce-friendly recipes geared for American Summer holidays, grilling and summer entertaining. “Some of our favorites are Firecracker Guacamole [spicy guacamole served in a chilled mini watermelon shell], California Avocado Red, White and Blueberry Salsa, Guacamole Potato Salad, Cherry Tomato Bombs and many other recipes featuring California avocados including salads, burgers and snacks,” says Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Irvine, CA-based California Avocado Commission.

For great berry recipes for the Fourth, visit Naturipe’s Pinterest page at pinterest.com/naturipe/red-white-and-berries/

The Mushroom Council is hosting its second annual online “Swap it or Top it” recipe contest for consumers to build excitement around mushroom use beyond just salads in the summer time.

Last year’s winners included Erin Chase, author of the \$5 Dinner Mom cookbooks, for a recipe on Balsamic Beef & Mushroom Kebabs — a blended meat and veggie kebab that’s ideal for a night of summer entertaining.

Ingredients

- About 1 pound stew beef or beef roast cut into kebab chunks
- 8 oz. Whole baby bella mushrooms, washed
- 2 Small zucchini, cut into kebab chunks
- 1 Large red onion, cut into kebab chunks
- Salt and pepper
- 1.25 cups Balsamic vinegar

Directions

Add the beef pieces, whole mushrooms, zucchini chunks and red onion chunks onto metal or wooden skewers. Season with salt and pepper, and then drizzle the balsamic vinegar over the top.

Let marinate in the refrigerator for at least an hour, rotating the kebabs about every 15 minutes so each side has time to soak up some of the balsamic vinegar.

Grill for 10 to 15 minutes, rotating every few minutes. Cook time may vary, depending on the size of the beef pieces. Grill until the beef is cooked through.

Serve Balsamic Beef & Mushroom Kebabs with a side of French bread.

to increase America's nutritional health through greater consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

"A great example of a summer-specific program is our 'Peel the Love' campaign, which we debuted in 2013 as a way to show the fun, irreverence and universally beloved aspects of bananas and pineapples," he says. "This year, by popular retailer demand, we are commissioning two nationwide 'Peel the Love Banana Cabana' tours. Last year's tour of 10 cities has grown to 26 cities in 2014."

These Banana Cabana events at retailers, public events and venues will offer close brand engagement with consumers through staff cooking demonstrations, dish-preparation highlights, recipe booklets, games and visits from Bobby Banana.

Specifically for Independence Day, Dole sales representatives can help retailers create customized in-store promotions, displays and other elements to leverage its national Peel the Love program to take holiday and summer sales even further.

"Demand for bananas is surprisingly constant throughout summer — however, like Memorial Day weekend, the Fourth of July is important since it signals the start of summer and the barbecue season," says Goldfield. "It is important for Dole to have a strong presence during this time, not only for the obvious increased serving opportunities, but also to set the pattern for the remainder of summer."

Cindy Plummer, commission vice president of domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission, based in Fresno, CA, notes California produces more than 80 table grape varieties grouped into three color classifications: red, green and black — and are a great summer fruit to include in all Fourth of July promotions.

"Grapes are the perfect easy summer snack item to incorporate into any summer menu," she says. "The holidays during the summer are important because retailers have the opportunity to cross-merchandise with grapes as a good way to increase sales. Grapes are a natural accompaniment at a picnic or grilling at home. In fact, grapes can be grilled."

A Sound Marketing Strategy

For retailers looking for fireworks with its sales numbers, planning ahead and educating consumers are musts for success.

"This year, the Fourth falls on a Friday, so it represents a wonderful opportunity to encourage shoppers to celebrate with California avocados throughout the three-day weekend," says DeLyser. "Retailers should be prepared to sell more fresh California avocados than when the holiday is during the middle of the week. Feature ads, well-stocked displays in prominent locations cross promoted with other barbecue and party products are great ways to drive sales."


DeLyser says having at least two displays of avocados has proven to be an effective sales generator, with bagged avocados offering a great sales opportunity to sell multiple California avocados for Fourth of July parties, and it also makes an excellent impulse item when placed near checkout or in the salty snack aisle.

Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral, seafood and meat for Kings Food Markets, headquartered in Parsippany, NJ, says the Fourth of July is an opportunity for the retail chain to promote summer.

"We make sure the departments are set seasonally so that people see and 'feel' summer," he says. "Tree fruit, cherries, melons, grapes and berries are top commodities in fruit year-round, and sales typically double or triple during the summer. Corn, tomatoes, salad



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commodities and grilling items are also highlighted to maximize sales."

California Grape's Plummer says grapes should be promoted every week with ads and in-store price reductions as research shows the greatest volume lift will happen when grapes are discounted more than 50 percent from regular prices.

"With the majority of consumers recognizing that grapes have healthful properties, consumers might be looking for flavorful and healthy summer snacks," she says. "Retailers can include information about the health benefits of grapes in their ads."

As a way to market produce, Kings Food Markets create in-store farmers markets to give customers the one-stop shop. "We usually will start the experience outside the stores with displays of melons and corn. It's also important to carry these items inside the store since customers typically won't go back outside once they are in," says Kneeland. "We create big corn displays that can be shopped from all sides by the customer, and we always tie in an extra — Vidalia onions, tomatoes or squash — for that additional sale."

According to NWPB's Hunt, utilizing value, versatility and health messages in the retail environment will help stimulate sales of watermelons. "The better you know your product, such as your types of watermelon and year-round availability, the more your

customers will feel inclined to purchase watermelon," he says. "Luckily, we don't have to tell people what it is or that a cold slice of watermelon on a summer day is good, so what we are doing now is pushing research that watermelon is good for you."

To help with this, the NWPB offers retailers tools for store-level training, free materials for in-store promotion of watermelon, and highlights consumer research in its retail kit.

On Display

Naturipe's Garnett suggests creating a visual destination to the berry display to grab the attention of shoppers. "The Fourth of July is the perfect reason to display a full berry patch of red and blue — add the white with Greek yogurt, whipped cream or marshmallows," she says. "Impulse purchases are best when the display is eye catching, suggestive and fun."

The California Avocado Commission offers its "Have a Blast American Summer Holidays" brochure, Have a Blast Recipe Tear pad, and Fourth of July POS cards for retailers to showcase new and versatile ways to enjoy avocados in addition to guacamole and salads.

Retailers should aim marketing promotions beyond Independence Day itself, DeLyser says retailers have an opportunity to increase sales and volume by promoting produce the week prior, the week of and the week following the holiday to maintain sales



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"Large colorful displays of California avocados at the entrance to the store or prominent displays in the department utilizing the California avocado display bins, POS and recipes help to create consumer interest and purchase," says DeLyser. "Consumers continue to want to know where the food they eat is grown, and we encourage retailers to highlight the California avocado's origin when in season. The California industry has an initiative under way to call out the California origin more clearly for retailers at the point of purchase."

According to research conducted by West Dundee, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group about space to sales during May through August, in order to obtain optimum sales results, retailers should target an average of at least 25 square feet of space devoted to grapes, which can generate up to 63 percent more dollars per store per year compared to sets under 18 feet.

Plummer says when stacking grapes on display, gently stack bagged California grapes no more than three layers high.

"Offer grapes to go in containers in the produce department, and at the deli as well,

since some consumers may head to the deli to purchase other items," she says. "With more consumers spending lots of time browsing the produce department, make sure grape displays are always in prime, front locations to create impulse sales. Also, fresh, well-stocked displays are always appealing to consumers."

Display Contests At Work

For the first time ever, the Mushroom Council will be holding a summer display contest — called "Swap it or Top It" — for retail stores, with more than \$10,000 in prizes to be awarded.

"The contest will challenge retailers to build mushroom displays with Council provided Point of Sale material," says Preis. "The goal is to build excitement with retailers around the blendability theme while encouraging the use of mushrooms in summer grilling thus increasing summer mushroom sales."

The Watermelon Promotion Board also hosts a month-long display contest during July, which is also National Watermelon Month, and Hunt says the bigger the display, the better for sales.

"Last year, one Canadian store in Nova

"Consumers continue to want to know where the food they eat is grown, and we encourage retailers to highlight the California avocado's origin when in season."

— Jan DeLyser,

California Avocado Commission

Scotia had a 200-bin display to capture the biggest display prize, and we have others looking to top that this year," says Hunt. "The ones that are red, white and blue and those that utilize patriotic imagery always do great."

Independence Day is a holiday of celebration with family and friends, wrapped around parades, fireworks and food. A savvy retail store will play up America's patriotism and turn red, white and blue into plenty of green. **pb**

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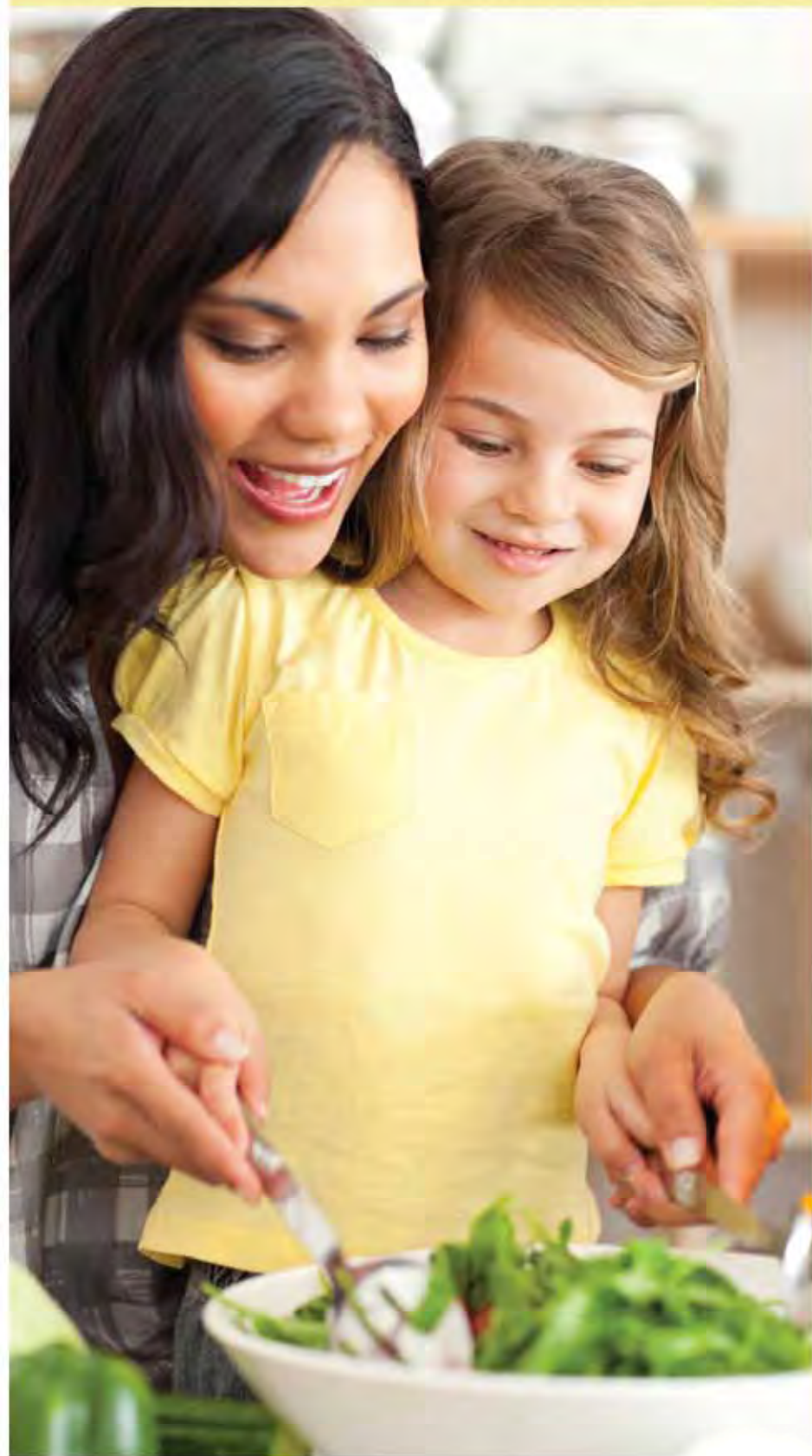
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Experts agree, even though the definition of local changes with the crop and time of year, consumer interest in produce from close to home is worth the attention from retailers.

The Local/Locale Connection

Big players in growing, shipping and retailing produce try to bridge the gap with programs to integrate local into their national programs. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

The definition of “locally grown” may be elusive, but its attraction to consumers in every corner of the country is undeniable.

“It reached a critical mass five years ago,” says Ray Gilmer, vice president for issues management and communication at the United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, DC. “The locally grown phenomenon took hold quickly over a couple years. That’s also when discussions of what local meant began. Growers, shippers and retailers see that it [the movement] is here to stay. The industry has institutionalized it in their marketing programs.”

But while locally grown, whatever its definition, is here to stay, so too are national brand names or locales like Washington apples, Idaho potatoes and Vidalia onions.

“Consumers want to buy local because it is a romantic view of times gone by, where they associate products grown closest to them with the taste of yesteryear,” says Dionysios Christou, vice president for marketing at Coral Gables, FL-based Del Monte Fresh Produce. “What is more important is the quality and freshness of the product as well as the suppliers’ reputation and their ability to consistently deliver safe, high-quality products.”

Local May Be A Niche, But It’s Still Vibrant

Ten years ago, when a dedicated group of New England foodies noticed that tomatoes found in supermarkets during winter had traveled from as far away as Canada, Mexico or Holland, they launched a greenhouse business in Portland, ME. Their goal: produce tomatoes as fresh as from their own backyards.

They did just that, and their New England

neighbors ate them up and asked for seconds. This led to the expansion of the business, appropriately named Backyard Farms, based in Portland, ME. It now has enough tomato greenhouses to cover 20 football fields.

“The market for local produce is everything for us,” says Tim Cunniff, the company’s executive vice president for sales and marketing. “We’re a regional New England player. Basically 65 percent of our production



stays in New England.”

Although the buy-local movement is the main focus for Backyard Farms, Pandol Bros., the Delano, CA-based table-grape giant, takes another approach to meeting the needs of its clients and consumers. Pandol Bros. supplies grapes throughout the country and beyond — from fields thousands of miles apart in the far reaches of the Western Hemisphere.

“We hear a lot about buying local,” says John Pandol, the company’s director of special projects. “We hear about re-branding of traditional supply routes, but I don’t see where we’ve changed our practices from five years ago. Ninety percent of the strawberries are not only from California, they are from about five counties in California. Half the apples are from four counties in Eastern Washington.

It seems the buy-local movement means everything or nothing — depending on which producers you ask, but the puzzle can be partially solved by examining the scale of production.

New Jersey is, by Northeastern standards, a thriving agricultural area with the well-earned moniker, the Garden State. And the three-decade-old Jersey Fresh program has made a world of difference in helping farmers thrive by selling local.

“New Jersey is proud of its agricultural background, and with a program such as Jersey Fresh, we are helping keep the farming tradition in New Jersey,” says Bill Walker, agricultural marketing specialist at the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Trenton, NJ. “With its 10,300 farms and 730,000 acres of farmland, even though New Jersey is a very densely populated state, the program is working to keep our state green, growing and to keep the ‘garden’ in the Garden State.”

New Jersey farmers produce a little more than \$425 million in fruits and vegetables — having a strong market among neighbors who buy local is a big help. The Monterey County farms in California grow more than eight times that much produce, and Monterey ranks but fourth among counties in the agricultural behemoth that is California.

Consumers may be eager to buy local produce, but California fruits and vegetables, Washington apples, Idaho potatoes and Vidalia onions are not likely to be shut out of the market.

No Place Like Home

Even though the definition of local changes with the crop and time of year, the relatively recent consumer interest in produce from close to home is worth the attention of

supermarket retailers.

“It’s big. We have some research that says it’s bigger than organic,” says Kathy Means, vice president for industry relations at the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE. “It’s difficult to define, but it’s hot. Local is in the eye of the beholder. Some chefs say they want their herbs from rooftop gardens within five miles of the restaurant. Other people describe it as far as 400 miles. But in Delaware, 400 miles is as far as the Carolinas, Quebec or Ohio, and people here

don’t think that is local.”

There are almost as many reasons to buy local as there are people buying locally.

“The appeal will vary depending on who you ask,” says United Fresh’s Gilmer. “For some people buying local means supporting your local farmer. For others, it means freshness or quality. And for some, there is a misconception that local produce is safer — even though there is no scientific evidence to support that.”

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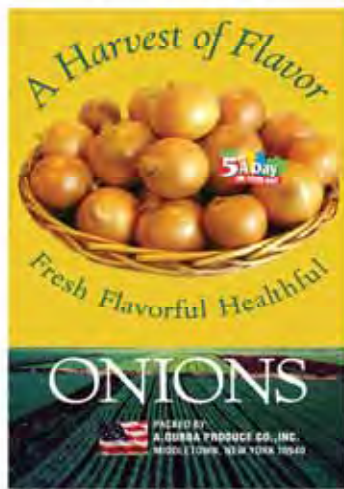
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“When we did research, prior to the Great Recession, respondents consistently said the top reason to buy local was freshness, followed by leaving less of a carbon footprint. Today, the primary reason far and away, is based on desire to support the American farmer and to contribute to the U.S. economy.”

—Jan DeLyser, California Avocado Commission

remain important motivations, but the severe economic downturn a few years ago changed the main reasons that consumers buy local.

“When we did research prior to the Great Recession, respondents consistently said the top reason to buy local was freshness, followed by leaving less of a carbon footprint,” says Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing at the California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA. “Today, the primary reason far and away is based on desire to support the American farmer and to contribute to the U.S. economy. Carbon footprint and freshness proximity to market continue to be secondary motivators.”

Based on that research, the lesson for supermarkets is to let consumers know that the stores are supporting farmers in their neighborhood.

For Publix Supermarkets, based in Lakeland, FL, buying local means purchasing produce as close to home as it can, according to Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix.

“And as close to home,” she explains, “means within our six-state operating area: Florida, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee and North Carolina.”

The economic motivation for buying local lends itself to definitions that embrace produce from a very large area.

“Local can be neighborhood, state or region,” says Mary Ostlund, marketing director at Brooks Tropicals, Homestead, FL. “When someone talks about local, they’re talking about feeling connected with who grows it. Kind of like, ‘I’m proud to be an American, a Southerner or a South Floridian. I’m proud to be able to eat what’s harvested in California, Georgia or Homestead, Florida.’”

Acceptance of produce from across the country as local depends greatly on whether there is a tradition of growing the particular fruit or vegetable closer to home, either within the state or region.

“A consumer in Boston may consider a Cali-

fornia avocado local when his only other choices would be imported from outside the U.S.,” says DeLyser. “That same consumer might not consider a Washington apple local because there are also apples grown in New England.”

Backyard Farms simply tells consumers where it grows tomatoes. It’s up to the consumers to decide whether the product comes from neighbors. “Local depends on who you talk to,” says Cunniff. “We don’t use the word local; we say where we are from. For Mainers, it matters that we are from Maine. For New Englanders, it matters that we are from New England. Each state has its own definition of local.”

Detailed information about where and how produce is grown adds to the relationship between consumers and local farmers. “Location matters, but so does the transparency in knowing the operation that produces your food,” says Cunniff.

Familiarity and trust go a long way toward building loyalty among consumers. These factors apply to both local farms and locales known for their farm products.

“I believe consumers want to buy produce from regions that are nearby the place they live and work, or areas that they know of, possibly visited, and trust for delivering quality products,” says Brianna Shales, communications manager at Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA. “They are likely looking to support local farms and their local economy as well as reducing food miles.”

Most U.S. consumers feel more of a local kinship with farmers thousands of miles away in the U.S. rather than with farmers hundreds of miles away in a neighboring country, according to DeLyser.

“Respondents have always stated that something grown in the U.S. is more local,” says DeLyser. “And they are motivated to purchase that produce first and foremost to support our American farmers, and secondly because they trust the safety and freshness of

“Crossing state lines doesn’t cross ‘local’ off the produce. It’s about feeling connected and buying as fresh as fresh can be. Consumers are buying fresh, feeling familiar or a sense of connection with the grower.”

— Mary Ostlund, Brooks Tropicals

food grown in the U.S., even if the distance traveled might actually be further. In Texas, we found that most folks consider California avocados more local than those grown in Mexico, even though the groves in Mexico are physically closer than those in California.”

Local is about kinship, not miles or lines drawn on a map. “Crossing state lines doesn’t cross ‘local’ off the produce,” says Brooks Tropicals’ Ostlund. “It’s about feeling connected and buying as fresh as fresh can be. Consumers are buying fresh, feeling familiar or a sense of connection with the grower.”

Brands Older Than Home

While consumers are drawn to produce from the farmer down the road or across the state, they are still at home with fruits and vegetables from familiar locales.

“A lot of commodity groups have made a brand out of where they are, like Idaho potatoes or Washington apples,” says United Fresh’s Gilmer. “In that respect, you don’t have to be local to add value.”

The brands based on locale are likely to increase, despite consumers’ willingness to buy local.

“The way this is trending, there will likely be a desire for even more hyper-regional monikers,” says CAC’s DeLyser. “We see this in cuisine. Southern barbecue is no longer enough. We now have North Carolina style or Georgia-style, which are quite different in the seasonings. There is Alaskan salmon as well as a more-premium Copper River Alaskan salmon. The same holds true with products from a specific area like Vidalia or Maui onions, Kona or Blue Mountain coffees.”

Despite the new competition from local produce, Gilmer does not know of any branded producers suffering as a result. “Regional producers who have established brands, like

Idaho potatoes or Georgia peaches, seem well-positioned to withstand the new local competition,” says Gilmer. “There’s already strong brand recognition with quality. Their advantage is having many years of brand recognition with consumers. If you are a large, branded producer who grows in many areas, the buy-local movement means increasing competition for your product.

While the buy-local movement has been picking up steam for years, the familiar locales have been promoting themselves for decades.

“We’ve seen attention to locale far longer than we have to buying local,” says Means of the PMA.

Name locales usually have the advantage of climate, soil and growing traditions ideal for a particular fruit or vegetable.

“Locale refers to a specific location with the ideal growing conditions that produce consistently premium-quality products,” says Del Monte’s Christou. “For example, Del Monte is able to supply gold extra sweet pineapples year-round, because they are grown in Costa Rica

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“If produce is delivered from a close location but lacks in taste or quality, or if the local supplier doesn’t follow GAP/Food Safety Standards, then it just isn’t the right product to have.”

— Dionysios Christou, Del Monte

where the weather and growing conditions allow for a consistent premium-quality product. Another example is Vidalia onions that are shipped cross-country.”

Washington apples, Idaho potatoes, Vidalia onions and Salinas salad products have become as familiar as the farmer down the road.

“It doesn’t get much better than buying produce from a great locale, like Washington is for apples, pears and cherries,” says Stemilt’s Shales. “Ideal climate conditions are essential for growing high-quality, flavorful produce. We tout our locale constantly because the locale, along with the hard work of our family farmers, is what produces quality products that consumers can trust.”

The connection between local produce and produce from a branded locale is the familiarity, transparency and trust that connects consumers to the farmers and their wares.

“Brands are like names,” says Brooks Tropicals’ Ostlund. “Brand names can help consumers make a connection with the produce.”

The familiarity comes with stories about where and how the produce is grown, and about the people who grow it.

“Brand locales are very important,” says CAC’s DeLyser. “Consumers want to know the story behind everything they eat. They want to know the face and the place behind their food. So branded locales are a way of delivering at least part of the story.”

Get It Where You Can

Most consumers have little choice but to get their fruits and vegetables from an international supply chain at least part of the year.

“Unless you live in the Salinas Valley or Florida, it’s hard to get your produce locally all year,” says PMA’s Means. “Local is great, but there aren’t that many places in the U.S. where you can grow citrus. And there is no place in the continental U.S. where you can [commercially] grow bananas.”

Some retailers encourage their customers to adjust their tastes to fit with the local supply of fresh fruits and vegetables.

“More than six years ago, we began our ‘At Season’s Peak’ program to help educate our customers about the true seasonality of our produce,” says Publix’s Brous. “As consumers, we are accustomed to having a full variety of fresh fruits and vegetables year-round. As a retailer, we know that fruits and vegetables have a seasonality of when they are at their most fresh, juicy, and peak of their season.”

“In addition to our website, customers will find in-store signage, recipes, TV/radio spots and billboard signs referencing the At Season’s Peak promotional item,” says Brous.

Although consumers claim they want produce from nearby farms, many customers only talk a good buy-local game.

“Consumers are funny,” says Pandol. “In every small town you see campaigns to support Main Street, but then they go and shop at the malls or the big ‘Main Street killer’ — the Internet. We operate out of four districts. We list country of origin, which we are required to do, and that’s it.”

The buy-local movement has not impacted Pandol Bros.’ sales of grapes from two continents.

Even retailers committed to local farmers find they sometimes have to look far afield to find the produce their customers want.

“We look to purchase produce in our backyards first,” says Brous. “When the fruits and vegetables are not available within our geographic area, we look across the U.S. And then as a final option, we look abroad.”

Many big players in growing, shipping or retailing produce try to bridge the gap with programs to integrate local into their national programs.

“The national suppliers are also buying from local growers to supply that area,” says PMA’s Means.

The bottom line is, regardless of where produce is grown, it must meet the consumer’s quality tests.

“If produce is delivered from a close location but lacks in taste or quality, or if the local supplier doesn’t follow GAP/Food Safety Standards, then it just isn’t the right product to have,” says Del Monte’s Christou. **pb**

Georgia

IN FULL SCOPE

Raising the bar on locally grown.

BY KEITH LORIA

Georgia is one of the Top 5 growers in the nation as the entire state has a vast heritage of agriculture. Driving the winding mountain roads in North Georgia, one can see rows of corn stalks, beans, orchards and cattle all across

the valleys and mountain pastures.

Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA), based in LaGrange, GA, says production levels on all products have stayed steady the past five years — some varieties, such as bell peppers, have gone down in total acreage.

“A large number of people are interested in getting fruits and vegetables closer to their home, so offering products from your region is a distinct advantage over those coming in from the West Coast,” he says. “Here in Georgia, broccoli is fairly new and kale is coming along. Overall, things are looking solid.”

The GFVGA membership spans the gamut of produce, from cucumbers to Muscadine grapes, and every grower faces similar problems. They need to stay up to date on pest management tactics and resources to protect against disease. Likewise, they need education and consultation on food-safety legislation and mandates, and they need for the industry to be recognized by legislators as one of the most vital pieces of Georgia’s economy.

“Those needs have created the mission statement for our association, which is to promote the best interests of the produce industry, through legislative support, consistent communication and food-safety education, from production to consumption,” says Hall.

The Georgia Department of Agriculture, based in Atlanta, is one of the most progressive promoters of produce. Not only does the Department assist various commodity groups, but it also launches initiatives to help sell produce directly to consumers.

It was only two years ago that it began its Georgia Grown program, a marketing and economic development effort to aid the state’s agricultural economies by bringing together producers, processors, suppliers, distributors, retailers, agritourism and consumers.

“There is such great demand for locally produced product and our signature crops. We feel there is great demand in the overall

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DICKEY FARMS



domestic market and international market," says Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Gary W. Black. "We put a good team together and decided on a direction to meet this demand in the marketplace. We spent the last two years introducing the public to the concept."

One of the cornerstone principals of the Georgia Grown initiative is to help with job growth and create economic stability. "We believe this branding initiative can help grow jobs locally and expand Georgia-produced products and services," says Black. "It was important for us to build a business model with high respect for self determination so we could harness the power of local producers to help meet the demand of consumers."

The Georgia Grown program is unique in that it did not have direct appropriations by the state's budget or take advantage of any tobacco settlement dollars. It is a business plan that involves the farmers and business owners, granting any license holder the opportunity to use the Georgia Grown logo in their marketing materials.

"It's essentially a membership program that pulls together all facets of the food industry," says Black. "That structure has set us apart from most branding programs. It's provided energy for us to be successful with a wide range of different companies."

This past April, 170 people were registered for a Georgia Grown Symposium that had a theme of "Growing Your Georgia Business," and Black believes it was a high watermark for the agency.

"We assembled a group of young entrepreneurs, small growers, large growers, retailers, food manufacturers, public relations companies and financial institutions. We talked about how to get in business, the basics of Georgia Grown, food safety, and understanding what to expect in products at the

store," says Black. "We have seen robust growth in brand recognition, and we are continuing to build our recognition in the marketplace. We are excited about what's happening."

Weather And Land Portfolio

Greg Cardamone, general manager, L&M Companies, Inc., headquartered in Raleigh, NC, has farms that produce mostly spring and fall crops in Georgia, growing bell peppers, cucumbers, cabbage, yellow squash, zucchini, eggplant, chili peppers and melons each spring, plus broccoli and greens in the fall, specializing in Georgia sweet potatoes.

"As the weather heats up and we finish with our Florida farms, most of our East Coast customers receive product from Georgia, and then as the summer heats up, even more of our production spreads north and transitions into a wide variety of the locally grown seasons," says Cardamone. "It's like the beginning and jumping off points for lots of local programs. In Moultrie, GA, we grow a wide variety of items, including peppers, chili peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, squash, cabbage, greens, broccoli, melons and sweet potatoes. You never know what we could add to try next season."

In Georgia, weather is always a challenge, and it was an even bigger factor this season due to the unseasonably cold spring that left many growers behind a few days on planting. Some consistently warm weather could, however, get everything back on track.

Weather also plays an important role in the different production techniques. According to GFVGA's Hall, there's much more rain in Georgia than growers would get in California or Arizona; as a result, its growers must deal with a different kind of pests and more bacteria.

"Another regular challenge in Moultrie is

labor. Georgia has a serious harvest labor shortage that causes problems across the state at harvest time," says Cardamone. "Crops like squash have to be harvested every day, and we need the manpower to get it done."

Georgia's unique soil also is important to the success of many of its products. "The climate and unique soil conditions in South Georgia create the perfect and exclusive region where Vidalias can be grown," says John Shuman, president and director of sales for Shuman Produce, based in Reidsville, GA. "Everything from the average temperatures and rainfall to the sandy soils of the area within the 20-county growing region contribute to the perfect environment for producing the world's sweetest onions."

Matt Curry, president of Curry & Company, headquartered in Brooks, OR, with a second location in Collins, GA, says the Vidalia region is one of the best-known and most respected growing regions in the nation, and its limited growing area assures Vidalia onions are consistent in quality and flavor.

"Sandy soils work the best for sweet onions because it allows the sulfur to wash through to the clay below the soil," says Curry. "Georgia's combination of rain and sandy soils, combined with the Vidalia onion seeds themselves is why Vidalia sweets are so sweet. Low sulfur content is key for sweet onions."

Curry says the biggest challenge is analyzing each particular season, as each one is unique and has its own challenges and opportunities. "A lot of this revolves around quality and timing of the crop. Are the ads you set up weeks ago lining up with the actual production at the time you need to ship the product?" says Curry. "Our best laid plans are often changed by Mother Nature. It's our job to manage our crop to make sure we are keeping our customers happy with the right

GEORGIA PECANS

Georgia is the leading producer of pecans in the U.S., averaging 88 million pounds each year, with a lot of new acreage continuing to be added. In fact, nearly 20,000 acres were added in the last two years, according to the Georgia Pecan Commission based in Atlanta.

"There is more demand and the export market has increased, accounting for the new acreage," says John Robison, chairman of the Georgia Pecan Commission. "We have a great growing season here, well suited for pecans, with good soil and a good climate."

New varieties of pecans have added to the product's popularity, with Georgia orchards of Cape Fear, Desirable, Elliott,

Schley, Stuart and Sumner being the state's top sellers.

One important fact that the Georgia Pecan Commission tries to convey in its advertising message is that pecans have been designated by the American Heart Association as being a heart-healthy food and are known for helping other diseases.

"We are also working on a promotion aimed at kids. Every school in the state of Georgia has the opportunity to go on our website and take part in a poster contest, with the winners receiving \$500," says Robison. "We hope to educate kids through that avenue, as well as a science experiment we are running this fall using Georgia pecans as a healthy food, which will be directed at kids in grades 7 through 12."

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The Grower's Perspective

Robert Dickey, a fourth-generation owner of Dickey Farms, Musella, GA, grows 1,000 acres of peaches and feels having the Georgia Grown label attached to it helps the farm increase production.

"People want to know where their food comes from, and we have this great reputation for growing sweet and fresh peaches in the state. There's a real diversity in Georgia for growing a lot of produce. We are excited to be part of the brand and give the message back to the consumer," he says. "We are usually first on the market with peaches and that gives Georgia a great advantage."

Dickey says by putting the Georgia Grown logo on its boxes, it attracts the eye of shoppers. "We see more retailers displaying these prominently and trying to connect the farms and stores," he says. "We are working with them on promotions and helping to identify that they are Georgia-grown peaches. The consumer sees the value in promoting it that way."

Zinnia Alvarez, food safety administration



PHOTO COURTESY OF DICKEY FARMS

of L.G. Herndon, Jr. Farms based in Lyons, GA, says the farm produces 500 acres of Vidalia sweet onions, 550 acres of sweet corn and 520 acres of leafy green vegetables (collards, mustard, turnips and kale).

"People want to buy food from a family business that's local, something they know. I think that attracts people to the Georgia name," she says. "You can drive by a field and

know that's the food you are going to eat. That's big in today's age."

Joe Cornelius, chairman of the Georgia Blueberry Commission, says the Georgia blueberry industry stands out from other states for numerous reasons such as: the number of varieties (including Highbush and RabbitEye) Georgia grows; its long production season (mid-April until end of July); and the rich soil

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that is ideal for blueberries.

According to Cornelius, over the past decade, blueberry production has grown from 25 million pounds to a record high of 68 million pounds last year, and an expected 70 million-plus in 2014.

"It's important the industry recognizes Georgia does produce blueberries. A lot of the world, and the country, don't give us credit," says Cornelius. "A lot of our resources are in research, so we don't have a large publicity budget, but we try to help retailers under-

stand the value of Sweet Georgia Blues."

To help with this, the Blueberry Commission prominently displays its logo on all products, which shows marketers, brokers and buyers that Georgia remains important in blueberry production.

Certification Is Key For Retail & Foodservice

With many progressive retailers, local growers cannot do business with the stores unless the growers are GAP-certified by the

USDA. According to the United Fresh Produce Association's Harmonization Initiative, Produce GAP standards used in various audits seem to be at least 90 percent the same.

"Some of our growers have found their retailer doesn't accept USDA audits, but rather is looking for another national or international third-party auditing company for certification," says Samantha Tankersley Kilgore, director of communications for the GFVGA. "In large farms, it is very possible growers will undergo between 8 to 10 audits

GEORGIA GROWN'S EXECUTIVE CHEF PROGRAM

Georgia Grown also sponsors an executive chef program to create a greater awareness about the availability of the quality, local products that can be found in the state's expanding culinary scene.

"This is co-sponsored by the Georgia Restaurant Association in Atlanta who are the closest confidants to Georgia consumers and serve as a year-long ambassador for the Georgia Grown program," says Georgia Agriculture Commissioner, Gary W. Black. "We utilize these chefs to communicate with schools and consumers, as well as to promote our locally grown items with public appearances."

The four Georgia chefs for the 2014 program are Chef Gary Coltek of Kennesaw State University Culinary and Hospitality Services in Kennesaw, Chef Roberto Leoci of Leoci's Trattoria in Savannah, Chef Marc Taft of Chicken and the Egg in Marietta, and Virginia Willis of Virginia Willis Culinary Enterprises, Inc. in Atlanta.

"This program is one of the many ways working with the Georgia Restaurant Association helps us promote and foster relationships between chefs and our farmers across the state," says Black. "This program is not only beneficial for the growth of Georgia's economy, but enables chefs to incorporate fresh, locally grown products into their menus, and allows them to promote the vast amount of products Georgia has to offer." **pb**



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in a season, costing at minimum \$1,500 per audit, most of which are auditing the same practices. In short, our growers are working as hard as they can to provide the safest produce possible and adhere to multiple audit standards for their retailers."

Shuman says food safety is always at the forefront of the company culture at Shuman Produce, as it has a responsibility to consumers to maintain a strong food-safety program.

"We are certified through numerous audits to our fields, facilities and workforce including every certification offered through PrimusLabs," he says. "We maintain a four-star rating with Primus throughout the year at all of our facilities. We also participate in third-party social responsibility audits, Global GAP and we are GFSI [Global Food Safety Initiative] certified."

Cardamone says L&M Farms has an ongoing food-safety program with third-party audits based on GFSI benchmarks and an on-site food safety coordinator working with all of its Georgia operations.

It's likewise important locally grown and good agricultural practices work together seamlessly. Consumers are not only interested in locally grown produce, or the locale where the produce comes from in most cases, but they also want to know their produce is safe.

"Good Agricultural Practices are low cost, and should be implemented on the farm regardless of size, and whether the operation

is to be audited or not," says Kilgore. "This set of standards is something that we as an organization can help the grower learn about and implement."

Reaching Out To Retailers

There are myriad benefits for retailers to sell locally grown produce, including establishing customer loyalty, helping the state's economy, and simply offering a better and tastier product.

GFVGA's Kilgore says state pride also comes into play. "More and more consumers are paying attention to marketing like 'grown in Georgia' or 'locally grown,' and that has become a deciding factor in many consumer purchases, so having Georgia-grown produce in your store could produce a higher volume of sales," she says. "On a practical level, transportation time is cut down, which improves shelf life and gets product to stores faster."

Commissioner Black thinks making things personal is key to driving the local message in the retail environment. "Anytime you can have those farmer relationships established and create an experience in the produce aisle where consumers feel like they are building a relationship with the Georgia farmer, there's a real winning experience for everyone," says Black. "What we offer to retailers, small and large alike, is that we have the expertise to expand those relationships with producers and we want to take advantage of that."

In the past year, the Georgia Grown program helped retailers arrange farm tours and provided further opportunities to establish relationships.

"Every one of the retailers I talked to would like to meet more people and have more choices," says Black. "We also want to help some smaller producers get in the marketplace and help young farmers establish relationships in the future — even those who might have a specialty product."

Rather than embark on a large mass-media campaign, Georgia Grown works more with individual companies, allowing members to incorporate the program's logo on their own advertising campaigns. The Georgia Grown logo has popped up on billboards, in newspaper ads and in numerous marketing materials.

"Once you get the brand impression, a relationship starts being built and a trust comes to the produce section," asserts Black. "Georgia Grown is also a brand with deep roots in sustainability, quality and integrity. The Georgia Grown brand is desired by businesses and consumers who want to buy and promote Georgia's locally grown products."

Retail giants like Wal-Mart, Kroger and Harveys Supermarkets all have strong Georgia Grown point-of-purchase visibility planned for the spring and summer months.

The Georgia Grown program even opened its own online store to let state growers,

REACHING OUT TO SCHOOLS

Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA), based in LaGrange, GA, says the GFVGA has been working with the Farm to School Alliance to provide education to local growers who want to connect with schools in their district.

Gary W. Black, Georgia Agriculture Commissioner, says one of the areas Georgia Grown is concentrating on in 2014 is its relationship with local schools. To that end, the program is running a Georgia Grown Test Kitchen and a Feed My School for a Week Program, to help bridge the gap in the nutritional value and quality of food served in Georgia schools, while providing more farm-to-cafeteria opportunities.

"They are very unique programs for farm to school. Through these programs, we are influencing the buying habits of nutritional directors across the state," says Black. "We are showing the ease that comes with purchasing local products for school systems, while improving the nutritional value for students."

With the Feed My School for a Week Program, 13 schools will learn how to feed its students for one week using exclusively products from Georgia. The schools will also host an agriculture guest speaker and "taste tests" for Georgia

commodities, in addition to running several other educational activities throughout the designated week.

For the Test Kitchen, schools can enroll school kitchens in a yearlong program, which will provide recipes that can be used in foodservice and also connect schools with local producers who can source the product. The selected schools will also participate in other Georgia Grown activities throughout the year.

For example, the Cobb County School District's food and nutrition department works with Georgia Grown's produce vendor to bring Georgia grown fruits and vegetables to all students of Cobb County.

The district serves fresh fruits and vegetables daily from farms in Georgia, as well as highlighting to students Georgia's locally grown products and accompanying nutritional benefits.

"The end result will be healthier Georgia students, decreased barriers in farm to school efforts and increased awareness as students learn and experience, both educationally and nutritionally, where their food comes from," says Black. "It increases awareness about the importance of proper nutrition and healthy eating, while assisting schools in sourcing local produce and products."

customers and retailers show their pride in Georgia and its No. 1 industry — agriculture. Products available include apparel, hats, cookbooks and gift baskets.

John Robison, chairman of the Georgia Pecan Commission, says having the Georgia Grown logo on pecans from the state is a great way to distinguish what Georgia does best.

"A lot of consumers here in Georgia know we are the largest producers of pecans, but there's always room for more education and promotion on the product," he says. "Our Commission's website has information and marketing materials that can help."

In-Store Promotion

Vidalia sweet onions, a Georgia-grown product, are one of the most famous sweet onions in the world and a fantastic marketing draw to the produce department during the summer. Sweet onions have the highest household penetration of all onions, and Vidalias lead the category in that respect.

"Consumers from coast to coast are familiar with the Vidalia and prize them for their sweet, mild flavor and versatility in cooking," says Shuman Produce's Shuman. "The power of the Vidalia brand can be used not only to increase

John Shuman, president and director of sales for Shuman Produce, based in Reidsville, GA, explains that RealSweet Vidalia Onions grow well due to the state's average temperatures, steady rainfall and sandy soil.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHUMAN PRODUCE

onion-category sales during their window of availability from April to August, but cross-merchandising Vidalias with related items can increase the overall ring at the register."

Shuman says plenty of opportunities exist for pairing Vidalias in the produce aisle, but they can also be effectively merchandised alongside grilling-related items to take advan-

tage of outdoor cooking season.

He would like to see retailers include more information on their displays when it comes to merchandising.

"Consumers know Vidalias are seasonal, and special attention should be called to the limited amount of time the product is available during the year," he says. "We also



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recommend retailers use signage to connect shoppers with farmers and their unique growing region in South Georgia to highlight the locale and exclusivity of the product."

To assist retailers, L&M provides photographs, artwork and information on its farms and the people that spend countless hours tending the crops, harvesting and packaging.

"Many of our customers choose to use this in their stores, or on their websites to promote local programs," says L&M's Cardamone. "We find consumers like to learn about the farming families that live in or close to the area where they are purchasing. It provides a farmers market feel and allows us to share the pride we have in providing a fresh, locally grown product."

The GFVGA is a strong advocate in helping retailers get the word out about offering Georgia-grown produce. Kilgore recommends a retailer use signage to promote and draw attention to the produce that is Georgia-grown and make it large and eye-catching so that everyone who walks in is thinking local.

"Hosting events around the produce is also a good idea. Something like 'Meet Your Farmer,' where customers are able to meet a grower who provides a particular product has worked

well," she says. "You could also bring in a chef to create new dishes with fresh produce in the store itself."

Farming Out To Foodservice

The Georgia Grown program helped foodservice and growers connect in a positive way, with a sound infrastructure in place to help them communicate. The program also fostered trust and confidence for the public to buy from Georgia producers.

Shawn Kight, owner of the Sawmill Place, located in Blairsville, GA, says from a restaurateur's standpoint, using local Georgia products means a fresher product and knowledge about where the food comes from.

"We want to be that special local restaurant that is unique to this part of the mountains. Sourcing locally fits our concept well and the vision we are trying to pursue," says Kight. "With so much grown right here, it makes sense to purchase and serve it locally. Anyone who has ever tasted a garden-fresh tomato or cucumber knows there is a vast difference between farm fresh and store bought."

Sawmill Place uses more than 30 different farm fresh products, primarily vegetables and fruit, mostly through the Union County

"Buying local helps sustain the local grower economy and the restaurateurs have fresher, higher quality products being listed on their menus."

— Shawn Kight, Sawmill Place

Farmers Market. It also sources locally its multi-grain pancake mix from Logan Turnpike Mill and its sausage from Chamber's Mountain Meats and Nantahala Meats.

"Buying local helps sustain the local grower economy and the restaurateurs have fresher, higher quality products being listed on their menus," says Kight. "Connecting local growers and foodservice professionals is a win-win situation."

Drew Fleetwood, co-owner of The Square Restaurant in Moultrie, GA, says its chef starts each morning at the local farmers market, Packer Produce, to buy as many things local as possible.

"We love supporting our neighbors and farmers as often as we can. Living in one of the most agriculturally diverse and abundant counties on the East Coast, we see no reason to not shop local first," he says. "We love the freshness and longevity that local produce lends to our pantry. It's something special when the farmer himself walks through the door and orders food made with produce that he harvested that very week."

Some of the local ingredients the restaurant keeps in its kitchen are honey, butter, salad greens, cheeses, pork, jellies, grits and peanuts. It also sources locally for its daily features, such as seasonal fruits, veggies, nuts and meats.

Dave Snyder, owner and chef of Halyard Restaurant Group, based on St. Simons Island, GA, notes using quality ingredients is the best way to keep great food coming from your kitchen.

Among his list of local produce buys are strawberries, blueberries, squashes, field peas, corn, potatoes, lettuces, tomatoes, cucumbers, kales, herbs, baby vegetables, lemongrass, cabbages, kaffir lime leaves and figs.

"We are lucky that our farmers will ripen fruits and vegetables a bit longer than normal when selling to us, because they know we will use it right away," he says. "The added benefit is that we are growing, no pun intended, our local economy as well."

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ACME MARKETS

Garden State farmers sell more than \$1.1 billion in products annually, according to the Trenton, NJ-based New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

Celebrating New Jersey Produce

The state's natural elements make for fertile and quality agriculture. BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

New Jersey's farmlands have fed its natives and neighbors since pre-Revolutionary War days. No wonder this Mid-Atlantic state is nicknamed the Garden State. Fast-forward 200-plus years, and agriculture continues to be one of the top three contributors to New Jersey's economy.

Garden State farmers sell more than \$1.1 billion in products annually, according to the Trenton, NJ-based New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA). New Jersey ranks third nationally in cranberry, spinach and bell pepper production, fourth in peach and fifth in blueberry and cucumber production.

"Jersey produce is a big part of our business plan," says Jay Schneider, produce sales manager for ACME Markets, a Philadelphia, PA-based chain with 113 stores in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland. "At peak season, Jersey-grown fruits and vegetables will account for 15 to 18 percent of our total produce sales volume."

New Jersey's Farmscape

More than 10,000 farms operate on 730,000 acres, or 13 percent of New Jersey's

land area, according to the NJDA's 2012 State Agriculture Overview. That year, the state reached a milestone of 200,000 permanently preserved acres under the State Farmland Preservation Program, which ensures the Garden State will retain its nickname.

Its natural elements, such as the land itself, have long made New Jersey fertile for agriculture.

"The organic matter in the sandy loam soil is unique," says Tom Consalo, president of the Vineland, NJ-based Consalo Group. "It gives crops a distinct taste, size and quality."

"New Jersey also has an ideal climate with abundant sunshine and rainfall to maximize sugars and fruit size as well as color in peaches and nectarines," says Jerome "Jerry" Frecon, horticultural consultant for the Glassboro, NJ-based New Jersey Peach Promotion Council (NJPPC) and professor emeritus at Rutgers University. "Temperature plays an important role too."

"There are several different microclimates," says Rick Feighery, director of sales for Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., based in Philadelphia, PA. "You can see a 10 to 15 degree temperature difference in one growing

area versus another just a few miles away. It's these microclimates and the combination of hot days and cool nights that create the flavor characteristics in crops like tomatoes."

What New Jersey farmers grow on this productive land also makes the state's agricultural industry attractive to retailers.

"Our farmers grow so many different varieties," says Al Murray, the NJDA's assistant secretary of agriculture. "Not just one or two types of eggplant, for example, but seven kinds. In tomatoes, there's Plum, Romas, Grape, Beefsteak and Heirloom. In corn, there's bicolor, white, yellow and sugar-enhanced. And in beans there's limas, green, striped and purple. There's something to meet the tastes of many different palates."

And there are many palates to feed. The Northeast megalopolis, which spans the area from Washington, D.C. to Boston, boasts a population of more than 51 million people (or 17 percent of the U.S. population). New Jersey farmers can reach these consumers, and even those as far away as Eastern Canada, with their fresh produce overnight.

"The benefit of our proximity to market is that we can pick, pack and ship at the peak of

TOP 4 FRESH MARKET FRUITS BY DOLLARS

ITEM	DOLLARS (MILLION)
1. Blueberries	\$80.8
2. Peaches	\$39.6
3. Cranberries	\$29.9
4. Apples	\$28.5

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, New Jersey Field Office, Trenton, NJ, 2012

TOP 10 FRESH MARKET VEGETABLES BY DOLLARS

ITEM	DOLLARS (MILLION)
1. Tomatoes	\$30.9
2. Bell Peppers	\$27.6
3. Herbs	\$20.7*
4. Sweet Corn	\$14.0
5. Cucumbers	\$12.6
6. Spinach	\$11.8
7. Summer Squash	\$11.7
8. Lettuce	\$10.1**
9. Cabbage	\$9.7
10. Pumpkins	\$7.4

* Includes arugula, basil, chives, coriander, cress, fennel, sage and thyme.

** Includes head lettuce, romaine and all other lettuce.

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, New Jersey Field Office, Trenton, NJ, 2013

ripeness and freshness," says Thomas Sheppard, president of Eastern Fresh Growers and owner of Sheppard Farms, Cedarville, NJ. "There's a huge freight savings, too. It can cost \$7,000 to \$8,000 in freight to bring product in from the West Coast. That's an average of

\$5 per box in just freight cost."

New Jersey farms have grown larger in order to supply this diverse market. Between 2007 and 2012, the number of small farms (1 to 9 acres) decreased by 24 percent, while large farms (50 to 179 acres) increased by 7 percent.

"Small farmers can't generate enough production to cover the investment costs it takes to sell to retail like increasingly technologically sophisticated infrastructure and food safety," says Tim Wetherbee, sales manager for Diamond Blueberry, Inc. in Hammonton, NJ, and chairman of the New Jersey Blueberry Industry Advisory Council.

The state's largest farms have adapted to meet the demands of centralized retailers. Many of these farms are still family owned and operated, sometimes for four or more generations. However, these families have banded together to form corporations, diversify and vertically integrate.

They also use such techniques as forced-air, vacuum and hydro-cooling to ensure product quality and freshness. Hydro-cooling especially helps New Jersey peaches to retain sugars by slowing down respiration and oxidation.

The state's tree fruit doesn't need to be pre-conditioned because it's picked ripe due to its nearness to market. State-of-the-art computerized soft and color sorters are employed by blueberry growers. The next generation of the state's farmers already has begun to work with multinational software giants to develop mobile data collection and management solutions for farming akin to those used by the leading companies in other industries.

"As a retailer, I see the quality of Jersey produce as very good and consistent. All of the growers we deal with have certified packing facilities with HACCP and Gap certifications," says ACME's Schneider.

Growers whose fruit is packed under the Jersey Fruit and Just Picked brands by Glassboro, NJ-headquartered Sunny Valley International have PrimusLabs certification at the GFSI level. In addition, these growers

PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW JERSEY PEACH PROMOTION COUNCIL



The NJPPC hosts "Peach Parties" — events that spotlight the state's fresh peaches in more than 35 farmers markets and at retailers such as ACME, Foodtown, Kings Food Markets and ShopRite.



The New Jersey Peach Queen visits this particular Peach Party to support the event with peach products, themed promotions, and sampling.



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“As a retailer, I see the quality of Jersey produce as very good and consistent. All of the growers we deal with have certified packing facilities with HACCP and Gap certifications.”

— Jay Schneider, ACME Markets

will be using the PTI case level coding this year to ensure traceability of blueberries and peaches from field to customer.

Sustainability is a buzzword with consumers and retailers alike.

“Our Jersey Fruit and Just Picked growers all participate in an integrated pest management program,” says Bob Von Rohr, director of customer relations for Sunny Valley International. “Our largest peach grower, Larchmont Farms, utilizes solar panels to run its packing facility. We use recycled material for our boxes and packaging, and our growers use drip irrigation to minimize water usage.”

New Jersey's Top Crops

New Jersey's seasonal harvest runs from mid-April until the first frost or end of October or early November.

“Much of our fruits and vegetables after June all come from Jersey,” says Victor Savanello, director of produce and floral at Allegiance Retail Services LLC, an Iselin, NJ-based company whose banners include Foodtown, Super Foodtown, Foodtown Express, Freshtown, La Bella Marketplace, D'Agostino and Brooklyn Harvest Market. “This includes peaches, blueberries, watermelons and muskmelons as well as leafy greens, herbs, peppers, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, squash, snap beans and tomatoes.”

Blueberries. “The item that keeps picking up every year is Jersey blueberries,” says ACME's Schneider. “Consumers can't get enough of them.”

The blueberry is New Jersey's official state fruit. “Demand by health-conscious consumers has increased so much that we've expanded our program,” says the Consalo Group's Consalo. “We sell both in the state, out of state, and internationally up to Canada. In addition, we're packing larger pack sizes for retail, such as 18 and 24 ounces and possibly creating a ready-to-

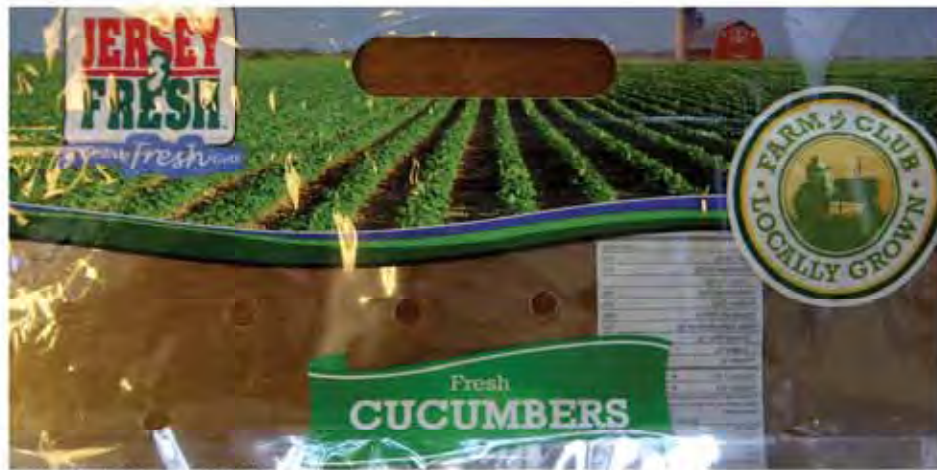


PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

eat package for the 2015 season.”

“The Duke variety enables us to start harvest by mid-June,” says Diamond Blueberry's Wetherbee. “This is important because about 40 percent of New Jersey's blueberry crop moves due to Fourth of July promotions. Then we'll get into Blue Crop and wrap up by

the end of July or beginning of August with the Elliott.”

An increase in plantings over the past few years and better yields are expected to increase blueberry volume out of the state.

“I expect we'll see 70 million pounds of fruit produced in New Jersey in the next few

TOP 4 FRUITS BY POUNDS

ITEM	POUNDS (MILLION)*
1. Peaches	60.0
2. Cranberries	55.0
3. Blueberries	55.1
4. Apples	34.0

* Utilized production

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, New Jersey Field Office, Trenton, NJ, 2012

TOP 10 VEGETABLES BY POUNDS

ITEM	POUNDS (MILLION)*
1. Bell Peppers	97.7
2. Tomatoes	58.8
3. Cucumbers	57.6
4. Cabbage	57.0
5. Sweet Corn	48.0
6. Lettuce	35.2
7. Herbs	32.2
8. Summer Squash	27.6
9. Spinach	25.4
10. Pumpkins	18.9

* Utilized production

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, New Jersey Field Office, Trenton, NJ, 2013



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years," says Art Galletta, co-owner and president of Atlantic Blueberry Company, in Hammonton, NJ. Naturipe markets the company's berries.

Peaches And Nectarines. New Jersey has a tree-fruit breeding program at Rutgers University. The state developed a number of peach varieties adapted to the climate that ripen from July 4 through Sept. 15. These include traditional yellow-fleshed varieties and more specialty fruit.

"Competition is so keen for shelf space

that we must find our niches in the market with new and unusual varieties," says Rutgers' Frecon. "For one, that means white-fleshed peaches and nectarines. We also have a series of flat peaches. These include a variety that is white-fleshed and freestone, two that are clear skinned — one with orange-yellow flesh and one with white flesh — and two red blush skinned flat peaches with yellow flesh."

Tomatoes. The "Jersey beefsteak" tomato is synonymous with the state. Today, farmers cultivate a number of types such as vine ripe,

"We use to sell more collards and mustard greens. Now, these two collectively make up only 10 to 30 percent of our kale sales. Kale has always grown in New Jersey. It grows well here."

— Thomas Sheppard, Eastern Fresh Growers

roma, red and gold grape. The heirloom- and beefsteak-like UglyRipes is a proprietary variety developed, grown and marketed by Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., headquartered in Philadelphia, PA.

"Jersey-grown tomatoes will ramp up in availability around the first of June, come on heavy by the Fourth of July," says Procacci's Feighery. "The rounds will go until Labor Day, and the grape tomatoes until it freezes in the fall."

Vegetables. More than 20 categories of vegetables grow in New Jersey, inspiring some in the industry to label the state the "Salad Bowl of the East."

"Cooking-type greens such as kale, green and red chard, and collards are now starting to gain popularity with more mainstream customers," says ACME's Schneider. "Consumers are starting to see the health benefits from these types of items that in years past were not in the public eye."

Kale is such a good mover that Eastern Fresh Growers' Sheppard launched ready-to-eat packaging for this season. "We use to sell more collards and mustard greens," he says. "Now, these two collectively make up only 10 to 30 percent of our kale sales. Kale has always grown in New Jersey. It grows well here."

Microwave-ready packed fresh asparagus and sugar-enhanced as well as supersweet corn varieties are two other vegetable trends in New Jersey.

Organics And Ethnics. "One trend I see is more organically grown fruits and vegetables. Retailers are asking us for organics," says the Consalo Group's Consalo.

Sheppard markets a number of organically grown vegetables such as leaf lettuces, squash, bell peppers, mini sweet peppers, cucumbers and eggplant. These are grown at Jersey Legacy Farms, a 100-acre farm in Cedarville, NJ, run by his brother, David Sheppard and niece,

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Michele Schoen.

"New this year we'll be offering red and yellow organic pear tomatoes in a 1-pint clamshell," says Sheppard.

Jersey Legacy Farms grows jalapeño peppers too. This is an example of some of the fresh produce cultivated to serve the tastes of the state's ethnically diverse population.

"One retailer with stores located in a Chinese neighborhood asked us to grow hot peppers, melons and long beans for them. Another orders a lot of collard greens from us at Thanksgiving for its customers," says Sheppard.

Cilantro, methi leaves (fenugreek) and Chinese cabbage are grown by the Consalo Group.

Bitter ball (white eggplant), kittley (eggplant), Scorpion and Jamaican red hot peppers and yellow and chocolate habaneros, sweet potato shoots and Malabar spinach are a few of the African specialties sold as U-Pick at B&B Farms, in Egg Harbor City, NJ. B&B is owned by retired New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture, Art Brown, and his wife, Carolyn.

"It's been very successful. Customers have driven here from as far as Boston, MA, to Richmond, VA," says Brown.

From Root To Market

The route from farm to retail shelf is one that has changed dramatically. "Thirty years ago, when we started the Jersey Fresh program, retailers wanted a 52-week supply chain rather than having to deal with a lot of different farmers," says the NJDA's Murray. "Plus, many times buyers for the large national chains were based in the West and

"Retailers are eagerly seeking Jersey-grown produce, because if they don't, they'll lose their customers to the farm markets."

— Al Murray, New Jersey Department of Agriculture

didn't have strong relationships with suppliers in the East. That's all changed now. Retailers are eagerly seeking Jersey-grown produce, because if they don't, they'll lose their customers to the farm markets. With so much consumer demand for locally grown, buying and selling Jersey-grown produce has become important to their bottom line."

Today, Jersey-grown fruits and vegetables are, in many cases, picked and delivered the same day to retail.

"We have a store-door delivery program set up with several local farmers," says ACME's Schneider. "There are also companies that pick up from farmers and deliver to our distribution center."

C.H. Robinson Worldwide, a third-party logistics provider headquartered in Eden Prairie, MN, saw an opportunity to help retailers implement local programs. In New Jersey, the company's team in Paulsboro, NJ, assists in developing and implementing retail customers' locally grown programs.

"We tailor programs to meet each customer's unique needs," says F. Scott Fein, Northeast sourcing region supervisor for C.H.

“We tailor programs to meet each customer’s unique needs They could include marketing products for growers, arranging the loading of a product, or consolidating and cross-docking local products at regional service centers for distribution to retail and club stores.”

— E. Scott Fein, C.H. Robinson

Robinson. “These programs vary from customer to customer. They could include marketing products for growers, arranging the loading of a product, or consolidating and cross-docking local products at regional service centers for distribution to retail and club stores. As our programs grow in visibility and demand increases, we continually look for ways to start programs earlier in the spring and extend the season longer into the fall. This provides a larger window of opportunity to promote locally grown New Jersey produce.”

Promoting Jersey Fresh

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Jersey Fresh, the first state-sponsored branding initiative in the country. Jersey Fresh is an advertising, promotional and quality-grading program designed to help the state’s farmers market their produce to consumers. Today, the Jersey Fresh logo appears on everything from TV commercials to billboards, print ads, grower packaging and retail point-of-sale. Not surprisingly, the Jersey Fresh logo generated 78 percent brand awareness in the New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania tri-state area in 2012, according to the NJDA.

“Customers recognize the Jersey Fresh logo,” says ACME’s Schneider. “It has gained tremendous popularity over the past years.”

The New Jersey Blueberry Industry Advisory Council works with the NJDA to promote Jersey Fresh on radio and in trade ads as well as funding research for its members. Likewise, the NJPPC promotes Jersey Fresh in its widespread

marketing and advertising efforts. This includes maintaining an information-packed website, where the top-two ranked viewers are shippers and the industry, with consumers ranked third.

“We were invited to add a couple of questions to the annual PublicMind Poll conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson University,” says Pegi Adam, the spokesperson for the NJPPC. “The questions include ‘Do you know when NJ peach season is? What ad type influenced you to buy NJ peaches? And What do you look for when you buy NJ peaches — price, size,

quality?’ We post results of this survey to better assist supermarket retailers in their purchasing and marketing of New Jersey peaches for following season.”

The NJPPC also hosts “Peach Parties” — events that spotlight the state’s fresh peaches, peach products, peach-themed promotions, peach sampling and a visit from the New Jersey Peach Queen — in more than 35 farmers markets and at retailers such as ACME, Foodtown, Kings Food Markets and ShopRite.

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The heirloom- and beefsteak-like UglyRipes is a proprietary variety developed, grown and marketed by Procacchi Brothers.

“More retailers are looking at the CSA mode. It’s one that enhances the customers’ local experience more so than simply putting produce in their cart.”

—Paul Kneeland, Kings Food Markets

nothing new for Allegiance’s Savanello. “We’ve always sourced New Jersey produce, even back before food miles and carbon footprint were buzzwords. The difference now is that because of the demand for locally grown, we make sure to let customers know where their produce is from. We’ll do this via signage, in ads and at point-of-sale.”

Some New Jersey retailers are taking the “fresh-from-the-farm” approach one step further. For example, Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral and seafood at Kings Food Markets, a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, is expanding the chain’s signature Fresh Local 24/7 program to include more growers, more products and a bigger display measuring about 8 feet wide and deep with fixtures that offer a farmstand look. Kneeland is also reintroducing the chain’s CSA.

“More retailers are looking at the CSA mode,” he says. “It’s one that enhances the customers’ local experience more so than simply putting produce in their cart.” **pb**



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Research from a GlobeScan report shows, with proper in-store education, sales of fair trade products increase from 10 to 40 percent. Also, nearly 8 out of 10 people who recognize the label have bought FTC products.

New Opportunities In Fair Trade

Increased consumer awareness and expanding produce availability make this trend a profitable concept in retail and foodservice. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

Growing consumer interest and a wider selection of produce items in fair trade offer retailers and foodservice the perfect platform to increase visibility and sales. "Market data suggests fair trade is the largest growing category within a greater category of sustainability issues," says Rafael Goldberg, chief executive of Interrupcion Fair Trade in Brooklyn, NY, which markets its brand Taste Me, Do Good. "People genuinely love to participate in supporting causes they care about."

While no single definition of fair trade exists, one developed by FINE, an informal association of four international fair trade networks, categorizes it as a "trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect that seeks greater equity in international trade."

"More consumers than ever are demanding to know where their products come from," says Jenna Larson, public relations manager at Fair Trade USA in Oakland, CA. "A recent study shows more than 74 percent of American consumers want to purchase products while treating people fairly. Today, more than 120 million Americans are familiar with our Fair Trade Certified (FTC) label."

Fair Trade USA recently completed a

consumer survey entitled *The Be Fair Survey*. Kellee Harris, western regional business manager and Fair Trade USA marketing liaison for the Giumarra Companies in Los Angeles, CA, explains, "The study revealed the majority of Americans say it's important to purchase products that treat people fairly by providing safe working conditions [87 percent], fair compensation [81 percent] and opportunities for kids to go to school [74 percent]."

"There is a current trend among consumers to want goods produced fairly," says Marion Tabard, director of marketing for Turbana Corporation in Coral Gables, FL. "Research from a GlobeScan report shows, with proper in-store education, sales of fair trade products increase from 10 to 40 percent. Also, nearly eight out of 10 people who recognize the label have bought FTC products."

Forward-looking retailers are already building fair-trade equity. "More and more grocery chains are asking Giumarra for information, merchandising support and most importantly, a wider selection of Fair Trade Certified produce," reports Harris.

"We have a customer base strongly connected to the fresh departments and are increasingly aware of where each product comes from," says Maroka Kawamura, produce

director at New Leaf Community Markets in Santa Cruz, CA. "They are interested in the way the people on the other end have been treated. Fair trade products are gaining a foothold."

"There's clearly a growing demand from consumers to better understand not only where their produce is coming from but also the farmer growing it," says David McInerney, co-founder of FreshDirect in Queens, NY. "Just last year we spent a week with the folks of Interrupcion in Machala, Ecuador. I was impressed with their deep and transparent relationships with their growers."

Aaron Quon, category director greenhouse and vegetables for The Oppenheimer Group in Vancouver, British Columbia (Divemex's North American marketing partner) says, "A growing number of brands are building deep, long-term relationships with their growers while building more transparent, reliable supply chains through fair trade."

"We expect fair trade recognition by consumers to escalate as we continue to market and educate," projects Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties in Pompano Beach, FL. "There is demand for sustainable, ethically harvested products. We believe this will translate into sales and many retailers agree."



Shelf talkers, such as this one from Wholesum Harvest, are available for retailers to showcase in Produce.

Why Fair Trade?

In addition to the obvious social benefits, fair trade pays dividends on many levels. "In the past 15 years, we learned sustainability and good business go hand in hand," says Fair Trade USA's Larson. "Fair Trade fosters direct, long-term relationships between growers and buyers. Direct communication and actionable audit services from Fair Trade USA lead to stronger, more reliable, transparent supply chains."

"To be truly successful, a company must monitor what we call the triple bottom line: people, planet and profit," explains Matt Mandel, vice president of sales and marketing for SunFed in Rio Rico, AZ. "The intersection of these three leads to a sustainable company. You must look at profit or you'll be out of business; but at the end of the day, what makes any company great are the people who make it happen. The SunFed family is not just limited to the people working in our corporate headquarters, but every person who impacts our supply chain."

Fair trade offers companies a formal way to implement their values. "We always realized the importance of operating on a platform including sustainability," says Eagle. "For years we had strict standards, including ensuring good working conditions, fair salaries and supporting communities with medical assistance and education. Fair trade was just a natural progression for us."

"Participating in fair trade programs gave Albert's an opportunity to enrich and improve the lives of growers throughout the world," states Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing for Albert's Organics in Swedesboro, NJ.

Fair trade offers retailers a means to inte-

grate sustainability and profitability objectives. "It allows them to show how business and social actions can affect positive change in individual lives," says Giumarra's Harris. "Each small transaction multiplied out over thousands of purchases truly can make a difference."

For example, in 2013, sales of Giumarra Fair Trade-Certified asparagus returned significant funding to a farm worker committee, which elected to fund school scholarships, fees, supplies and bus transportation for workers' children. There were additional funds available to purchase a large number of new washing machines in worker housing complexes, as well," she says.

"The companies we trade with have a compelling interest in certifying products that are produced under Fair Trade conditions," asserts Ricardo Crisantes, vice president sales and marketing for Wholesum Family Farms in Nogales, AZ.

"Fair trade products convey our and the retailer's commitment of social responsibility," says Kim Flores, director of marketing for Seald Sweet International in Vero Beach, FL. "It ensures the end-consumer the products are grown with fair working conditions, compensations for the farm and packing house workers, and often gives direct benefits to the workers' communities."

Progressive Retailers

Retailers already see rewards in fair trade. "Retailers are responding to demand and offering more fair trade produce items than ever before," reports Larson of Fair Trade USA. "Volumes were up 48 percent in the first half of 2013 alone compared to the first half of 2012, and grew almost 60 percent in 2012 versus 2011."

"The response to the Divemex Fair Trade Certified pepper program has been remarkable," says Oppenheimer's Quon. "Demand is consistently high. We are seeing interest from more mainstream retailers than before. Fair trade products enable retailers to differentiate and convey their own values around social and environmental responsibility."

"Retailers have been and will continue to capitalize on the growing socially conscious consumer base," adds Turbana's Tabard. "By carrying FTC produce, retailers are filling a major void for these consumers and increasing their bottomline."

Several innovative retailers forged success for fair trade. "Whole Foods Market took the lead on fair trade and does a fantastic job — not just as a retailer but as a promoter," says SunFed's Mandel. "The way they merchandise the product gives them the ability to really tell a story and explain the benefits of fair trade."

"FreshDirect has been a huge innovator in the industry and they have been able to capi-

FAIR TRADE IN FOODSERVICE

Side Note

Bringing fair trade into foodservice is a manageable challenge and an approach that can capture a specific audience. "It could fit well in many fast/casual formats where the attention of customers can be captured," says Garland Perkins, business development representative and foodservice specialist for The Oppenheimer Group headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia. "Fair trade items could thrive in a quick-serve, one-stop-shop where a hurried but conscientious consumer picks up a banana and coffee for breakfast and a sandwich to-go for lunch later that day."

Foodservice institutions at colleges, universities and corporate campuses also present great opportunities for fair trade. "Young adult diners tend to be interested in where their food comes from and care about social and environmental issues," says Perkins. "Operators can draw attention to the products fairly easily. For example, provide a picture of the location/group of people who benefit from fair trade on the window of a serving station in a college cafeteria or that of companies with the start-up vibe." **pb**

talize on the differentiation with fair trade," says Goldberg of Interrupcion. "They've run some incredibly successful ads giving shoppers more reasons to support fair trade.

"Kings is a long-time promoter of these concepts. We've done everything from demos to signage with them. New York's Food Emporium is another great partner. We've grown sales significantly by highlighting the fair trade Taste Me, Do Good products."

Not Just Coffee Anymore

The last decade has seen significant change in availability and diversity of fair trade produce. "Over the past decade, we've seen Fair Trade certified products move from being a limited subset of commodities to greatly expanding," says Goldberg. "It's never been easier for a retailer to have a consistent offering of fair trade products in its mix."

"In 2012, the number of fair trade produce offerings more than doubled, up from only six items in 2011 to more than 17," says Fair Trade USA's Larson. "Products include bananas, mangos, oranges, pineapples, avocados, beans, bell peppers, peas, watermelon, tomatoes, hard squash and more. Our program not only comprises fresh fruits and vegetables, but also juices, purees and dried fruits."

Interrupcion currently handles fair trade blueberries, cherries, apples, pears, mangos, bananas, strawberries, pineapples, plums, peaches, kiwi and asparagus. "We pushed the envelope to increase the diversity of offerings and to make it easier for retailers to have this spot in their marketing mix," says Goldberg.

Turbana has been importing FTC bananas since 2006. "We were the first company to import FTC bananas into the U.S.," says Tabard. "Uniban, our parent company, is the largest producer of FTC bananas in the world."

Giumarra currently offers asparagus, peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, melons, grapes, and winter squash varieties. Albert's sells fair trade bananas and occasionally mangos. Wholesum Family Farms markets fair trade tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, bell peppers, as well as soft and hard squash.

Southern Specialties' current fair trade offering includes French beans marketed under the Today's Gourmet and Southern Selects labels. "We're exploring other products as well and are happy to work with any customers interested in bringing Fair Trade certified product to their customers," pledges Eagle.

Seald Sweet handles fresh citrus from its Fair Trade certified grower in South Africa. "This includes oranges and easy-peelers like clementines and mandarins available in the

U.S. during the summer," says Flores.

On the retail side, Kings Supermarkets carries fair trade blueberries, pineapples, mangoes and bananas. New Leaf handles as many products as it can get. New Leaf's Kawamura explains, "We have had cherry and slicer tomatoes, eggplant, avocados, bananas, pineapples, mangos, blueberries, grapes, cucumbers, peppers, melons, winter and summer squash, and tomatillos."

Fresh Direct offers various organic and non-organic mangoes, pears, bananas, blueberries, strawberries, pineapples, apples, avocados, asparagus, and tomatoes throughout the year. "We look forward to continuing to expand our fair trade product offerings," says McInerney.

Merchandising Fair Trade

Consumers buy fair trade when they understand why their purchases matter. "The success of a fair trade program rests heavily on consumer education," says Giumarra's Harris. "The more customers know about the benefits of fair trade, the more likely they are to make empowered choices to support it."

Southern Specialties' Eagle concurs. "The biggest challenge is driving consumer awareness. It's still an educational and awareness issue for the consumer. Our mission and challenge is to create this awareness."

"First and foremost, retailers need to provide educational opportunities for their customers," notes Tabard. "This can include collateral pieces or in-store events. It's also important to educate the people who work for the retailer, so they can speak about the benefits of fair trade purchases."

Prominently displayed fair trade products will drive sales. "Fair trade fresh produce items prominently displayed will create more awareness," says Eagle. "Whole Foods has done a great job at merchandising fair trade items."

"To sell fair trade well, it must have a prominent place in the section," says SunFed's Mandel. "Retailers cannot dabble in it. They must make a consistent commitment. As more products become available, merchandising opportunities are much greater."

Often, the Fair Trade label alone has a positive lift on sales. "In 2011, a Harvard study found the Fair Trade label led to a 13 percent increase in sales for a major grocery chain," asserts Fair Trade USA's Larson. "Another U.S. retailer conducted a similar study in 2012, finding a much higher lift. Fair Trade USA provides point-of-sale materials (such as posters, copy and photos) to make storytelling as simple as possible."

"In 2012, the number of fair trade produce offerings more than doubled, up from only six items in 2011 to more than 17. Products include bananas, mangos, oranges, pineapples, avocados, beans, bell peppers, peas, watermelon, tomatoes, hard squash and more."

— Jemma Larson, Fair Trade USA

"The FTC label should be clearly identifiable on all produce packaging and bulk commodities in retail displays," says Harris. "FTC produce merchandising displays should feature point-of-sale materials, including posters and information cards with pictures of the farmers and/or workers to connect consumers to the people behind their produce."

Stores should create an impactful connection between shoppers and stories. "Using simple, yet powerful, photos, quotes and stories on point-of-sales materials can draw in shoppers," says Larson. "With growing awareness of the FTC label and so many resources available, communicating the impact of fair trade has never been easier."

"We put particular focus on in-store marketing campaigns with signage," says Goldberg. "We have a great story and retailers benefit in the telling of it. Our partners use ready-to-display materials to reach out to shoppers."

"POS cards featuring some of our worker families and web content helps our participating retailers answer shopper questions and tell our workers' stories," relates Divemex's Tamayo. "Last year, a customer built large Power-to-the-Pepper displays in several stores, illustrating how a purchase of our peppers would empower the people who grew them."

Unique Tools And Partnering

Suppliers and buyers strive to promote the fair trade message in direct and creative ways. "We work with our retailers on longer term programs and planning, so we can be very competitive in offering promotional opportunities and sharing the cost with our retail

partners," reports Goldberg.

"Each year, Fair Trade USA leads several campaigns providing retailers with simple, imaginative ways to promote Fair Trade products," explains Larson. "Mother's Day and Fair Trade Month (October) are two important ones. Helpful campaign materials/information and social media tools are on Fair Trade USA's website."

Harris adds, "Using the FTC logo alongside featured items in retail advertising circulars call

attention to the retailer's offerings, helping create consumer awareness and lending credibility to the retailer."

"Our fair trade ad incorporating floral, coffee and fair trade blueberries stimulated a lot of interest," relates Kings' Kneeland.

A variety of tools can educate and inspire customers. "Store newsletters, ads and fliers highlight farm worker impact stories and show the success of a particular program the customers contributed to with their

purchases," advises Harris.

"We produced an informational video and POS signage for our customers' use," reports Albert's Weinstein.

Wholesum Family Farms provides POS materials to educate retail produce department professionals as well as consumer-oriented signage.

"Interrupcion promotes using QR codes as a great way to connect consumers interested in learning more," says Goldberg. **pb**

Side Note

VALUING FAIR TRADE

What are the standards behind a fair trade label? **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

Fair Trade is a market-based approach for consumers to support their values with their purchasing power and help alleviate poverty. "It's a great way to bring values into the produce mix," says Rafael Goldberg, chief executive of Interrupcion Fair Trade in Brooklyn, NY. "With the complexity of the consumer landscape and myriad of options in a produce department, fair trade provides a solution and opportunity to encapsulate so many of the different values our shoppers care about."

"Fair trade empowers consumers to make a difference in the lives of people producing Fair Trade Certified (FTC) products," says Marion Tabard, director of marketing for Turbana Corporation in Coral Gables, FL. "For instance, for every box of Turbana Fair Trade Certified bananas sold, one dollar (called the social premium) is utilized to support social and economic development in the workers' communities."

Kellee Harris, western region business manager and Fair Trade USA marketing liaison for the Giumarra Companies in Los Angeles, CA., says fair trade is the great connector. "Fair Trade Certified produce connects growers and retailers to socially-conscious consumers who want to know about the impact of their purchases.

"Giumarra has long-standing relationships with growers in Mexico who realize and appreciate the value of their workers. They believe in sustainable standards and practices making up the cornerstone of the FTC program."

WHAT'S IN A LABEL

Just as no single definition of fair trade exists, no single certification program exists, but most marketable fair trade in the

U.S. currently operates under one of a handful of third-party certifiers, including Fair Trade USA, Fair for Life, FLO and Fair Trade International. "Fair Trade USA is a leading third-party certifier of fair trade products in North America," explains Jenna Larson, public relations manager at Fair Trade USA in Oakland, CA.

"Fair for Life is a third-party certification program for social accountability and fair trade in agricultural, manufacturing and trading operations," reports Tabard. "Fair for Life may complement existing fair trade certification systems. FLO is an independent International Certification Company offering Fair Trade Certification services (of products only) to clients in more than 70 countries."

"Our growers work with both Fair Trade USA and Fair Trade International," says Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties in Pompano Beach, FL. "Fair Trade USA has done an excellent job of helping us bring our product to market."

Buyers should be educated on the meaning behind any fair trade label. "Unless the product has a certification logo and was verified by a third party, there is really no way for a consumer to validate the claims," observes Larson.

"From a social perspective, we want the farms and farmworkers we buy from to be sustainable," says Maroka Kawamura, produce director at New Leaf Community Markets in Santa Cruz, CA. "Ensuring farmers and laborers are paid adequately and social premiums are paid means workers have incentive to come back to that farm. We want to ensure employees are not being taken advantage of and

having a third party auditing this is incredibly helpful."

CREATING CHANGE

A fair trade program is valued by its deeds. "Fair Trade Certification creates meaningful change," emphasizes Jaime Tamayo, director of marketing for Divemex, S.A. in Guadalajara, Mexico. "We see its impact every day. The fair trade community development premiums earned on our bell pepper program are used for scholarships to keep kids in school by covering registration, transportation, and other expenses. It also provides access to education for adults interested in building their skill sets or finishing their basic education. So far, more than 40 of our families have been involved in the scholarship program."

Since 2006, Albert's Organics has been a strong and reliable partner in supporting fair trade. "Albert's contributed more than \$650,000 in community development funds to banana growing communities in Ecuador and Peru," says Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing for Albert's Organics in Swedesboro, NJ. "This support helps provide small farmers direct access to international markets as well as the tools and resources they need to succeed and thrive."

"Our growers in Mexico get fair prices for their produce since fair trade provides the protection of a floor price," says Ricardo Crisantes, vice president sales and marketing for Wholesum Family Farms Inc. in Nogales, AZ. "A portion of the profits is invested back into the grower community. We contribute to various social projects to benefit the health and education of employees and their families, and the region's economic development." **pb**



(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF MELISSA'S AND CONCORD FOODS



Experts agree, it's beneficial to incorporate tie-ins with existing displays as well as frequent in-store demonstrations.

Tied Into Fruit Sales

Complementary items side by side help the bottom line. **BY BECKY BILLINGSLEY**

Gorgeous produce departments with mounds of bright yellow bananas, heaps of shining red and green apples and a rainbow of plump berries can transcend shoppers to a museum-like appreciation for their beauty, but adding the right tie-in products with an astute eye for showcasing them can enhance both shoppers' satisfaction and retail sales.

Placement in Produce is crucial. Retailers don't want to disrupt the overall effect of their artistic produce displays, but they want tie-in products to sell well. Product suppliers have the same goals, because their bottom lines depend on what the retailers desire. Consumers want to eat healthy, price-friendly foods that are tasty and convenient to prepare.

Everyone's requirements can be satisfied with savvy cross-merchandising. Victor Cascio is vice-president of retail acquisition with the Sunflower Group based in Kansas City, an experiential marketing firm with services including in-store product demonstrations and retail merchandising. He also has experience on the retail side with companies his father launched: Associated Wholesale Groceries and Cascio's Markets. Cascio thinks the current trend to devote about 10 percent of produce departments to tie-in products

should be bumped up to 25 percent.

"If [my wife and I] see something with a dip or glaze beside it, we're going to buy it," says Cascio. "Publix has its Aprons Cooking School with something going on all the time, and that should be happening in the produce department too. I think people want to eat healthier, and [with demos] they would know more about what to do with the product. With all the

different varieties of fruit, people won't buy them if they don't know what to do with them."

Generating Buzz In Produce

Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda's, based in Los Alamitos, CA, says product demonstrations are an excellent way to get people to try something different, such as the ready-to-eat crepes her company introduced to the American market in 1986, as well as exotic fruits — such as baby kiwi berries and gooseberries. She likes to partner crepes during demos with berries, whipped cream, cream cheese, chocolate sauce and slivered almonds for three reasons: sharing demos with other products also shares the cost of the demos among those suppliers; customers get great meal ideas that will translate into repeat sales; and retailers can potentially sell six products



PHOTO COURTESY OF SACO FOODS

“Creating meaningful lift across a market or chain normally calls for 20 to 40 percent of the all-commodity volume [ACV] in a given market or account. Less than that is akin to cooling a swimming pool with a bag of ice.”

— Eric Douglas, Sunflower Group

instead of one or two.

Eric Douglas, vice-president of business development at the Sunflower Group, says “Co-op sampling makes all the sense in the world. Despite the appeal of joint promotions, they don’t come to life as often as one might think. Sharing the cost is appealing. Sharing the spotlight and compromising on certain scheduling details has a chilling effect. However, when joint demos do happen, and when they feature complementary items, they provide shopper value — as well as value for the participating products.”

Melissa’s, based in Los Angeles, CA, sells crepes as well as several flavors of dessert sauces (raspberry, chocolate, white chocolate, caramel, mango and the newly added cinnamon) along with spice grinders that can add fresh nutmeg

and more to fruits and nuts to enhance recipes. Melissa’s director of marketing, Robert Schueller, says while demos are one of the more expensive ways to promote their products, they are also extremely effective.

“We encourage demos, especially if the retailer has never carried the product before,” he says. Through a combination of demos, product shippers and retail in-house advertising, Schueller says Melissa’s enjoys a “double-digit growth in the crepe category during strawberry peak season.”

Jerry Scolari, a partner at Reno, NV-based Scolari’s Food & Drug Company, with stores in Nevada and California, agrees. “Demonstrations always helped sales for product that the customer might not usually try.” Scolari’s devotes between 10 and 15 percent of its

produce department to tie-in products, he says.

As for the efficacy of product demonstrations, Sunflower Group’s Douglas notes performance can vary dramatically for certain reasons such as “price deals, competition, proximity to payday, weather, the quality of product being sampled, and the quality/persuasiveness of presentation.

“But it’s not uncommon to see day-of-demo sales increase 500 to 1,500 percent. But the broader view is more valuable and less dramatic. Comparing week-of-demos versus the prior four weeks can still show stout results (such as 200 percent lift) and ongoing sales life (such as 150 percent a week after the demo). Other research shows sustained lift months following sampling events.”

For those considering product demonstrations, Douglas says while the frequency and duration of demo campaigns depend on sales goals and a budget, thinking that a handful of demos will significantly boost sales is shortsighted.

“Creating meaningful lift across a market or chain normally calls for 20 to 40 percent of the all-commodity volume [ACV] in a given market or account,” he says. “Less than that is akin to cooling a swimming pool with a bag

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of ice.”

Concord Foods in Brockton, MA, has its products demonstrated “on a limited basis,” says Samantha McCaul, marketing manager for the company. Concord generally uses demos for new products or when products are placed with new retailers and there are shared demo costs — in cases like pairing guacamole mix with fresh avocados.

The promotional tool that has been even more effective for Concord Foods’ dessert mixes and other tie-in products is coupons, both in- and out-of-store.

Coupons Help Boost Sales

“Coupons have just been incredible,” says McCaul. “We do find both types to be really effective, and it comes down to what your goals are. We might have an ad in store fliers or one of the retailer magazines. We do a lot of instantly redeemable coupons, and we find them to be the most successful. We have very high redemption rates on our IRCs [instant redeemable coupons] when we pair them with companion items, like with banana bread mix and \$1 off bananas, or 55 cents off avocados with guacamole mix. The redemption rate is very high.”

Mary Beth Cowardin, director of produce marketing at T. Marzetti Co. in Columbus, OH, agrees coupons are effective tools, and she likes to see them at the point of purchase, such as on the shelf by Marzetti Caramel Dip and fresh apples. She also sees a “positive impact” in having open caramel or fruit dip containers beside freshly cut fruits, so customers can have a taste.

Placement of the products is critical for their success in helping boost fruit and companion-food sales. If tie-ins are placed on shelves below the fruit tables, it’s much more likely customers won’t bend over to look at them, especially as an impulse purchase.

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— Samantha McCaul, Concord Foods

Amy Verheyden, director of operations at SACO Foods in Middleton, WI, says she has seen her company’s Dolci Frutta chocolate dips stacked above or below fruit tables, and she is happy with that as long as they’re visible near the strawberries. Optimally she would like to see produce managers use their Dolci Frutta shipper display, which she says is “clearly a nice promo piece, and when it’s placed near fresh strawberries, sales go up.”

Tropical Foods in Charlotte, NC, did a study in 2012 that asked grocery store customers where they would like to see the company’s chocolate and peanut butter Dip & Devour fruit dips placed.

“Eighty-five percent said they want to see it right on the shelf,” notes Tropical Foods’ director of marketing, Chad Hartman. “That’s where we like to see it, right on the shelf or on a point-of-purchase piece.”

“Ninety percent of people use them to dip strawberries, so I want them right next to the



strawberries. The peanut butter [dip] is brand new, and I would really like to see them next to the bananas. We've also tried [the peanut butter dip] next to celery, and that is really good placement."

In addition to placement, the manner in which tie-in products are displayed can dramatically affect sales. "Clear signage has been proven to impact sales, and continues to be an integral part of retail promotions and our marketing plans," says Marzetti's Cowardin. "Products should be easily visible and have adequate spacing that allows consumers to conveniently find the items they need."

Simcha Weinstein is the marketing manager at Swedesboro, NJ-headquartered Albert's Organics, which has seven distribution centers throughout the United States. He wrote a training manual for the company titled *The Organic Produce Handbook*, and it contains advice about effective displays that combine signage and promotion ideas.

For example, Albert's recommends displays containing groups of produce that are used in a recipe, such as tomatoes, avocados and lemons and erecting "a large overhanging sign that reads 'Guacamole Fixins.'" Tie-in products such as Concord Foods' guacamole mix would also be a good fit.

"The key to cross-merchandising, Weinstein writes in the handbook, is planning,

"Occasionally the spontaneous effort will work, however the success rate is far greater when there is planning and coordination involved," explains Weinstein. "It's a good idea to have a planning session with other department heads at least once a month and focus on how to take the different products within each department to create a storewide merchandising opportunity."

This might take the form of adding chips to the guacamole display; pairing pretzels with chocolate dips and strawberries; placing

chocolate sauce beside raspberries and a shipper display of crepes; or putting a blueberry muffin mix near the blueberries, banana bread mix by the bananas and pie shells, etc. Experts agree, signage for such displays should be simple, clever and emphasize health, tastiness as well as convenience.

"That's trending in food and grocery stores," says Hartman of Tropical Foods. "People are looking for easy meals and snacks, grab-and-go, not restaurant take-out food, and not difficult to prepare." **pb**



Some experts say retailers can increase sales by 30 percent with ripening. If stickers are on the ripe fruit, retailers could gain another 10 percent.

Ripe Fruit Makes The Difference

Sales can surge 30 percent or more with a well run program. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

Nearly a quarter century ago Dick Spezzano, then vice president for produce at Vons Supermarkets in Southern California, experimented with consumer reaction to avocados that were soft and ready to eat.

"We did a test of ripe and green avocados at Vons, and the ripe outsold the green," says Spezzano, who does business now as Spezzano Consulting Service, Monrovia, CA. "We learned how to ripen them like we did bananas. You can increase sales 30 percent from ripening. If you put stickers on the ripe fruit, you get another 10 percent."

Since that early effort, Spezzano learned supermarkets can get a significant sales bump with ripeness programs for many fruits other than avocados, including pineapples, peaches, plums, bananas and mangos.

The complex requirements for ripening vary by fruit and can even differ depending on the date and place of harvest. Softer fruit also must be skillfully displayed and culled in the store by experienced employees. With a well-run program, however, ripe fruit can be the center attraction of the supermarket.

Not only that, "a retailer can differentiate itself from the competition by carrying ripe fruit," according to Kevin Moffitt, president and chief executive of Pear Bureau Northwest,

Milwaukie, OR. Ripe products not only satisfy consumers' desire for good-tasting fruit and convenience, he says, but shoppers will know they can find ripe fruit at a particular store and buy there more often.

A Major Boost In Fruit Sales

Avocados are the poster children for how much ripe fruit can increase sales and prompt return visits by satisfied customers.

"Sales go up two to four times," says Dave Austin, national marketing director at Mission Produce, Oxnard, CA. "It's a huge lift. Giving customers what they want means they eat more, and that means they buy more. Shrink goes down if this is handled right."

The total increase in avocado sales nationwide over the past 15 years is nothing short of staggering. "When it was basically California, and a little from Florida, it was around 500 million pounds a year," says Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. "Then Chile came in and additional crop from Mexico. It's 1.6 billion pounds now, and probably in the next few years it will be 2 billion pounds."

Consumers also crave ripe peaches, nectarines and plums as an entirely different category than just plain stone fruit.

"While there is no absolute statistic on the sales growth, the retailers we work with report

solid double-digit sales growth," says Harold McClarty, owner of HMC Farms, Kingsburg, CA. "Retailers who commit to the tree-fruit category as a value-added category rather than a commodity category, where the value-add is a reliable, enjoyable eating experience, are seeing real growth."

Specific information is available on sales of ripe pears, and the numbers are impressive. "The Pear Bureau commissioned a study in the spring of 2012 that showed that selling ripened pears can increase sales by 20 percent," says Moffitt. "Selling ripe pears can improve sales and customer satisfaction. Today's consumers want flavor and are interested in convenience. Selling ripe pears takes the guesswork out of the selection process."

Pineapple sales surged after the development of varieties that can be harvested later and riper and still hold up. "The consumption of pineapples has doubled or tripled over the past 20 years because gold varieties can be picked riper and not go bad," says Spezzano.

Consumer education about ripening can elevate mangos in the United States closer to their status as the leading fruit in the rest of the world. "You have to know the growing areas and varieties, but you can get at least a 30 percent bump in mangos, especially if you use ripe stickers," says Spezzano.



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“Retailers who commit to the tree-fruit category as a value-added category rather than a commodity category, where the value-add is a reliable, enjoyable eating experience, are seeing real growth.”

—Harold McClarty, HMC Farms

From the right source, ripened melons can bring the supermarket both sales and gratitude. “People will thank you because they have trouble telling when melons are ripe,” says Spezzano. “Turlock Fruit Company [out of Turlock, CA] does a premiere job with melons. They trigger honeydews with ethylene. If you put ripe honeydews out there with stickers on them, you’ll increase sales 40, 50 or 60 percent.”

The Store Plays A Role

To make a program work, supermarkets must accept that costs are involved to ripen fruit as well as handle and present it well in the store.

“We used to have peaches for 49 cents, but they were like bricks,” says Jeff Cady, produce and floral manager for TOPS Markets, Buffalo, NY. “Now they’re \$2, but they’re ready to eat. We use point-of-sale material in-store, social media, and we advertise that we have ripe fruit. Our partner will apply a ripe-fruit sticker to the soft fruit.”

Experts agree, success starts with training and paying produce department workers who know how to display and rotate this ripener, softer fruit.

“If you want to have price drive everything, you can’t do it,” says Spezzano. “You need long-term employees who are trained, and you have to pay them more. You really have to be able to execute at the store level with tree fruit. It’s got to be single layer and well-handled.”

Even before the fruit is displayed, it must be carefully stored at the proper temperature.

“Mission Produce maintains avocados at 38°F to 42°F degrees and tries to get the retailers to keep them at the same temperature until they are displayed,” says Austin.

Grower associations and individual producers provide information on the proper care, handling and presentation of ripe fruit.

“The Pear Bureau offers training, ongoing education, POS, and other resources to help get a retailer started on a conditioned pear program,” says Moffitt. “There are many benefits to offering ripened fruit on display, and we want retailers to succeed with their program.”

Once on display, labeling or signage to let

consumers know the fruit is ripe generates its own sales increase.

When first promoting softer fruit, Mission Produce encountered retailers who were afraid the avocados would rot on display, but shrink should actually go down with ripened fruit because it moves off the shelves so quickly.

“Ripe fruit sells better than green fruit,” says Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. “You have less shrink as a percentage. If your normal shrink is 5 percent, and you increase your sales by 30 percent, the shrink percentage decreases.”

Careful About Trying This At Home

Getting fruit ready to eat is a complex proposition because each variety has its own exacting requirements. The ripening needs of various fruits are quite different. With careful planning, however, they can be ripened at the

same time, according to David J. Byrne, vice president-sales at Thermal Technologies, Blythewood, SC.

“Ripening-room technology today allows you to ripen multiple fruits in the same room if it is designed for this purpose in advance,” he says. “If the needs of each item are considered in the design phase of a project, it allows you to optimize the quality of all of them.”

Proper handling affects how long the fruit will hold up after it is ripe. “Fruit that is fully mature before it is cooled is less susceptible to internal breakdown, which is the major cause of shrink at retail,” says HMC Farms’ McClarty.

Bananas properly ripened also can be both ready to eat and able to hold up on the retail shelf or in the kitchen. “Regarding bananas, experience has shown that the rate of ripening correlates to the rate of color progression at retail,” says Byrne. “Using a true five-day cycle means bananas will stay at the highly desirable five and six color stages longer while on display. This means more sales and less shrink. Consumers will notice that their bananas last longer on their kitchen counters too, which means more repeat business.”

This is a complex process, and supermarkets are advised to think long and hard about whether it’s worth the risk of trying to ripen the fruit themselves rather than letting experts



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—David J. Byrne, Thermal Technologies

handle that sensitive part of the program.

“We have a partner we use for our ripe-fruit program,” says TOPS’ Cady. “We’ve partnered with the Summeripe brand [from Mountain View Fruit Sales] of Reedley, CA, a few years, and we want to continue to improve.”

Avocados are the most complex to ripen, and few produce retailers try it themselves. “Virtually none of the ripening with avocados is done in the supermarket,” says Mission Produce’s Austin. “If they cook a load, that will cook their profit for a long time. There are some smaller chains that try it, but your personnel has to be very good.”

Hass avocados from different parts of the world may have different ripening requirements. “Avocados with more oil don’t require as much time in the ripening room,” says Austin. “The less oil, the longer you need them in the ripening room. When you change the source, you often have to ripen them differently.”

“We used to get avocados from just California, but with this tremendous increase in demand shippers are changing sources much more often. Now it’s California, Mexico, Chile, Peru and New Zealand. Others also pull some from the Dominican. The key is ripening to the correct level depending on the oil content.”

“Even the time of year an avocado is harvested can make a difference in how it should be ripened,” according to Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting.

“If you do it wrong, you get a ton of shrink,” says Austin. “Avocados will elevate to the point where they become overripe quickly. It’s more of an art than a science. Our ripeners are very experienced.”

There are similar complex requirements for ripening mangos, which will sell quickly if consumers know they are ready to eat. “Mangos are like avocados and bananas,” says Spezzano. “You use temperature and ethylene, but you have to know what you’re doing.”

Timing Is Everything

While the skillful manipulation of ethylene

and temperature ripens these tropical fruits, only adept harvest scheduling ensures that most stone fruit brought to market is not only soft, but begging to be eaten.

“Peaches, nectarines, and plums are ripened at the source — the tree — unlike bananas and avocados, which require post-harvest handling for consumption,” says HMC Farms’ McClarty. “You should be able to pick a peach off the tree and eat it. Ripening is done on the tree — not in the supermarket. One of the biggest problems this industry is facing is the misconception that a post-harvest process will mask the harvesting of immature product.”

Logistical issues must be monitored rigorously to get fruit on the shelf by the appointed date, not only ready to eat, but able to hold up.

“One of the most important keys to optimizing a ripe-fruit program is communication with the supplier of the ripened fruit or the retailer’s own team if ripening is being done internally,” says Moffitt. “It can take three to five days to warm, ripen and cool the fruit, not including the time required for shipping and delivery. So it is important to plan ahead and stay in close communication with the supplier to prevent out-of-stock situations and keep the program consistent.”

The success or failure of a ripened-fruit program depends, more than anything, on keeping skilled employees in the produce department and finding suppliers who consistently offer the right stuff.

“Fruit that is harvested at full maturity and handled properly through the supply chain has a very good chance of pleasing the consumer, which drives sales and repeat purchases,” says McClarty. “There are dangers in relying on a ripened program that focuses exclusively on post-harvest softening of the fruit, so that the fruit appears to be ripe when a shopper relies on softness as the indicator for ripeness or maturity. Ultimately the customer will be disappointed by a soft, tasteless, peach, nectarine or plum.” **pb**

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Michigan: The Regional Vegetable Hub

Midwestern players discuss vegetable varieties, local borders and signature items. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

The moderating influence of winds coming off Lake Michigan provide the farming region in the western area of the state a milder climate than other farming areas in the entire region. These relatively moderate temperatures let Michigan vegetable growers ship region-wide every summer, and everywhere east of the Mississippi for much of the season.

"I don't think anybody in the Midwest grows as many vegetables as Michigan," says Bruce Heeren, vice president at Heeren Brothers Packing House, Comstock Park, MI. "We're next to Lake Michigan, which moderates the temperature."

Over the decades, the state carved out markets for seasonal produce over a wide swath of the eastern half of the country.

"Michigan has been known as a vegetable and fruit production area forever," says Todd Van Solkema, CEO of Van Solkema Produce, Byron Center, MI.

Midwestern Vegetable Capital

Much of the summer vegetable bounty never leaves the state because Michigan

supermarkets are generally eager to offer local produce.

"Meijer has been purchasing locally grown products since 1934," says Scott Calandra, produce buyer at Meijer, Grand Rapids, MI. "We purchase more than 75 items from more than 90 farms and businesses in Michigan. Locally grown produce represents roughly 27 percent of our total produce sales during the peak months of July through October. Our buyers continually build relationships with growers, and together we continue to improve the produce our customers demand and seek."

Asparagus, potatoes, onions and sweet corn are the most important Michigan-grown vegetables at Meijer, according to Calandra. "Purchasing local produce reduces shipping costs related to fuel and reduces food miles our produce travels. At Meijer, locally grown produce supports our local growers and delivers a fresher product at a lower price," says Calandra.

As spring turns to summer, Michigan-grown vegetables take their turn at center stage in supermarkets throughout much of the Midwest.

"You will see Michigan produce signs

within a five state area, including Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan," says Todd Miedema, director of marketing at Miedema Produce, Hudsonville, MI.

Michigan grows more than 50,000 acres of vegetables, according to USDA statistics, and Ohio, which is the next highest Midwest state, tops out at 33,000 acres. It ranks fifth in the nation in snap beans, sixth in cabbage, third in cucumbers, and second in celery and carrots, though trailing California. The state also cultivates significant bell pepper, pumpkin and onion crops.

The state's horn-of-plenty begins with the May harvest of asparagus — a source of particular local pride — and runs through early fall's hard squash.

"Asparagus starts around May 15," says Randy Vandeguchte, president of Superior Sales, Hudsonville, MI. "Peru gives us a lot of price pressure, but I don't think the product is the same. Our asparagus is in the store within three days, but whether it's by air or by boat, the product from Peru has a little age on it by the time it gets to the store."

The value of Michigan asparagus increased by more than 5 percent over the past decade —



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THE CALIFORNIA COMPETITION

With the multiplier effect, the food and agriculture industry contributes an estimated \$96 billion to the Michigan economy, according to the Michigan State University Product Center and the U.S. Department of Agriculture statistical service, and increase of 50 percent from 2004 to 2010. More than 50,000 farms in the state produce food on around 10 million acres of land.

Those impressive numbers easily place Michigan at the top spot among Midwestern vegetable producers. But lurking in the background is the 800-pound vegetable-growing gorilla out west.

"California is always our main competition. They are able to harvest 12 months of the year, and we're only able to have vegetables seasonally," says Gene Talsma, owner of Crispheart Produce, Hudsonville, MI.

California produces almost half the vegetables in the country, according to the USDA Vegetables 2013 Summary, while no other state produces more than

9 percent of the total, and no Midwestern state produces even a tenth of that.

The main competition for Michigan vegetables is produce out of California and locally grown out of Ohio, according to Jim Weber, produce director at Econofoods, Brillion, WI.

Michigan vegetable farmers bank on the appeal of the familiar taste of their harvest, in addition to the draw of more locally grown produce. "We have great flavor because we have quality soil here in Michigan," says Bruce Heeren, vice president at Heeren Brothers Packing House, Comstock Park, MI. "Our soil gives different flavor than California or Washington because it has different nutrients. We concentrate on supplying an area of the country extending deep into the South during an extended summer season.

"We do most all the vegetables. We grow pretty much everything they do in California, but our season is shorter," says Heeren. "We start with asparagus in early May, and go until the end of October with hard squash." **pb**

hopefully I'll be able to get Michigan vegetables. We do have Michigan potatoes, but I would like to get sweet corn, summer squashes, cucumbers and peppers," says Weber. "Hopefully, now that Nash Finch merged with Spartan, we will be able to get Michigan vegetables. Now our farmers are in Wisconsin; my homegrown produce is all Wisconsin."

Many consumers and supermarkets across the lake in Chicago regard Michigan vegetables as local. "Locally grown is the theme today," says Dave Smith, assistant secretary treasurer of the Michigan Vegetable Council, Erie, MI. "If I go into a Kroger or Meyer, I see pictures of some of our growers. I think Michigan grown helps in Chicago, too. A lot of our vegetables go to major markets in the state, and out of state would mostly be south of here."

And no vegetable says eat local like homegrown tomatoes. "There's nothing better than a good home-grown vine ripened tomato. It sure beats those things that are picked green," says Heeren of Heeren Brothers. "We sell them mostly in the Midwest, in the states bordering Michigan, because if you get much further, you run into everybody else's local tomatoes."

The tomato harvest in western Michigan begins in late July and continues through September. Michigan farmers produce more than \$30 million in fresh market tomatoes, up 20 percent over the past decade, according to USDA's Hurlbut.

"The big thing everywhere is buying local," says Superior Sales' Vandeguchte. "The local chain stores are starting to support Michigan produce in a big way. We put a lot of emphasis on keeping product as close as we can."

When the state's shippers go more than a few miles beyond the state, they encounter significant regional competition.

"Michigan is part of the vegetable capital of the Midwest. A lot of vegetables also come out of Ohio, Wisconsin and New York that time of year. We get summer competition from a lot of places — Canada, Ohio, New York, New Jersey and Wisconsin," says Vandeguchte.

Michigan is also a national player when it comes to a handful of vegetable crops.

"We ship cucumbers over half the country. Merchandising vegetables as from Michigan depends on the retailer, and on the vegetable," says Heeren.

Michigan's Yearly Glories

From late spring, when the first Michigan asparagus is harvested, until late summer, when the Southeastern harvest begins, the state is a major supplier of vegetables everywhere east of the Mississippi.

despite the emergence of Peru as a major source, according to Kif Hurlbut, deputy regional director of the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service Great Lakes Regional office.

"The asparagus stays in the upper Midwest," says John Bakker, executive director of the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board, DeWitt, MI. "Our biggest competition is probably from Washington and Ontario, but almost all of our asparagus stays in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois and Indiana, and those states think of us as their local supplier."

Asparagus usually kicks off the Michigan summer harvest around May 1, but this year it began a little later, according to Bakker.

Locally Grown In Michigan

Many Michigan vegetable growers build their programs around sales to markets within the state.

"It's local produce for the local stores," says Gene Talsma, owner of Crispheart Produce, Hudsonville, MI. "Most of the local stores want to buy locally."

While "local" produce can embrace the entire region, some Midwestern retailers have

separate programs for each state they have supermarkets.

"We work with local farmers in all five states that we have stores. We do a lot of locally grown," says Joe Hirschmugl, public relations manager at Meijer, which is Michigan-based, but also has stores in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky.

For most customers at Econofoods, a chain of a half dozen supermarkets in Wisconsin and Minnesota, "local" can refer to produce from either state because the distance from field to store is so short. If you go 5 miles south, east or north from the Iron Mountain, MI, store, for example, you cross the border into Wisconsin. "'Local homegrown' is how it is labeled," says Jim Weber, produce director at Econofoods, Brillion, WI. "The produce manager will display signs that show the farmer that grew the spring mix, or some other vegetable."

Econofoods was a subsidiary of Nash Finch out of Minnesota until a recent merger created SpartanNash of Grand Rapids, MI. With more than 170 stores and extensive food service operations, Weber hopes the ownership change will bring a greater supply of Michigan vegetables.

"I just got Michigan apples last season, and

"Run a lot of home-grown ads in Michigan," advises Van Solkema of Van Solkema Produce. "Further south, there's a window from July through September/October — depending on when Georgia gets going."

The Southeastern market is important to many shippers during this Michigan time of year. "We do a lot of summer shipments to the Southeast, where they don't have a local program that time of year," says Superior Sales' Vandeguchte.

The state's farmers are among the national leaders in producing and shipping some major vegetables.

"I know we are No. 1 in pickling cucumbers. Potatoes, dry beans and cucumbers for pickling are big ones," says Jennifer Holton, director of communications at the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD).

Squashes of all kinds are another prime player coming out of the state. "We're a big producer of squash, both hard and summer squash. We're a pretty large factor in the asparagus market, we have a hard time growing enough for the demand," says Smith of the Michigan Vegetable Council. "Celery is another crop that would rank a distant second

to California."

Many Michigan producers specialize in a specific vegetable, or cluster of vegetables.

"Our biggest item is radishes, and the other root crops like parsnips and carrots," says Miedema of Miedema Produce. "We market our produce all over the U.S. We go as far east as Boston, as far west as California, and south to Miami and San Antonio. The heaviest in the summer is the Midwest going east, everything east of the Mississippi."

Hearty Fresh focuses on maintaining a reliable regional supply of summer celery from Michigan farmers.

"We only do celery during the Michigan season, and the main competition is from Quebec," says Dan Steenwyk, sales and purchasing representative at Hearty Fresh, Byron Center, MI. "We try to beat them on price. We buy in bulk and sell on contract. We get all our celery from Michigan because the growers are all in our area."

This shipper also serves as a quality control intermediary between retailers and Michigan farmers.

"We look at the celery when the loads come in, and anything that does not meet our quality standards goes in the return bin. It

goes back to the growers, and they use it for the processors," says Steenwyk. "That way our customers know they are getting good quality."

Crispheart also specializes in products of celery and celery hearts for relatively local stores, and Bosgraf produces onions.

"The only thing we do is onions from late September through March," says Mike Meyer, president of Bosgraaf Sales Company, Hudsonville, MI.

But other Michigan producers ship a full complement of vegetables to a large area of the country all summer.

"I would say all the vegetables are important in the summer. We carry cucumbers, peppers, squashes, eggplants — we're a complete mixed vegetable house," says Van Solkema of Van Solkema Produce. "We need to make sure we're not light on anything."

The state's vegetable bounty includes, in addition to the asparagus and tomatoes, more than \$200 million in potatoes, nearly \$40 million in pickling cucumbers, and between \$10 million and \$20 million each of snap beans, carrots, celery, onions, bell peppers, and fresh market cucumbers, according to USDA's Hurlbut. **pb**

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Chicago's farm-fresh themes echo loudly throughout the wholesale, retail and foodservice industries. BY LISA WHITE



Not only has the city benefitted from its location in a leading farm-income state, but it is also widely known for its innovative restaurant segment, as well as unique supermarkets and retail industry.

Recently, the Windy City has become more produce-centric, creating programs and adopting regulations that helped increase the availability and visibility of fruits and vegetables.

The city is known as a mecca for urban farming. Last year, Chicago's Mayor Rahm Emanuel created a plan, called Farmers for Chicago, to transform 5 acres of city-owned lots on Chicago's South Side into urban farms over the next three years. Local nonprofit organizations will cultivate the land and create a network of area farmers. The crops will be distributed to the city's farmers markets, local stores, restaurants and supermarket chains. This program will partner with Milwaukee, WI-based Growing Power, an urban farming business.

In 2011, the city changed its zoning ordinance to allow agri-

cultural uses for community gardens and urban farms in many parts of the city. The ordinance clearly defines community garden and urban farm uses, identifies where each is permitted, and establishes regulations to minimize the impact on surrounding property, according to the City of Chicago's website.

While community gardens are typically owned or managed by community-based organizations or public entities, urban farms are commercial businesses that require a license to grow food and sell it on a nonprofit or for-profit basis.

Agriculture is big business in Illinois. The state's commodities generate more than \$9 billion annually, according to the Illinois Department of Agriculture. Primary crops include apples, corn, melons, peaches, asparagus, cabbage, and snap beans.

Illinois' 76,000 farms cover more than 28 million acres, or close to 80 percent of the state's total land area, according to the agriculture department. The state ranks third nationally in total prime farmland acreage. Food processing is the state's top manufacturing activity and contributes close to \$13.4 billion a year to the value

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of the state's raw agricultural commodities.

The state ranks second nationally in the export of agricultural commodities, with nearly \$4 billion worth of goods shipped to other countries each year, the agriculture department reports. Exports from Illinois account for nearly 7 percent of all U.S. agricultural exports.

A Brief History Of Evolution

Chicago's central location has made it a vital transportation and distribution point since the city's founding in 1833, and it serves as a vital link between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River waterways.

When the St. Lawrence Seaway, which provides a direct link from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean, was created in 1959, Chicago became a key port. Marine, rail and overland freight are all handled through the Port of Chicago.

Illinois' location is beneficial to transportation. It maintains the third-highest combined mileage of railroads and paved highways in the country, according to city-data.com. The metropolitan area is served by an estimated 750 motor-freight carriers, and trucking companies ship more than 50 million tons of freight each year. Illinois' railroads average more than 40 million tons, while Chicago's airports handle 1 million-plus metric tons of cargo annually.

The city's location (near the center of the country); accessibility to water, air and rail transportation; and extensive roadways all add up to a thriving wholesale scene in terms of produce.

The produce industry in the city and surrounding suburbs is mainly serviced by Chicago's wholesale market, which has been in business since the 1800s. As far back as 1831, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, much of the city grew around the South Water Street Market, which was about 10 blocks long and located on the South Branch of the Chicago River. In 1925, the city relocated the market to the Southwest Side and renamed it South Water Market. The eight blocks of concrete buildings between Racine Avenue, Morgan Street, 14th Place and 15th Street included 166 wholesale stalls of produce. Crates of produce were distributed locally and eventually to much of the East Coast. By the late 1950s, this market was a major distribution center for the entire country, distributing more than 500 billion pounds of produce each year and handling close to 90 percent of the city's fruits and vegetables.

CHICAGO FACTS:

237 square miles of land

77 communities containing more than 100 neighborhoods

26 miles of beachfront

552 parks

40 million visitors annually

The Chicagoland area encompasses nearly 10 million people in three states, including Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana

City is the 22nd largest metropolitan area in the world

City is home to 11 Fortune 500 companies and the surrounding area has 21 more

Source: CityOfChicago.org



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF CHICAGO

The South Water Market facilities eventually became outdated. Produce was stored in four-story warehouses and trucks attempted to navigate their way to docks created for the horses and carts used in the early 1900s. Because the market was not accessible to larger trucks, smaller ones had to be used to compensate for the lack of loading space. Many of the wholesalers working at the market during that time described the environment as cramped and chaotic.

In November 2002, The Chicago International Produce Market (CIPM) was built at a cost of \$58 million. The 26-acre, 436,000 square-foot facility consists of 36 tenant spaces ranging from 12,117 to 60,586 square feet. Today, imports from 48 states, Canada and more than 20 countries are sold by CIPM's almost two dozen wholesalers.

"It's hard to remember doing business without the new market," says Mark Pappas, owner of Coosemans Chicago Inc., a wholesaler at the CIPM. "The former market was so antiquated, with freight elevators, inefficient coolers and docks built before 53-foot trailers were created. It took a day-and-a-half for trucks to unload."

Coosemans has sold specialty produce at the CIPM for the past 10 years after moving from the former South Water Market. In business for more than two

decades, the company has offices in more than 27 cities around the world, including Canada, Brazil and Belgium.

The CIPM has 1,000 tons of cooling equipment, which provides temperature-controlled coolers for produce storage. The market's computer-regulated refrigeration technology is designed to respond instantly to humidity and temperature fluctuations, which benefits the cold chain by impeding spoilage and maximizing freshness.

Along with nearby growing areas, where wholesalers can procure produce such as Southern Illinois farms and the Chicago suburb of Joliet, wholesalers are able to bring in local product from other nearby states, including Michigan, Iowa and Minnesota, during the growing season. Produce from these areas costs less, because it is cheaper to transport the shorter distance. In addition, produce from surrounding states takes only two to three days to arrive.

Business in the area benefits by Chicago's central location. Not only is the area serviced by one of the nation's busiest airports, O'Hare, but also approximately 50 percent of U.S. rail freight passes through the city.

With more than 6,000 restaurants and 1,600-plus supermarkets serving its estimated 2.7 million residents, Chicago is as diverse as it is large. It includes 77 distinct

communities and a myriad of cultures and cuisines. The streets are filled with mom-and-pop diners, ethnic eateries in Chinatown and Greektown, and world-class restaurants in the Gold Coast and River North neighborhoods.

Like Chicago's population and restaurants, the city's supermarket industry is just as diverse. After the closing of Dominick's, a long-standing chain in the region, the sole surviving area market, Jewel-Osco, continues to thrive. The expansion of upscale chains, such as Whole Foods Market, Trader Joe's and, most recently, Roundy's-owned Mariano's Fresh Market, is proof that retail remains relevant in the area.

Wholesale Perspective

The CIPM provides a one-stop wholesale shop for Midwest produce buyers, including those who represent area supermarkets, independent markets, chain restaurants and mom-and-pop eateries.

Established in 1913 by Fred Strube, Strube Celery & Vegetable Co. is the oldest federally licensed wholesale produce



company in the Chicago area. Its 70,000 square-foot warehouse includes 1 million cubic feet of space that is racked and divided into 14 controlled environments designed to receive, store, stage and distribute a variety of fresh produce.

After the death of president and chief executive, Jan Fleming last year, the

company restructured leadership, which includes Jan's widower, Tim Fleming, and fourth-generation leader, Robert Strube Jr. along with his wife, Sue.

"Our parents haven't totally stepped out of the company and are still active board members, but they are no longer involved with the day-to-day," says Fleming.



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Like many wholesalers in the Midwest, the company had to contend with a winter of record snowfall and frigid temperatures.

"Winter was tough, but we're taking our lumps, trying to regroup and move forward," says Fleming. "Fortunately, there weren't any supply issues, but the weather may push back local deals, since the ground is still hard and planting will be later in the season."

This means Strube, like other wholesalers, will source produce from other

areas, such as Texas and Mexico.

"There may be a couple of weeks' supply gap, but it hasn't impacted pricing," says Fleming. "There are still plenty of items in the season now, and in a few weeks we will change prices when there's not much demand."

Strube continues to look at adding new items, but it tends to stick with traditional produce that its retail and foodservice customers want.

Coosemans Chicago Inc., however,

"The foodservice industry is looking to keep costs down overall, but even more now due to dead weekends during winter . . . We'll have a good run on foodservice for the spring and summer months."

— Mark Pappas, Coosemans Chicago



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brings in new items, including dragon fruit from Vietnam, which is an up-and-coming product that customers are re-ordering.

"This is a different, interesting and good-looking fruit that has a neon-red color and white flesh with a sweet taste," says the company's Pappas. "Retailers like Whole Foods, Mariano's and independent stores want produce no one else has in order to keep pace with trendy products in restaurants."

In terms of what's selling, restaurants in the area have been buying Coosemans' exotic mushrooms and squash blossoms as well as heirloom tomatoes.

"We try to procure what restaurants are looking for," says Pappas.

The past winter was especially rough on restaurants and retailers, he says, because the snow and a string of subzero days kept people indoors for longer periods of time.

"The foodservice industry is looking to keep costs down overall, but even more now due to dead weekends during winter," says Pappas. The area contended with multiple-inch snowstorms and constant subzero temperatures, so Pappas is hoping that a touch of spring will kick the public's cabin fever, and "we'll have a good run on foodservice for the spring and summer months."

Dietz & Kolodenco Co., established in 1963, is a fruit house specializing in apples, pears, grapes and melons that sells out of the CIPM. Its products are sourced from the United States, South America and New Zealand.

"Some customers told us people weren't

going out due to the bad winter weather, and some trucks got delayed in snowstorms, but we were never deadlocked," says Nick Gaglione, owner of Dietz & Kolodenko. "Chicago is used to these winters and tends to rebound real quick."

Although the company primarily handles fruit, it started working more vegetables into its rotation because of increased demand.

"Our customers are mainly smaller, local independent chains with nine or 10 stores," says Gaglione. "There are quite a few of these stores that specialize in their demographic and know what the neighborhood is looking for."

He says organic produce has increased in popularity, but it's a tough business to get into.

"There is a vast price difference, so the market is smaller," says Gaglione.

A Shift In Retail Landscape

The biggest retail news during the past year occurred when Chicagoland's second largest supermarket chain, Dominick's, in business since 1925, notified the state that

it would close all of its 72 Chicago-area stores by Dec. 28, 2013. The chain was purchased by Safeway in 1998 for \$1.2 billion and employed 5,633 workers.

Since the stores' closures, 11 sites have been taken over by Roundy's and turned into Mariano's Fresh Market stores, while other sites have been converted to Whole Foods Markets, Joe Caputo & Sons Fruit Market and Jewel-Osco stores.

Probably the Chicago area's biggest retail success story in recent years is Mariano's Fresh Market, which opened its first store in the northwest suburb of Arlington Heights in 2010. Based on the popularity of Mariano's stores, growth projection has increased from initial estimates. Parent company Roundy's is expected to open 50 Mariano's stores by the end of this year.

When it comes to produce, the retail market boasts fresh themes in Chicago. Fresh Thyme Farmers Markets, a Phoenix, AZ-based startup grocery chain that combines the experiences of outdoor farmers markets and full-service grocers, recently opened its first of 23 Midwest

stores in the Chicago suburb of Mount Prospect. Eight more stores will open in the area this year, with between 15 and 18 opening in the area over the next six years.

The company will source its produce through Midwestern-based distributors as well as the CIPM, according to James Braswell, Fresh Thyme's director of produce. As the chain opens more stores, it may consider opening a Midwest distribution center.

"We will display produce inside and outside, depending on the weather," he says. "We use mobile-bin type displays to move around and diversify our merchandising selection."

Fresh Thyme picked this area to expand because it was a good fit with its unique concept. "There are many good operators in that part of the country, but we fill a niche with a different shopping experience, fun atmosphere, quality [foods], natural foods and the way we merchandise," says Braswell.

The Mount Prospect store is larger than the chain's typical footprint and offers local deals. "We will diversify our offerings

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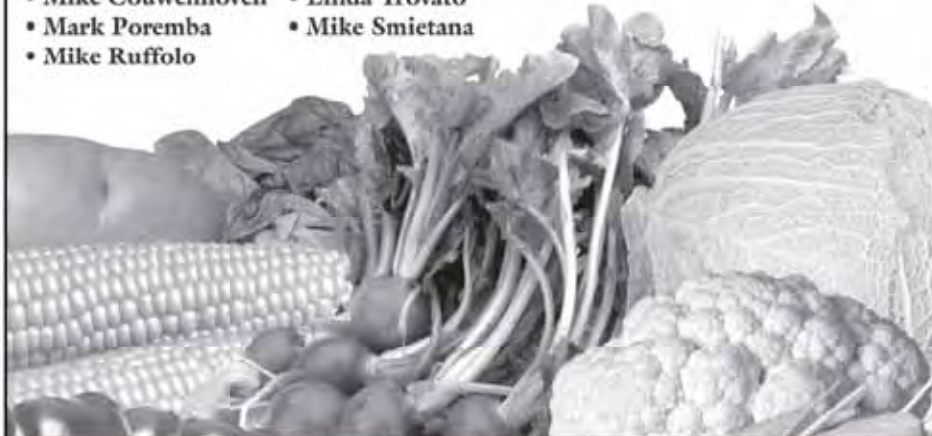


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depending on the markets we're going into," says Braswell. "We're excited to get into the Midwest."

Sunset Foods, which opened its fifth store about two years ago, is trying to stay ahead of the competition by expanding its produce varieties and categories. "We're making sure we're first to market on various apple and orange varieties," says John Fitzgerald, marketing coordinator/graphic designer for the upscale chain. "We're seeing many growers picking up their game

and providing higher quality products and more variety."

Fitzgerald says Chicagoans are seeking value, and Sunset Foods sets itself apart with its quality and large selection of produce categories as well as a knowledgeable staff.

"There will always be room for upscale, independent markets like us," he says. "We've been in business for 77 years and stand behind what we do. We're in it for the long haul."



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"Instead of placing the produce department in the back of the store, we are bringing it to the front because more people are looking for these items."

— Jim Bilbrey,
Treasure Island

Treasure Island Foods already is a mainstay in Chicago. The first store was opened by two brothers in 1963 on the North Side. The goal was to provide imported and domestic products at competitive prices. Today, the chain operates seven stores.

"In terms of produce trends, the biggest thing I see is kale, baby kale, red kale. Any kale is on fire," says Jim Bilbrey, produce buyer, supervisor at Treasure Island. "We offer all types, including packaged, fresh and organic. All greens are selling really well."

The chain has been updating and remodeling its stores and recently opened a new store in the city's Hyde Park neighborhood. "We're in the middle of changing our produce department to include more fresh-cut fruit and vegetables," says Bilbrey. "Instead of placing the produce department in the back of the store, we are bringing it to the front because more people are looking for these items."

Treasure Island is also expanding its salad bars and offering more prepared salads. "Our salad bars include about 80 different items," says Bilbrey. "We also opened a pasta bar in our Hyde Park store that includes produce and is located right by the salad bar."

The stores are continuing to capitalize on the popularity of juicing by offering more fresh-squeezed juices in the produce departments. "We've offered these for years, but we've been getting more creative with our ingredients," says Bilbrey.

A Foodservice Metropolis

The restaurant industry helps drive Illinois' economy, generating enormous tax revenue. In 2012, there were 25,785 eating and drinking places in Illinois, according to

the National Restaurant Association. This year, Illinois restaurants are projected to generate \$22.4 billion in sales. The state's restaurants are expected to employ 549,200 people this year, amounting to 6.5 percent job growth.

Chicago is renowned for its bevy of unique eating establishments, many of which feature produce prominently on the menu.

Opened in 2009, Browntrout was conceived by Sean and Nadia Sanders during their honeymoon in New Zealand. It's named for the brown trout they caught in Lake Wanaka and inspired by sustainability. The menu for the 70-seat restaurant is new American and includes herbs grown on the rooftop garden and sustainably farmed and organic products.

"We work with a Michigan farm that specializes in growing items in greenhouses," says chef/owner Sean Sanders. "Produce is in every one of our dishes, and we source local fruits and vegetables as much as possible. This is better for the state's economy."

The menu at Nana's, a family-owned, organic restaurant, caters to diners passionate about where their food comes from. Its menu includes organic ingredients from farmers, producers and vendors who meet and maintain USDA National Organic Program standards. The products used are free of synthetic preservatives, growth hormones, genetically modified ingredients, antibiotics, artificial colors and flavors, and other additives and chemicals, including pesticides.

"We've been sourcing much locally grown produce since we opened in August 2009," says Audri Simonelli, Nana's director of marketing and special events. "Produce-wise, we get a lot of items locally grown year-round from the Midwest area."

The restaurant has a partnership with 30 farms throughout the year, along with specific growers. "We partnered with Green Spirit Farm, a vertical farming system that focuses on greens," says Simonelli. "We used their kale in our cauliflower salad, and it turned out to be a great twist, so we built a relationship with them. Now they grow a special blue scotch kale variety just for us."

Nana's also joined The Plant, an umbrella organization that focuses on promoting sustainability. The organization farms inside of an old meat packing facility in the city using renewable energy

In 2012, there were 25,785 eating and drinking places in Illinois, according to the National Restaurant Association. This year, Illinois restaurants are projected to generate \$22.4 billion in sales.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF CHICAGO

made on site.

"There are a variety of services and businesses in The Plant, one of which is Urban Canopy, which promotes urban farming in the city," says Simonelli. "In looking for the most cost-effective ways to grow heirloom tomatoes, cilantro (which we use a lot) and herbs, we decided to work with Urban Canopy. We plan to grow items on our rooftop at some point in the future."

Because Nana's is a seasonal restaurant, the menu offerings are constantly changing. While one month the focus will be on asparagus, rhubarb may be a menu staple the next month.

"We have good relationships with the farmers we work with, although the growing season has been delayed due to the harsh winter, so that's been challenging," says Simonelli. "Produce is coming in slower than normal."

Lulu Café opened in 1999 in a small storefront with a four-burner home stove and thrift-store pots and pans. Today, this produce-focused restaurant takes up three storefronts. Its menu is described as Bohemian and prepared by self-taught chefs. Offerings include adventurous fare for vegetarians, including a six-course tasting menu.

"We work with individual farms and go to the Green City Market twice a week," says Jason Hammel, Lulu Café's chef and owner. "This is not necessarily to shop, but to see what's out there and work on our menu items."

Lulu Café receives deliveries from

farmers year-round. The restaurant works with a core group of 10 farms, although it has a relationship with more than 20.

"In terms of trends, we're noticing an extension of the growing season, so we've been working to get items in this area more year-round," says Hammel. "Farms are using greenhouses to extend the season, and we've definitely seen farmers trying to grow new products, like artichokes and different types of peppers not normally grown in this state. Farmers are asking chefs what they want and growing it."

Lulu Café also grows its own produce in a small rooftop garden and has an on-site gardener. Due to the lack of space, these homegrown items are limited to smaller vegetables and herbs.

Hammel estimates that produce is between 35 and 40 percent of Lulu Café's expenditures. The restaurant spends more on produce than on proteins.

"Produce pricing has been going up so fast that people are shying away from these ingredients and instead using them in a boutique way," says Hammel.

Lulu's Café has decided to take a different route and eat the cost. As a result, it is working on streamlining menus to control food expenditures.

Ideally situated in the center of the country, the city of Chicago and its produce industry continue to thrive. Staying on the cusp of trends, like farm-to-table and organic, with burgeoning retail and food-service industries, there continues to be much opportunity in this Toddlin' Town. **pb**

Grape Sales: 5 Challenges And Opportunities

Marketers and retailers address universal grape topics once product is in stores.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES

According to recent Nielsen data, grapes account for 5.7 percent of the produce categories dollar sales.

Grapes make a sweet contribution to the produce department. Consumers love these juicy fruits so much they rank as the fourth-highest seller in the fruit category behind berries, apples and bananas, according to 52-week data ending March 29, 2014, provided by the West Dundee, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group. What's more, grapes account for 5.7 percent of the produce category dollar sales.

"Grapes are such an important commodity for us that they're right up there with bananas in terms of sales volume," says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Reading, PA-based Redner's Markets, an employee owned company that operates 45 Warehouse Markets and 14 Quick Shoppes in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware.

The hitch is that grapes don't necessarily sell themselves. New developments in varieties, packaging and length of the domestic season, plus the usual struggles of sufficient display space — while at the same time slashing shrink and setting the right promotions price-wise — create challenges. These same issues, however, can provide many

register ringing opportunities.

1. Merchandising By Variety Or Color

There's no right or wrong answer. However, there are problems as well as prospects when selling grapes by specific variety name and color.

California produces more than 80 table grape varieties. Some 15 plus of these are new grape varieties that were developed in California within the past five years, according to industry sources. The trend favors proprietary varieties that offer standout qualities in terms of color, size and flavor.

"Old-line varieties, such as Thompson and Crimson, are quickly replacing new varieties such as Scarlet, Vintage and Autumn King," says Nick Dulcich, owner of Sunlight International Sales, in McFarland, CA. "Several proprietary varieties, such as Emerald and Pristine, are also taking a position in the fall grape line-up."

Anthony Vineyards, in Bakersfield, CA, will start marketing a new proprietary grape variety grown both conventionally and organically as well as harvested in mid-October. The Gemma Rose is a large oblong-shaped grape with a seedless, cream color flesh, crisp cherry red skin

and sweet flavor. The company found success in marketing the grape in Asian markets and has increased acreage for domestic sales.

"We'll have enough to test market this season," explains Rob Spinelli, in sales with Anthony Vineyards. "An increase in volume over the next few years will allow us to really promote."

Some industry professionals believe the trend of the future is to market grapes by variety. "There's an opportunity to call out the attributes of new varieties," explains Tim Dayka, managing partner of Dayka & Hackett, LLC, in Reedley, CA. "This enables retailers to market two to three red, two green and two black varieties at the same time."

Retailers can also offer specific varieties of grapes as a unique point of differentiation. "Sampling is usually the best way for consumers to get to know a new variety," says Fernando Soberanes, salesman for Giumarra Southern Hemisphere, one of the Los Angeles, CA-headquartered Giumarra Companies. "This should be accompanied by promotional materials, including in store, social media and advertising."

One potential drawback to marketing



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grapes by variety is a relatively limited window of availability. "A certain grape variety may be available for two to three months at most; unlike apples, where many varieties are year-round," says Steve Kenfield, vice president of sales and marketing for HMC Group Marketing, Inc., in Kingsburg, CA. "That makes it more challenging to get the consumer to connect."

Another dilemma begs the question: Is there really a noticeable distinction between varieties? If yes, is that difference better than what's available and enough of a variance for customers to remember to come back and buy?

"There are differences I can see, as a grower, that the consumer won't see," says Jon Zaninovich, vice president of Jasmine Vineyards, Inc., in Delano, CA. "Just like there may be only subtle differences among 20 varieties of yellow-fleshed peaches. Ten varieties of red are like 50 shades of gray in terms of color. It takes a very savvy consumer to see the differences."

Red grapes accounted for the largest share of category dollars at 53.6 percent, with white/green 39.3 percent, and black/blue 6.3 percent, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data for the 52-weeks ending March 29, 2014.

"This makes red and green seedless grape varieties a 'must-have' for year-round grape sales," says Gina Garven, manager of sourcing business analytics and vendor managed inventory for C.H. Robinson in Eden Prairie, MN. "Black seedless, red globe and other varieties, such as seeded and bi-color grapes, make up the remainder of the category."

Experts say there is a real opportunity, beyond variety name and color, to sell grapes by their characteristics.

"Unique size and taste profiles tend to get fanatical niche followings, never passing more than a few tenths of 1 percent of the crop," says John Pandol, director of special projects for Pandol Bros. Inc., in Delano, CA.

2. Pack Style Preferences

Pack choices are multiplying almost as fast as varieties. There's simple tissue paper wrap, plastic bags, clamshells and now graphic pouch bags. The opportunity lies in a retailer's preference and format.

"Tissue paper is classic. Center cut and specialty grapes in tissue make a nice presentation, but there's a limited market for this," says Jeff Fairchild, the produce director at New Seasons Market, a 13-store chain headquartered in Portland, OR.

Clear plastic bags are inexpensive. However, they can lead to a poor presentation when

moisture builds and clouds the view of the product. For this reason, "bags are being phased out," says Jasmine Vineyards' Zaninovich.

Most grapes are sold in bulk at random-weight volume. However, there is a sizable share of fixed-weight, packaged grapes that are seeing much faster growth year-over-year. Of the fixed-weight options, nearly two-thirds of sales come from the 3-pound clamshell or bagged options.

"While all fixed-weight packs are up considerably, the greatest growth in 2013 was experienced with the smaller 1-pound and 1.5-pound options," explains C.H. Robinson's Garven. "Today's grape shopper is more likely to be over 50 years old, have a smaller household, or shop for their kids (which are under the age of 12). Smaller packs cater to health-conscious shoppers looking to feed one or two people in the household as quick and easy snacks."

Clamshells offer other advantages also, such as limiting shrink, preventing slips and falls from loose fruit falling on the floor, and easily creating stacked displays.

"Clamshells are still the preferred package style for the club stores, however stand-up pouch bags are now the preferred industry standard," says Giumarra's Soberanes.

High-graphic pouch bags, made from a variety of materials with better clarity and greater rigidity, are finding favor with retailers.

"The grapes hold up well, the pack doesn't get cloudy, and there's a good opportunity for messaging," says New Seasons' Fairchild.

"The grab-and-go handle makes it easy for consumers to pick up and increases impulse sales," notes Redner's Stiles.

Pouch bags cost 5 to 7 cents more a piece than plain plastic bags.

"If retailers didn't think they could turn the packaging into value, they wouldn't do it. I think the presentation creates higher sales and offsets the cost," explains the HMC Group's Kenfield.

There is debate, and no clear answer in the grape community, as to why the pouch bags have taken the produce department by storm.

"My take is subliminal messaging," says Pandol of Pandol Bros. "To the produce clerk: set the bags out nicely like they were gift bags at fashion week. To consumers: the handle on the bag is begging for you to pick it up."

"The 'no-graphics' retailers seem to be warming to the idea of a modest amount of graphics. We see some extreme graphics, some purposeful, and others more an extension of a farmer's ego rather than a clever merchandising scheme," says Pandol. "The biggest challenge is



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For grape availability and sales support, please contact:

Richard Bagdasarian, Inc. Mecca, CA 760.396.2167 nbozick@mrgrape.com	Bravante Produce San Joaquin Valley, CA 559.638.5075 ron@bravanteproduce.com
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radically different types of bags on the same display. We have not yet developed a vocabulary to clearly communicate exactly which bag we have. This will be really difficult for retailers who don't direct source — or use a combination of FOB buying supplemented by brokers or forward distributors."

3. Promoting During Summer, Fall/Winter Or Both

Grape dollar contribution to produce department sales ranged from 5.0 percent in the second quarter to 6.5 percent in the fourth quarter of 2013, according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group data for the 52-weeks ending March 29, 2014. There are nuances in the California supply that provide opportunity to expand promotions at retail beyond the traditional summer months and into the fall and early winter.

"There are good supplies of grapes all through the summer months, and the most aggressive pricing is typically in July through September. However, summer offers grapes a lot of competition. Fall varieties are typically stronger and have a longer shelf life than summer varieties. This enables the retail sector the ability to feature grapes with promotions

for a longer period of time," says Sunlight's Dulcich.

Much of the new varietal development is focused on the late-season in order to capture this fall opportunity.

"Late November into December has historically been a difficult timeframe to promote grapes as supplies are not as robust," says Andy Kampa, general manager for C.H. Robinson Worldwide. "However, with the discovery of new varieties that can store longer and color better, combined with growers covering their vines with plastic, the season has extended.

"The best way to merchandise grapes during lower supply periods is to reduce the amount of space dedicated to grapes and increase the frequency that shelves get stocked. Another way to guarantee sales during lower supply months is to stock different varieties and colors," suggests Kampa.

The fall is now a great time to spotlight several varieties of California-grown grapes.

"Our aim is to have all three colors of grapes available into December," explains Gordon Robertson, vice president of sales and marketing for Sun World International, LLC, in Bakersfield, CA. "The Scarlotta Seedless is a late red, the Autumn Crisp a late green, and the

Adora is a late black."

4. Maximizing Display Space

Grapes are an impulse purchase. That means customers usually buy when they see a big, bright, beautiful and well-stocked display.

"Big displays are good," says Pandol Bros.' Pandol. "Lots of items separated by different packages and color breaks. Varieties, organics, multicolor packs, specialty grapes — consider them all as a monster grape-o-rama."

The Fresno, CA-headquartered California Table Grape Commission (CTGC) recommends an average of at least 25 square feet of space devoted to grapes from May through August to optimize sales. Research conducted in 2005 by the Nielsen Perishables Group on behalf of the CTGC reveals that space allocation of more than 25 feet can generate up to 63 percent more dollars per store per year than sets under 18 feet. For September through December, an average of more than 30 square feet of display space can generate up to 29 percent more dollars per store, per year than sets under 20 feet.

If retailers don't have this much space in one spot to devote to grapes, then here are a few suggestions.

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"I'm a firm believer in secondary displays. For example, we'll tie grapes in with cheese in the dairy aisle. The customer who just ran in to pick up milk now sees the grapes. Secondary displays are all found dollars," says Redner's Stiles.

Other excellent locations for secondary grape displays are up by the cash register and in the deli. "The more points of consumer interruption, the greater the grape sales," says Sun World's Robertson.

Shelf life of grapes is a concern since refrigeration may be lacking in secondary display locations. However, the solution to taking advantage of secondary display space and minimizing shrink is all a matter of timing. Research conducted at the Plant Sciences Department of the University of California, Davis, in 2007 on behalf of the CTGC revealed bagged grapes can be displayed for up to 24 hours and 2-pound clamshell-packaged grapes for up to 48 hours before visible shrink occurs.

5. Finding The Right Promotion

There is a fair amount of seasonality with grape sales at the retail level, and sales increases are more closely tied to supply rather than the holiday demand.

"For example, grape print promotions are heaviest in the months of June through November, when the domestic California crop is harvested. There are also a sizable share of promotions January through April when Chilean imports are in good supply," explains C.H. Robinson's Garven.

What's the right price to promote? The traditional 99-cent per pound grape ad is going the way of the dinosaur.

"While certainly an attractive price point, 99-cent ads are showing up less and less. As recently as 2011, 13.9 percent of print promotions for bulk seedless grapes were promoted at this price. In 2013, the share of ads at this price was down to 8.3 percent.

"Often times, the incremental sales volume of this price promotion does not make up for the margin compression retailers face. Another point to consider is today's fresh grape consumer is more likely to have a household income of \$75,000-plus, which means they are less price sensitive than the average consumer. Research shows \$1.99-per-pound is the most frequently promoted price point in the past three years — capturing more than 20 percent of print promotions in 2013," says C.H. Robinson's Kampa.

Research from the 2013 Fleishman-Hillard Attitude and Usage Survey, on behalf of the

CTGC, shows consumers say grapes are a bargain at \$1.48-per-pound, reasonable at \$1.86-per-pound and start to seem expensive at \$3.09-per-pound.

Past the price point challenge, there are non-price opportunities to promote grapes.

"I haven't quantified it, but I think there is more non-price promotion than five years ago. This may be a function of greater growth of retailers with EDLP [every day low price] pricing, or maybe the extreme high-low pricing chains realized consumers were shop-

ping the deals and picking up the rest at an EDLP place," says Pandol of Pandol Bros.

Promotional themes are a good source of opportunities that are not necessarily price generated. "Fourth of July, Memorial Day, Halloween, Christmas and Valentine's Day could be nonprice-themed promotions," offers Giumarra's Soberanes.

"Any time of year that grapes are fresh, of good quality and size, the retail [price] becomes irrelevant to customers," says Redner's Stiles. **pb**



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Head Lettuce Remains Vital To Produce Sales

Bulk product has sustained momentum through the years with good quality as well as producing newer varieties to add excitement to the category. **BY JANEL LEITNER**



PHOTO COURTESY OF K-VA-T FOOD STORES

In terms of leafy greens, California produces about 80 percent, and another 10 percent comes from Arizona. Other states with notable production are Florida, Colorado, Texas and Ohio.

Despite the popularity of fresh-cut, head lettuce remains a vital part of produce department sales. “Head lettuce is a staple in the produce department,” says April Ward, communications director of California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement located in Sacramento, CA. “As the U.S. economy has suffered in recent years, many consumers went back to basics to save money. Head lettuce is economical but provides the buyer with unlimited options for ways to use it.”

Jim Corby, director of customer solutions-produce at Save Mart Supermarkets with 95 stores located in Modesto, CA, agrees, “Even with the growing varieties of new value-added items, fresh lettuce still is a mainstay in the produce department and has one of the biggest basket penetration of any items in the store.”

Head lettuce has proven its endurance in the produce department due to several factors. “High-quality iceberg and romaine hearts are the two key drivers for overall produce sales in the vegetable category,” explains Ernst Van Eeghen, vice president marketing and product development at Church Brothers located in Salinas, CA.

“Bulk lettuce and other bulk vegetables are

the anchors of most produce departments,” says Diana McClean, director of marketing for Tanimura and Antle located in Salinas, CA. “A well managed display conveys freshness and nutrition, and it’s welcoming to shoppers.”

Perception of freshness is a large factor in its endurance. “Bulk lettuce has more of a ‘fresh look’ than packaged lettuce,” says Keith Cox, produce category manager at K-VA-T Food Stores, which has 104 stores and is located in Abingdon, VA.

Miniature varieties of head lettuce add an exciting variation. “Over the years we saw this category of miniature varieties of lettuce expand in popularity as growers of conventional/full-size lettuce varieties such as romaine, iceberg, red and green leaf dedicated more acreage to various baby/mini head varieties,” explains Ande Manos, who is in sales and marketing with Babé Farms in Santa Maria, CA. “These lettuces are primarily packed for foodservice with some going to retail.” [See “Mini Head Lettuces Offer Excitement And Profit” sidebar on page 122.]

Big Production

Today, in terms of production value, head lettuce is one of the three largest vegetable

crops in the United States, according to the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center at Iowa State University. More than 90 percent of U.S. lettuce production is located in California and Arizona.

“California produces a vast amount of the leafy green products, which Americans enjoy each year,” says Ward of California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement. “According to the United States Department of Agriculture, in 2008, California farmers contributed the following amounts of leafy green product to the U.S. supply: 80 percent of romaine lettuce, 80 percent of leaf lettuce, and 78 percent of head lettuce.”

Further research shows more information on which states are proud producers of head lettuce. “Arizona is the second largest production state,” explains Ward. “In terms of all leafy greens, California produces about 80 percent, and another 10 percent comes from Arizona. So 90 percent of all U.S. production is coming from California and Arizona. Other states with notable production are Florida, Colorado, Texas and Ohio. I always tell people to follow the lettuce crops, wherever they are grown it is usually sunny and 70 degrees.”

Regardless of where it’s produced, lettuce

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must have consistent quality for success. "Various growers can have a fantastic tasting product at different times, but to be consistent at a year-round level is the challenge for the grower/shipper and not many people can do that," asserts Van Eeghen of Church Brothers. "We get consistency by having the right varieties, the right distribution channels and the right cut-to-cool times (cut harvested from the moment it gets cooled). Cut-to-cool times are very instrumental in overall quality throughout the product shelf life."

There are a variety of options to choose from when it comes to bulk lettuce. "We built our success around whole-head unprocessed lettuce," explains McClean of Tanimura and Antle. "We grow a full line of leafy greens including iceberg, romaine, green leaf, red leaf and the unique artisan romaine and artisan lettuce mix varieties."

"Romaine and iceberg are most popular, but green leaf, red leaf and butter lettuce (also known as Bibb or Boston) provide alternatives with interesting shapes and colors," suggests Ward.

Pricing and Packs

Pricing options for head lettuce are diverse and directly relate to the type of customer. "The price can be in bags, clamshells, and bulk. It depends on the retailer, but you get the best perception in bulk," explains Van Eeghen of Church Brothers.

Pricing options may vary, but the demand stays the same. "We sell by the each (separately) or however the market has traditionally sold lettuce," says Corby of Save Mart. "It's about being competitive in your market. The retail on lettuce (up or down) does not seem to make a radical difference in movement."

Cox of K-VA-T Food Stores explains, "We have had better success with selling bulk lettuce by the pound instead of by the head."

A good quality product starts with good planning. "The prices vary on a day-to-day basis, but we see the best results in contract, which means we can plan for it so the quality is consistent and supply is consistent," explains Van Eeghen of Church Brothers. "We hedge our acreage between California, Arizona and Mexico."

Packaging helps present the minis. "Most baby head, little gems or multi-leaf lettuces are packaged in clamshells or stand-up pouches with colorful graphics to grab the consumers' eye," says Manos of Babé Farms. "For retail, Babé Farms offers our Baby Lettuce Bouquet Pack, which includes four heads of red and green baby head lettuces and two heads of our

gourmet blonde frisée lettuce totaling six heads packed in a convenient clamshell container.

"In foodservice, the baby head lettuces are mostly sold in 2-pound and 4-pound, single variety or assorted varieties. The multi-leaf head lettuce varieties come in 24-count, 8-pound packs and the little gem in 24-count, 8-pound."

Present Quality

From grower to retail, it is important to understand and promote good quality product. "Consistency for us is key, and at the store level, it is important to have a good produce manager who understands the importance of good rotations," explains Van Eeghen, of Church Brothers. "It can really make a difference. The produce section should be a little mini farmers market, and if retailers have a farmers market look, they will have good returns."

McClean of Tanimura and Antle says variety is key. "In regard to reducing both waste and labor costs, we offer our products both naked

and wrapped. Retailers are realizing more and more the benefit of a wrapped leaf program."

Promoting a fresh, attractive product is the best way to move lettuce. "Like all fresh produce, selling full and fresh displays will always generate more sales and profits," says Cox of K-VA-T Food Stores. "Proper trimming and conditioning of bulk lettuce before displaying is essential in maintaining fresh displays."

"To constantly sell lettuce — keep displays fresh and full, because this is very important to the customer," says Corby of Save Mart Supermarkets.

"It is important to take care of the main items such as the iceberg and romaine, and watch your rotation and freshness," explains Van Eeghen of Church Brothers.

Placements as well as having plentiful displays are two key components to merchandising head lettuce. "Bulk lettuce should be displayed in the misting section of the produce rack," says Cox.

Mini Head Lettuces Offer Excitement And Profit

The newer varieties of mini head lettuces add excitement and profit to any produce department. "There is tremendous opportunity with whole heads but also with smaller types of lettuces," says Ernst Van Eeghen, vice president marketing and product development at Church Brothers located in Salinas, CA. "It will complement the romaine or the iceberg and give excitement to the category."

A good understanding of each variety helps when putting together great promotions. "Red and green little gem are a very popular variety known for their sweet flavor, crunch and petite size," explains Ande Manos, sales and marketing with Babé Farms in Santa Maria, CA. "Little gem is a cross between butter lettuce and romaine and is great for grilling. Simply filet the head lengthwise, season and lightly baste with olive oil on the grill."

"Miniature Tuscan gems are gaining popularity, and we have a whole Tuscan category," says Van Eeghen. "They deliver flavor, crunch, color and uniqueness."

Manos elaborates, "Multi-leaf mini head lettuces, also known as the 'one-cut' lettuces are thick, full-size mini head lettuces — which produce approximately

three times more leaves than the regular varieties. Chefs especially like the yield and leaf uniformity of the one-cut lettuces. Multi-leaf varieties are mostly Red and Green Oak, Red and Green Tango and Lollo Rossa."

These small lettuces with a variety of tastes and textures appeal to foodservice as well as retail. "Chefs are looking for new flavor profiles and baby lettuces offer a gourmet alternative to iceberg, romaine and large leaf lettuces," says Manos. "Baby head lettuces are highly sought after because of their different flavor profiles — they are tender, buttery, or bitter. They also have aesthetic appeal because the color ranges from deep ruby red to a light chartreuse green with frilly edges and serrated leaves."

Diverse options appeal to different uses. "Iceberg and romaine are main drivers for salads but different colors are important as well," explains Van Eeghen. "The Tuscan lettuces we offer give dimension. Crunch, flavor and color are the main characteristics customers are looking for when making salad. Crunch is the largest driver for perception of freshness, flavor drives everything and color is the last of the three." **pb**

McClellan notes, "The most important aspect of merchandising and selling whole head lettuce is to keep displays fresh and well stocked."

"Also give it a prominent place," says Van Eeghen. "There will be great benefits for the category in the produce section when people consistently see it is well maintained and of good quality."

Promote Fun And Versatility

Head lettuce, especially minis, present fun promotional opportunities. "There are a few great ways to really promote these types of lettuces at the retail level," says Manos of Babé Farms. "Provide visuals and recipe cards showing the ease and versatility of mini head lettuces. Demonstrate the versatility of these lettuces with an in-house chef or on a video monitor. For example, little gem lettuces can be grilled or used as a wrap. The ease of prep can be demonstrated with just 'one-cut' using the multi-leaf lettuces. Baby head lettuces can be prepared as a gourmet salad."

Promotional advertising is always a way to kick start sales and get shoppers to try new varieties. "A unique promotion to engage shoppers with different lettuce varieties is to offer a BOGO which allows the shopper to mix and match lettuce varieties," says McClellan. "It takes an attractive incentive to try something new, which may turn out to be a new favorite and regular shoppingcart item."

"We will advertise bulk romaine or leaf lettuce every four to six weeks to help keep the momentum going," says Cox.

Summer provides great opportunity for promoting head lettuce. "Do a summer salad season promo — cross-merchandise with other salad components such as dressings, condiments, crumbled cheeses, croutons, nuts and seeds or dried fruits," suggests Manos. "Merchandise along with other salad vegetables, such as radishes, carrots, beets, heirloom tomatoes and onions. Create a one-stop-shop salad bar in the produce department."

Grilling is another unique usage. "Do a summer grilling promo," says Manos. "Include little gem lettuces or petite romaine lettuces, merchandise with artisan seasoning salts/flavored olive oils and with other grilling vegetables including zucchini, onions, bell peppers, mushrooms etc."

Nutrition offers another promotional opportunity. "Leafy greens are good sources of the anti-oxidant Beta-carotene, vitamin K and folate," asserts McClellan. "The darker and more colorful, the more nutritional value."

Making a connection with the consumer

Safety First

While food safety may be thought of mostly in relation to bagged greens, it applies to head lettuce as well. In 2007, the California Leafy Green Products Handler Marketing Agreement (LGMA) was formed to protect public health by reducing potential sources of contamination in California-grown leafy greens. According to the LGMA, more than 100 handlers, representing approximately 99 percent of the volume of California leafy greens, are LGMA members. These companies have committed themselves to sell products grown in compliance with the food safety practices accepted by the LGMA board.

It is important for suppliers to feel confident they are buying from a grower who has taken preventative measures to produce a safe product. "Make sure they buy from the right people," explains Ernst Van Eeghen, vice president marketing and product development at Church Brothers located in Salinas, CA. "If you buy from non-LGMA members, you may expose yourself to potential food safety issues. We use the California LGMA system for all of our commodities — whether grown in California, Arizona, or Mexico — because we want to have the lowest possible exposure. It is all about prevention."

"Buyers should require the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement Service Mark, because it provides assurance the shipper has been verified through government audit to be in compliance with mandatory food safety practices of the LGMA," explains April Ward of California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement located in Sacramento, CA.

LGMA membership requires verification of compliance with the accepted food safety practices through mandatory government audits. "A certificate is issued quarterly for LGMA growers in good standing," says Ron Labastida, food safety coordinator of Babé Farms

Inc., located in Santa Maria, CA. "As a LGMA grower, we have four inspection audits a year for compliance."

Ward of LGMA elaborates further, "Members of the LGMA are only allowed to use the Service Mark after they have been certified by California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) inspectors."

"If we are marketing here in California or on the East Coast, buyers are guaranteed LGMA lettuce growers produce within these standards," says Labastida. "Head, baby, leaf, or spring mix, all lettuces are in this category."

The California Leafy Green Marketing Agreement assigns an exclusive service mark, assuring safety to the buyer. "Buyers can verify handlers are members of the LGMA by checking the members section of the LGMA website and by looking for the service mark on bills of lading," says Ward.

Lettuce growers incorporate safety from day one. "The highest level of reduced exposure is limiting your risk," explains Van Eeghen. "Before planting, we even incorporate food safety steps beginning with ranch analysis, where we audit potential properties even before we have committed to these ranches. We check them first, and if the results are positive, then we decide to plant. We continue following LGMA protocol through the whole farming process to reduce our exposure to potential issues."

Growers also follow other types of guidelines to help monitor the safety of their produce. "Suppliers often request other food safety documents such as GAP programs or third party inspection audit certificates, corrective actions, or reports," explains Labastida. "Some suppliers provide their own in-house questionnaires, which growers annually update. This has been happening with more suppliers preparing for FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act)." **pb**

adds to sales. "One of the popular campaigns is the 'Know Your Food; Know Your Farmer' marketing initiative, which creates a relationship between not just retail but the consumer and the farmer," explains Van Eeghen of Church Brothers. "It produces trust and a bit

more intimacy between consumer and supplier. It says we are not just a big company, but also we have people in the fields working hard for a good product. This is a family-owned deal, and we supply all of North America." **pb**

Selling Tips For Dressings & Dips

Experts discuss how healthier ingredients, bold flavors and freshness influence consumer shopping habits within the category. BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES

Even without the additional buys, refrigerated dressings and dips made a significant 2 percent contribution to total produce department sales during the 52 weeks ending January 25, 2014.

Some items bought in the produce department automatically signify additional rings. Salad dressings and dips are two of them. Head lettuce, grape tomatoes, baby carrots, celery stalks and broccoli florets are but a few foods found in the shopping carts of customers who purchase these premium condiments. Even without the additional buys, refrigerated dressings and dips made a significant 2 percent contribution to total produce department sales during the 52 weeks ending January 25, 2014, as provided by the West Dundee, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group. Clearly, it can pay to pick the right products and make sure shoppers who are looking for these items know they can find them in the produce department.

"The drawback has always been that people think dressing is bad for you," says Jim Weber, produce supervisor at Tadych's Econofoods, a six-store chain based in Brillion, WI. "With the products available today, they can enjoy a truly healthy salad. It's a win-win."

Stock On-Trend Products

Healthier ingredients, bold flavors and freshness are three trends that are driving dressing and dip product innovation.

Health Cents. "There's definitely a trend

toward health consciousness among consumers," says Alison Kellogg, business development manager for Litehouse Foods Inc., in Sandpoint, ID. "They are snacking more and looking for something that will deliver nutrition. It isn't just about low-calorie or low-fat anymore, but a desire for ingredients that deliver nutrients like protein that can provide satiety."

An excellent example of this is new products made with Greek yogurt. Greek differs from traditional yogurt in that the whey (or liquid) is drained away, producing a thicker creamier consistency. This process also nearly doubles the protein content per serving of Greek versus regular yogurt.

"Greek yogurt-based dressings and dips are a big deal with our customers," says Weber.

Litehouse Foods introduced its four-item OPA by Litehouse Greek Yogurt Dressing line last fall. Flavors include Blue Cheese, Feta Dill, Caesar and Ranch. The company will launch line extensions with unique flavor combinations in June, says Kellogg. "We first introduced a product made with regular yogurt in 2006/7, and it represented a small part of the category. Today, yogurt dressings, especially those made with Greek yogurt, represent almost 50 percent of the category."

"Our Otria Greek Yogurt Veggie Dips and

Otria Greek Yogurt Fruit Dips leverage the recent Greek yogurt trend and were the first veggie and fruit dips made with Greek yogurt on the market," says Mary Beth Cowardin, director of marketing for produce at the Columbus, OH-headquartered T. Marzetti Company. "Flavors range from Spinach Artichoke to Cucumber Dill Feta and the fruit dip flavors Sweet Vanilla Cinnamon to Mixed Berry Medley."

"Consumers are searching out 'organic' over products labeled 'natural,'" explains Rachna Patel, senior marketing manager for Oak Brook, IL-based Bay Valley Foods, makers of the Naturally Fresh brand, which includes organic Peppercorn Ranch, Orange Miso and Greek Feta dressings. "That's because there is a legal definition of organic."

In addition, "retail request for gluten-free dressings and dips are on the rise driven by consumer requests," says Litehouse Foods' Kellogg. A majority of the company's products do not contain gluten.

Distinctive Flavors. One key differentiator between dressings and dips sold in Produce versus other departments at Kings Food Markets, a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, is distinctiveness, says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral and seafood. "We stock unique and/or locally

made dressings in produce. National brands are over in the dairy aisle."

This distinction most often translates to unique flavors. For example, Strawberry Poppy Seed, Pomegranate and Champagne are three of the Marzetti line of Simply Dressed salad dressings sold in produce at Tadych's Econofoods. Marzetti expanded this line with the launch of its Simply Dressed Pourable flavors, which includes Lemon Vinaigrette, Cherry Balsamic Vinaigrette and Light Roasted Tomato Dressing.

"Ginger is currently hot," says Charles Blyer, sales manager at Makoto Dressing, in Melbourne, FL. "That's because of all of ginger's health benefits, such as it can help to relieve nausea and reduce inflammation."

To underscore this popularity, Makoto's Ginger Dressing ranks in the Top 10 of all refrigerated dressings based on IRI data for the 52-weeks ending December 29, 2013. The company also sells Orange Ginger, Honey Ginger and a recently launched Yogurt Ginger dressing. It is also testing other line extensions.

Tried and true with a twist is a good way to describe the flavor revolution in top-selling refrigerated dressings. "The Top 4 or 5 flavors in the category represent 80 percent of the sales. These include Ranch, Blue Cheese, Coleslaw, Caesar and Balsamic," says Bay Valley Foods' Patel. "Now, we're seeing innovation with spicier flavors as younger consumers are exposed to global tastes. For example, our new six-item Greek yogurt line includes Chipotle Ranch."

Freshness & Convenience. "There's been a shift toward simpler ingredients on refrigerated dip and dressing labels," says Kings' Kneeland. "The ingredients listed on many products now read like a home recipe."

"This cleaner label connotes freshness to the consumer," says Bay Valley Foods' Patel.

Marzetti's Simply Dressed line plays to this demand with "simple, easy to understand and familiar ingredients, such as extra virgin olive oil, canola oil and sea salt," says Cowardin. "These dressings are free of preservatives, trans fats, high fructose corn syrup, added MSG and artificial colors and flavors."

"Interestingly, research shows that customers say they prefer glass packaging because it looks like they could have made it at home," explains Bay Valley Foods' Patel. "However, plastic flies off the shelf. That's because other cues will influence purchase. For example, a product with yogurt trumps the fact that the dressing is packaged in plastic."

New packaging trends reflect consumer desire for convenience and ease of use. "We are

looking at offering portion-controlled packs of dressings, by account, for the grab-and-go market," says Makoto's Blyer. "These could be merchandised next to single-serve, ready-to-eat salads."

Make Shopping Easy

"Shoppers don't have to look too far to find dressings and dips at Tadych's Econofoods," says Weber. "They are displayed together with salads on one side and products like baby carrots on the other."

Kneeland says Kings adds to this ease of discovery. "Dressings are all displayed on the top shelf above the salads. Conventional dressings with conventional salads, organic dressings with organic salads."

"Fruit dips and caramel dips should be showcased in close proximity to fruits, such as apples, strawberries, grapes and bananas," suggests Marzetti's Cowardin.

When introducing a new product line, Makoto's Blyer recommends carrying three or more SKUs. "One or two items tend to get lost

on the shelf, but three or more sets up a billboard effect and increases visibility."

Slotting fees (a cost that manufacturers pay to have their product placed on supermarket shelves) can have a double-positive effect. Firstly, it lessens the risk for retailers when introducing a new product. Secondly, the presence of this product on the shelf sets up a SKU slot for reorders, which benefits the manufacturer.

"The rule of thumb is that we offer one free case per store, per flavor," says Bay Valley Foods' Patel.

It's also wise to remind shoppers to buy dressings and dips. "We'll do this by promoting dressings in January and February — when everyone is trying to follow their New Year's resolution to eat more healthfully, including more salads," says Tadych's Econofoods' Weber. "Then, we promote dips for every seasonal event like Easter, Memorial Day and Super Bowl. Circular ads are best because it brings customers into our stores, and once here, they usually don't walk out with just one item." **pb**

Think Outside The Salad Bowl

There are more ways to merchandise dips and dressings than simply as veggie dunkers and salad toppers.

"One of the major appeals of our line of Otria Greek Yogurt Veggie Dips is that consumers can incorporate them into a variety of everyday breakfast, lunch and dinner recipes such as a Spinach Mushroom Omelet, Garden Herb Wrap and Lemon Pepper Chicken with Creamy Cucumber Sauce," says Mary Beth Cowardin, director of marketing for produce at the Columbus, OH-headquartered T. Marzetti Company.

Similarly, Cowardin continues, "We see dressings being used beyond salads, including toppings for burgers and sandwiches, adding flavor to pasta salads or used as a meat marinade."

Refrigerated salad dressings sold in Produce are cross-merchandised in the meat department at Kings Food Markets, a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ. "Most dressings can be used as a marinade, and dressings with unique ingredients can really jazz up recipes," explains Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral and seafood. "For example, we tie in a chipotle lime dressing with chicken. We made the

recipe available to customers via our cooking studio, online and in ads."

Recipe cards and recipe tear pads are available for point-of-sale displays from Litehouse Foods Inc., based in Sandpoint, ID. Recipes include, for example, Shrimp with Orzo Risotto using the company's OPA Feta Dill dressing and Creamy French Onion Chicken that calls for Litehouse French Onion Dip.

"These recipes are great examples of the versatility of our dressing and dip products and show how the different product lines complement each other for cross-merchandising opportunities that help consumers create great family meals," says Alison Kellogg, business development manager.

"Recipes are best displayed next to the refrigerated dip and dressing set in the produce department," suggests Rachna Patel, senior marketing manager for Oak Brook, IL-based Bay Valley Foods, makers of the Naturally Fresh brand of dips, dressings and sauces. "That way, shoppers can come in for a bagged salad, grab a dressing, then get other meal ideas — potentially purchasing even more fresh produce — and other items from throughout the store." **pb**

Stone Fruit: Sweet Flavor Works Best For Repeat Sales

Consumers can't always gauge ripeness, so experts offer tactics for this challenging category.

BY BOB JOHNSON



PHOTO COURTESY OF HW-VEE

Retailers can maximize stone fruit sales by merchandising displays of a wide variety with educational signage.

Nothing bolsters a stone-fruit program like a reputation for being the go-to spot for mouth-watering peaches and nectarines.

"The fresher and sweeter the fruit, the more repeat customers," says Amy Howard London, executive director of the South Carolina Peach Council, Columbia, SC.

And delicious fruit matters even more than a year-round supply when it comes to building the program.

"The category is better served by having product people can eat than it is by having product every day," says Steve Kenfield, vice president for sales and marketing at HMC Farms, Kingsburg, CA. "Consumer experience is a function of taste and texture."

This category challenges retailers' commitment to detail, however, because consumers can't always tell when the fruit is sweet, and the best "ready-or-not" test varies fruit to fruit.

Ripe And Ready

Some stone fruits are best judged by the give you feel when you press lightly. Color can also be telling with several other fruits. Or you can trust that sweet sniff — the nose knows when the first bite will be a delight.

There are many different ways to tell when

a piece of stone fruit is ready. Retailers do right to research the question and provide signage that helps consumers make educated purchase choices.

"Considering the large range of varieties and the different taste profiles, retailers would benefit from signage that communicates the key attributes of each variety. This is especially important for some of the niche varieties, which might have a price premium and be less recognized by consumers," says Karen Brux, managing director North America for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), Santiago, Chile.

Although fruit color can mislead, one reliable tip is to stay away from the slightest hint of green. "Coloring is only an indicator of the type of peach and is a result of the amount of sunlight the fruit received while on the tree. To judge a ripe peach based on color, look at the background for a creamy yellow shade and never choose a fruit tinged with green," says London.

While yellow peaches turn a richer yellow as they ripen, the popular white-fleshed peaches do not increase in color. "Unlike yellow peaches, a white peach will turn whiter as it ripens," says London.

That slight give when you press the flesh

signals that many stone fruit varieties are ready to eat. "At the market or grocery store, look for peaches that are firm-ripe. To judge a firm-ripe peach, gently squeeze the fruit with your palm. You are looking for the fruit to give a little when tested," says London.

Chemical changes in stone fruit generally make it sweeter as it grows softer. "Taste is driven by the combination of sugar and acid," says Kenfield. "The acid level drops with fruit softening, and brix is fixed at harvest. This is why softer fruit tastes sweeter than firmer fruit."

But touch may not tell all, because there are firm but sweet peaches. "White-fleshed fruit is genetically lower in acid than the traditional yellow flesh varieties. If the consumer prefers firmer fruit, a low-acid piece of fruit will taste sweeter than a similar firmness, higher acid, yellow-fleshed peach or nectarine," says Kenfield.

While touch is usually a good ripeness test, it is not always the best one. "In certain cases, consumers can place a plum or a peach in hand and, if it's slightly soft to the touch, determine that it's ripe," says Brux. But she adds, "In other cases, ripeness is more connected to the color."

The sweet smell of ripeness almost always predicts an enjoyable bite to come. "A nice, fragrant aroma is also a good sign that the fruit

“Shippers are often the best resource for educational materials. We have a full assortment of point-of-sale signs, including all of our major plumcot varieties.”

—Dovey Plain, Family Tree Farms

is ripe or will ripen quickly,” says Dovey Plain, marketing coordinator for Family Tree Farms, Reedley, CA. Once you achieve skill in translating color, touch and aroma to taste, you’re still not quite done. The challenge grows more complex because there are differences in the taste consumers crave.

“We believe consumers have different preferences for ripeness and want a choice at point of purchase,” says Dan Spain, vice president for sales and marketing at Kingsburg Orchards, Kingsburg, CA. “Kingsburg Orchards has been very successful with our tree-ripe program.”

When it comes to reading fruit readiness, shippers are the specialists. They can provide information and also assist with signage designed to educate and entice customers. “Shippers are often the best resource for educational materials. We have a full assortment of point-of-sale signs, including all of our major plumcot varieties. We also have plumcot and white-flesh brochures — as these tend to be the items with the largest need for consumer education,” says Plain.

Varieties Matter

Yellow- and white-fleshed peaches and nectarines, apricots and plums are the basics. “We carry yellow and white peaches and nectarines, and we carry a wide variety of pluots as they become available,” says Jeff Cady, produce and floral manager for TOPS Markets, Williamsville, NY. “We usually have three or four different kinds of pluots in the summer. We carry a Georgia peach until the local peaches become available.”

TOPS shortens its stone fruit menu in the winter, when the fruit comes from Chile. “In the winter, we carry peaches, plums and nectarines. We’ll carry the three basics. Sometimes we’ll dabble in the white flesh, but five would be the absolute maximum number of stone fruit varieties in the off season,” says Cady.

Many growers produce distinctive stone

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“Lemon plums have a short season, are unique to Chile, and are new to most consumers. We worked with Nugget Markets in the Sacramento area, displaying informative signage and running demos in a number of their stores.”

— Karen Brux, Chilean Fresh Fruit Association

fruit varieties that are earning loyal consumers. “It may be a few varieties are so unique that they are memorable and worthy of the effort needed to make this a special purchase for the consumer. To maximize the sales of the category, the retailer must provide the consumer what they want,” says HMC Farms’ Kenfield. “White-fleshed fruit is becoming more of a mainstream item as more people find this eating experience to their liking.”

A newcomer Chilean plum, for example, is proving popular among specialty stone fruits.

“Lemon plums have a short season, are unique to Chile, and are new to most consumers. We worked with Nugget Markets in the Sacramento area, displaying informative signage and running demos in a number of their stores,” says CFFA’s Brux.

This exotic variety from the Southern Hemisphere takes color turns that warrant explanation. “Lemon plums start off yellow and take on a reddish hue as they ripen, so our ‘Ready, Set, Eat’ cards communicated that, as did the Nugget demo staff,” says Brux. “Nugget further supported lemon plum sales with a write-up about this unique variety in their weekly ad circular that preceded the demos. Sales more than tripled during the demo weekend.”

Other producers offer new plum varieties with mouth appeal destined to win back customers. “The new varieties of plums coming into the market eat very well and should reclaim some of the territory lost to pluots due to poor eating, older varieties. The specialty items are driven by the retailer’s desire to create novelty,” says Kenfield.

Some of the larger producers developed hybrids — including varieties that pique curious eaters’ palates when available.

“Kingsburg Orchards has more than 70 proprietary varieties, and it’s hard to list them all. I would say the new stone-fruit commodities that should be highlighted and featured in the store are Peach-a-rines, Dino Eggs and Velvet apricots,” says Kingsburg’s Spain.

In some areas of the country, varieties can be merchandised as coming from California or South Carolina, where growers boast of growing “The Tastier Peach.”

“Most consumers ask for the Freestone peaches. In South Carolina, these varieties typically have a harvest start date around the Fourth of July,” says London.

With so many stone-fruit varieties, it would be hard to find shelf space to display them all. Fortunately, you don’t have to.

Keep It Simple

Peach and nectarine varieties abound, but retailers need not announce most of them because they were bred mainly to occupy relatively brief harvest slots.

“South Carolina peach growers harvest more than 40 different varieties during the season to ensure a steady supply of volume is available to the retail customers. The longest harvest periods of each variety is only 10 to 12 days,” says London.

When peach harvests from the entire country are tallied, that figure grows even more impressive. “The number of varieties harvested over the course of a season or a year is in the hundreds. Expecting the consumers to remember these and respond to them is a stretch,” says Kenfield.

A consumer may favor certain varieties or may just credit an especially good eat to the particular variety.

“Some consumers look for specific varieties

— usually when they had a particularly great experience and want to make a repeat purchase — or they’re looking for something they had last summer,” says Family Tree Farms’ Plain. “That is why it’s important every year to educate consumers about the concept of varieties and that each variety is only available for a few weeks.”

If you stick to the essential fruits, a well-stocked stone-fruit display must include both white- and yellow-fleshed peaches and nectarines, plums and more minor fruits, as they become available.

“For items that are difficult to distinguish between varieties, the trend seems to be ‘keep it simple.’ For example, explain the flavor characteristics of these items — such as yellow-fleshed peaches and nectarines, white-fleshed peaches and nectarines, black plums, red plums, apricots. But unless it’s something very unique, don’t try to call out each variety,” says Plain. “Other ‘special’ items like apricots, cherries, flat peaches and apriums can come and go during the summer, so be sure you’re able to fit these in when they’re available.”

An ample supply of these essential stone fruits when they begin to arrive in the late spring from California and the Southeast (or in the fall from Chile) is plenty to build a visually spectacular and aromatic display.

“When consumers see a large variety of sub-categories displayed together, it prompts purchases of more than one item,” says Plain. “Call it the ‘kid-in-a-candy-store’ effect. They want to try a little of everything. Take cues from your suppliers as far as the right mix at the right time. There are natural peaks and valleys of volume throughout the summer.” **pb**

Dried Plums: Going Beyond A Healthy Snack

As health benefits catapult the popularity of this dried fruit, marketers agree merchandising efforts should also focus on versatility. **BY LIZZ SCHUMER**



According to research, snacking has increased from 21 percent to 51 percent, with consumers eating three or more snacks a day, over the past four years.

Retailers are now seeing the benefits of placing dried fruits and their other natural-food friends in or adjacent to the produce section. Marketers have a treasure trove of strategies to make sure the prune's placement is a success.

Progress Of The Prune

"Extensive research has proven that dried plums have many digestive benefits, a crucial fact considering the increasing importance consumers place on digestive health and its role in overall well-being," notes Donn Zea, executive director of the California Dried Plum Board (CDPB).

In fact, the dried plum recently received the first European Food Standards Agency digestive health claim for dried and fresh fruit, a designation that Zea says will help market the fruit as a probiotic.

"We encourage retailers to look at the one and only prune as the leader in digestive health," says Zea. "It's a case of 'what's old is new.'"

Dried plums are not only good for the gut, but they can also help build strong bones and reverse bone loss in pre-menopausal women, according to a human trial at Florida State University conducted by Dr. Bahram

Arjmandi and published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*.

That study found eating 10 to 12 prunes per day could improve bone mineral density in postmenopausal women — possibly related to dried plums' phytonutrient composition and the presence of boron (a mineral) and vitamin K.

Stephanie Harralson, produce manager of Sunsweet Growers, Inc. of Yuba City, CA, says her company is "very excited" about this research and marketing the dried plum as a fruit that offers "multiple health benefits, along with delicious taste."

Versatile Uses To Influence Sales

All of these attributes contribute to dried plums' superfood status, and Harralson says consumers are starting to take notice as snacks are increasingly seen as a means to maintaining healthy eating habits.

According to a snacking report by consumer goods research company, Chicago, IL-based IRI Symphony, people are turning to snacking as a way to manage health.

"Snacking has increased from 21 percent to 51 percent, with consumers eating three or more snacks a day, over the past four years," says Harralson. "Consumers are attracted to

snacks that provide nutrition in a delicious and convenient form, so dried fruit is a perfect solution. In addition, we expect to see prunes increasingly mixed into a number of products from cereals to baked goods, to snack bars. Food manufacturers love the natural nutrition provided by the prune."

So what does that mean for marketing? Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral, seafood and meat for Kings Food Markets of Parsippany, NJ, says he likes to use the tie-in between fresh and dried fruit, as well as dried plums' potential as a healthy snack.

"Merchandise the dried fruit together in a section — tie it in with healthy snacks so the old stigma of prunes is left behind," suggests Kneeland.

He also recommends using organic dried plums as much as possible to lure in the market of consumers who tend to go for the natural option. That doesn't mean keeping conventional prunes out of the equation, though.

"Whenever you can, go for the organic option on the dried plums, but it is important to keep conventional on display too," cautions Kneeland. "This is primarily to target customers who may be a little more in tune to healthy eating than conventional consumers."

Rick Hogan, who is produce manager for

DRIED FRUITS AND NUTS

Grand Forks, ND-based Hugo's Family Marketplace, is especially in tune with that healthy lifestyle. A healthful eater himself, he looks to smoothies and juices to manage his health, and he says that many consumers are now doing the same.

"Recipes are important," he says, pointing to smoothies or a juice containing dried plums as two options. "Come up with a simple recipe, and get people to try it. That's where sampling could really work. Smoothies are very big right now. If you put dried plums

into a smoothie, you could work that into a very good sampling situation."

Justifying Locations In Produce

In his own stores, Hogan says proximity is key. "When retailers set a store, the dried fruits should be directly across from produce, which will increase sales more than having it across the store," he explains. "It encourages natural nutrition: that fresh or dried fruit or vegetables is the way to go, rather than taking a pill. You want to focus on the goodness of the

"When retailers set a store, the dried fruits should be directly across from produce, which will increase sales more than having it across the store."

—Rick Hogan, Hugo's Family Marketplace

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dried plum, and its benefits for health."

Kneeland says he takes it one step further, placing dried plums front-and-center, with the fresh fruit. "Do a multi-tier promotion," he says. "Advertise plums and tie in the dried prunes as a secondary source of healthy goodness. Be sure to keep placement on the shelf, then place a basket in the center of the plum display to highlight the prunes."

In one area, retailers agree: simplicity is the way to go, making it easy for consumers to find and use the fruit, even if they're initially leery about doing so.

"Consumers generally think of dried plums as a snack food, found mainly in bags or canisters as a whole or pitted product," says the CDPB's Zea. "More than ever, packers are providing options to make it easy for consumers to use in cooking or as toppings for salads, breakfast cereals and many other applications. Mixed with a little water and blended, prune puree makes a fantastic low-fat cooking and baking substitute and adds texture and richness to many creations."

Hugo's Family Marketplace is bringing all of these options together, making the produce and dried fruit section a one-stop shop for health-conscious consumers who may want to use dried plums as not only a snack food, but a cooking ingredient, as well.

"With our new store design, we're re-merchandising to move the natural health area into produce," says Hogan, noting the message of freshness and health produce already enjoys can boost the natural foods, and by association dried fruits, sales as well. "We like our [produce] presentations to be really big and fresh, and that's been successful for us."

As Hogan puts it, "We're all trying to find ways to get and stay healthy, these days. We're paying more attention to what we're putting in our bodies and in our carts. That translates to what we put on the shelves, and in terms of merchandising, that means dried plums can be front and center."

pb

'MARKETING' FOOD SAFETY



The topic of food safety is one that never seems to go away. It dominates strategy meetings and takes an inordinate amount of time to determine the proper course of action. In my experience, upper management tends to believe that food safety is something that is best provided by the supplier and that the next food safety incident will not happen to them nor will it be their responsibility. It is

also prevalent in the retail industry that any activities that the retailers do should be marketed as an advantage over the competition.

It is one thing to tell the consumer what you are doing operationally and on a promotional front to show competitive advantage, which draws them to the store. It is quite something else to tell the consumer that your product, in this case Produce, is safer than your competitors due to your various food safety activities and programs.

Many retailers continue to advertise their actions in the food safety arena as a competitive advantage. At best, this type of strategy is a sharp double-edged sword for a number of reasons. One in particular being the possibility of a food-safety incident (beyond control) affecting a store. This event would be devastating to the credibility of a store's claims of being better than the competition in terms of food safety. Such an event would wipe out any positive impression with the consumer as well as the rest of the market. Additionally, the event draws unnecessary attention to the issue of food safety, and ultimately, plays on consumers concerns and fears.

Any claim of superiority in food safety is inherently dangerous to the reputation of the store. Such an action sets an organization up to take a big fall when a food safety situation does occur. Management tends to blame suppliers for this type of problem and holds them responsible for the situation as well as solving the problem. Retailers need to take more responsibility for the resolution of these situations and implement new solutions and positive steps for prevention. There is a fine line between what can be done to show the retailer's concern

for food safety and not getting tangled in the dangerous position of "marketing" food safety efforts.

The best strategy involves notifying customers of the steps being taken to enhance food safety within stores. This shows the concern for food safety and the customers, but it does not take that regrettable step in claiming safer produce over the competition. This type of strategy shows positive actions toward food safety, and ultimately, this cause will initiate the competition to follow.

There are some actions to take that can decrease the chance of a food-safety incident and strengthen the overall operation. Begin by controlling warehouse receiving. Ensure that every item received is

from a reputable shipper, and if possible, has GS1 or GTIN identification on the boxes and pallets for traceability. Proper records must be kept to confirm that the origin of all produce can be tracked back to a source. Requiring and executing proper care in storage and handling within the warehouse also adds extra insurance to food safety.

Lastly, the proper handling, storage, and display of the produce at retail are vital to creating a strong and sound food safety system. These types of actions taken behind the scenes are as important as any outward

Retailers need to take more responsibility for the resolution of these situations and implement new solutions as well as positive steps for prevention. There is a fine line between what can be done to show the retailer's concern for food safety and not getting tangled in the dangerous position of "marketing" food safety efforts.

messaging to the consumer.

After the realization that the "marketing" of food safety is not in the best interests of your operation, the proactive steps will assist and minimize impact of any food safety event, whether a voluntary recall by the FDA or government action. Resisting the temptation to trumpet your food safety efforts as an advantage, or to promote your product as safer than the competition, is vital to the continued success of your stores and the establishment of a good, practical, food safety program.

It is important to remember that the food supply in United States is safe. Any of the food-safety incidents represent a small minority of the produce shipped every year. Everyone in the industry shares the responsibility for minimizing the opportunity for a food safety incident. Therefore it behooves us all to move in the same direction and focus on eliminating any possible food safety problem by improving the care and handling of the product through the supply chain. **pb**

By Don Harris

Don Harris is a 40-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from "field-to-fork" in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH DON LIMÓN'S ANDREAS SCHINDLER

Interview by Steven Maxwell



Those familiar with German fresh produce brands will undoubtedly have come across Don Limón. A huge success in continental Europe since its launch some seven years ago, the name is likely to call to mind its distinctive logo — a suave-looking gentleman in a wide-collared white shirt and black suit gazing out of the interior of a lime — suggesting a plantation owner, perhaps Don Limón himself.

However, as company general manager Andreas Schindler explains, the reality is nothing of the sort. The face in the logo is in fact Schindler himself from a photo taken in 2007 when Schindler created the brand together with his father, Wilfried, and brother Thomas.

Don Limón is also the latest in a family of brands and companies that have sprung from Pilz Schindler, the Hamburg-based fresh produce marketer established by Schindler's grandfather in 1952, which originally made a name for itself with its global mushroom sales. Now in its third generation, the company still sells mushrooms, but has since moved successfully into vegetable production, wholesale distribution and fruit imports.

It was to handle the latter part of the business that Don Limón, as both a company and a brand, was set up seven years ago — initially focusing on lime production and exports from Brazil and Mexico not just to Europe, but markets including the U.S., Canada, Russia and Japan.

A sociology graduate, Schindler joined the family business in 2000 after living in France. Now based in Hamburg, Schindler oversees Pilz Schindler's overseas export business, including production enterprises in Mexico, Peru, Panama, Costa Rica and Brazil covering products including pineapples, bananas, watermelons, mangos and limes, many of them sold under the Don Limón brand.

Could you describe Don Limón's relationship with North America in terms of imports and exports?

With imports, nothing so far. We did Florida grapefruits, and we see opportunities for lemons this year. Also, sweet potatoes are interesting. In terms of exports, Don Limón is exporting from Mexico to the U.S. and Canada. We have also carried out our first trials of mango shipments from Peru to Canada.

Where do you believe there are opportunities for U.S. exporters in the European market?

The most interesting product for the European market is sweet

potatoes, but there may also be opportunities for grapefruit from Texas and Florida. Lemons could also be a possibility, as Argentina is short on volumes, and that could make imports from California interesting.

I think the EU is very open to imports from the U.S., although protocols need to be checked beforehand of course. However, price-wise it may be more interesting for U.S. companies to export to Asia and the Middle East. The European consumer also cannot compete with the U.S. consumer in terms of both demand and prices.

What do you see as the main handicaps for U.S. exporters looking to increase exports to Europe?

The U.S. is not really producing counter season to Europe, so it has to compete with the local production here. There are only a few products where the U.S. has some competitive advantages, such as sweet potatoes, red apples and grapefruit.

In terms of products such as berries and cherries, which are brought by air, you have to look at whether it is worth making the investment.

There is no sense doing it when products are already available in Europe through local production. However, there are sometimes gaps in the market due to shortages and in these instances it would make sense for U.S. exporters to send these products to Europe by air.

Does Don Limón currently export to the U.S. and if so what importance does it have as an export market?

We export from Mexico between May and December, and also from Brazil between January and June every year. We export limes from Mexico to the U.S. We have our own packhouse and offices in Martínez de la Torre, Veracruz, overseen by Diego Morales. Although we don't have exclusive growers, we do have producers in Mexico who grow a lot of limes for us, and in turn, we provide financing for them to help with things like spraying their orchards.

Do you believe the Don Limón brand will become more of a fixture on U.S. supermarket shelves in the not-too-distant future?

At the moment the U.S. is not such an important market for us — we only send two truckloads of limes per week to the U.S. from Mexico — but we still see a lot of opportunities there. But the important thing is to be able to understand the market and the people. It's quite a different market to Europe, especially in the interior of the U.S. where there are cultural differences and a very different mentality, even from the East and West coasts. However, we're working on it and, although we haven't achieved it yet, we are hoping to develop our business across the U.S.

Andreas Schindler

The 46-year-old Schindler is part of a long tradition in the family business: agriculture. In 2000, Schindler began working for the family business. In 2007, the German-based importing company Don Limón was created. The company exclusively handles an expanding conventional and organic lime business.

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C.H. Robinson Worldwide, Inc.	38-39	877-679-2933	www.chrobinson.com
C.H. Robinson Worldwide, Inc.	118	877-679-2933	www.chrobinson.com
C.H. Robinson Worldwide, Inc.	64	877-679-2933	www.chrobinson.com
Church Brothers, LLC	63	831-796-1000	
Concord Foods	11	508-580-1700	www.concordfoods.com
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	88	610-268-3043	www.countryfreshmushrooms.com
Crowley Maritime Corp.	7	800-CROWLEY	www.customizedbrokers.net
Del Monte Fresh Produce	136	800-950-3683	www.freshdelmonte.com
Del Rey Avocado Co.	63	760-728-8325	
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	818-879-6600	www.dole.com
dProduce Man Software	36	888-PRODMAN	www.dproduceman.com
Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc.	84	856-447-3563	www.easternfreshgrowers.com
Ethylene Control, Inc.	101	800-200-1909	www.ethylenecontrol.com
Fierman Produce Exchange	30	718-893-1640	
Floral Business	18	561-994-1118	www.floralbusinessmagazine.com
Fresh Origins, LLC	68	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com
Fresh Plants, Inc.	78	800-424-3553	
Fresh Produce & Floral Council	69	714-739-0177	www.fpsc.org
The Fresh Wave, LLC	85	856-794-1408	www.thefreshwave.com
Georgia Peach Council	75	478-956-6418	www.gapeaches.org/retailers/retailers
Giorgio Fresh Co.	89	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofoods.com
The Giumarra Companies	127	213-627-2900	www.giumarra.com
GPW Direct Consumer LLC	Floral-12	616-847-1552	
A. Gurda Produce Farms	68	845-258-4422	www.agurdaproduce.com
Hampton Farms	130	800-642-4064	www.hamptonfarms.com
Harris Consulting Solutions	48	269-903-7481	
Highline Mushrooms	89	519-326-8643	www.highlinemushrooms.com
House Foods America Corporation	97	714-901-4350	www.house-foods.com
Idaho Potato Commission	35	208-334-2350	www.idahopotato.com/retail
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JAB Produce	111	312-226-7805	
Jem D International	23	519-733-3663	www.jemdfarms.com
Kerry's Kitchen Gardens Inc	96	305-247-7096	
La Hacienda Brands, Inc.	110	312-243-2755	www.lahaciendabrand.com
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	15	800-884-6266	www.veggiesmadeeasy.com

COMPANY	PAGE #	PHONE	WEBSITE
Anthony Marano Company	107	312-829-5055	www.anthonymarano.com
McKay Transcold LLC	109	612-308-8493	www.mckaytranscold.com
Melon Source, Inc.	48	800-624-2123	
MIXTEC Group	36	626-440-7077	www.mixtec.net
MJB Sales, Inc.	89	610-268-0444	www.mjbsales.com
New Jersey Blueberry Industry Council	83	609-292-8853	
New Jersey Department of Agriculture	81	609-292-8853	www.state.nj.us/agriculture
North Bay Produce	103	231-946-1941	www.northbayproduce.com
Ocean Mist Farms	29	831-633-2492	www.oceanmist.com
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	119	661-725-3145	
Paulk Vineyards	74	229-468-7873	www.paulkvineyards.com
Penang Nursery	Floral-9	407-886-2322	www.penangnursery.com
Peri & Sons Farms	36	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
Phillips Mushroom Farms	62	800-722-8818	www.phillipsmushroomfarms.com
Ponderosa Mushrooms	88	604-945-9700	www.ponderosa-mushrooms.com
Procacci Bros. Sales Corp.	Floral-15	800-523-4616	www.procaccibrothers.com
Produce for Better Health Foundation	65	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Produce Marketing Association	25	302-738-7100	
PuraVida Farms	21	480-588-7012	www.puravidafarms.com
Pure Hothouse Foods, Inc.	105	519-326-8444	
Red Blossom Farms	9	805-981-1839	www.redblossom.com
San Miguel Produce	86	805-488-6461	www.cutnclean.com
Shuman Produce, Inc.	73	912-557-4477	www.realsweet.com
Silver Creek Software	36	208-388-4555	www.silvercreek.com
South Georgia Produce, Inc.	74	229-559-6071	
Strube Celery & Vegetable Company	112	312-226-7880	www.strube.com
Sun Valley Group	87	800-747-0396	www.thesunvalleygroup.com
Sun World International	115	760-398-9430	www.sun-world.com
Sunkist Growers, Inc.	117	818-986-4800	www.sunkist.com
Sunny Valley International/ Jersey Fruit	Floral-11	856-881-0200	www.sunnyint.com
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	33	800-772-4542	www.taproduce.com
Taylor Farms	121	831-772-6664	www.taylorfarms.com
Thermal Technologies, Incorporated	99	803-691-8000	www.gotarpless.com
Tropical Foods	95	704-602-0631	
United Fresh Produce Association	59	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
The USA Bouquet Co.	Floral-16	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Village Farms	67	888-377-3213	www.villagefarms.com
Vineland Co-op Produce Auction, Inc.	86	856-691-0721	www.vinelandproduce.com



REUNITED

This month's Blast from the Past photo is quite apropos. It was taken back in 1960 at the United Fresh convention, which was held in Chicago that year. The men gathered together in their dapper suits happen to be the D'Arrigo Bros. sales team at the time. From left to right we have: Andy D'Arrigo (California), Steve D'Arrigo (California), John Antognoni (Boston), Andrew D'Arrigo (Boston), Peter D'Arrigo (Boston), and Stephen "Steve" D'Arrigo (New York).

"The D'Arrigo family always enjoyed the 'gathering of the clan' aspect [at the conference each year]," says Andy D'Arrigo, current board chairman/director of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of California. "The United convention was the one event that all the family members in the business gathered at each year. Traditionally, the annual board meeting was held during the convention as well."

According to Andy, the company has attended the conference for as long as any D'Arrigo Bros Co. member can remember. "Several family members have been directors or on the board of the convention as well," recalls Andy. "In the photo, we were standing in the convention hall, right next to our booth."

It's surreal for him to look back and remember how much the company has evolved over the years. At the time of the photo, Andy was the president of D'Arrigo Bros. of California. His brother Steve was a member of the sales team and attended the conference with him. John Antognoni was on the sales team for Boston at the time. Andrew D'Arrigo of Boston was the company president, and his son Peter was on the sales team of the Boston division as well. Steve D'Arrigo of New York was the president of D'Arrigo Bros. of New York.

With the collaborative help and strong commitment from each fam-

ily member, the D'Arrigo Bros. has remained a significant player in the fresh produce industry.

The company spans three divisions — each unique to its location and clientele. D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of California markets the Andy Boy brand of vegetables — yes, the brand gets the name from the 90-year-old Andy D'Arrigo himself. Andy Boy's Broccoli, Broccoli Rabe, Cauliflower, Fennel, Romaine Hearts, Cactus Pears and Nopalitos are the company's mainstays, and sales are managed by the D'Arrigo's third generation family members.

D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York is family owned and operated as well. The enterprise has served the New York metropolitan area for more than 50 years, offering a full line of the highest quality fruit and vegetable items available every day of the week. The company is located in a 75,000-square ft. facility in the Hunts Point Terminal Market in Bronx, NY.

D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of Massachusetts was the first location to be established in 1923. Now in the New England Produce Center in Chelsea, MA, this location services the independent wholesaler, purveyor, restaurant and retail community.

"The business of produce has changed immensely since 1960," says Andy. "Produce today and produce back then are two completely different animals. The companies of D'Arrigo California, New York and Boston have all evolved as well. There are so many moving parts to the companies that you cannot really pinpoint one segment."

There may be many "moving parts," but family remains constant. The D'Arrigo "clan" continues to work together expanding the company's produce offerings and showcasing them at national events each year.

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