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UNDER FORTY



FLORAL BUSINESS



GEORGIA GROWN



CHICAGO



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RETROSPECTIVE
floralbusiness

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- PMA FOODSERVICE BOOTH REVIEW



CONGRATULATIONS

• to the winners of the •

2015 UNITED FRESH RETAIL PRODUCE MANAGER AWARDS!

Dole is proud to sponsor these awards and honor the winners and all those who provide the product knowledge and expertise that puts our delicious fresh produce in the hands of consumers across North America.



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- **Bernadine Godeck**, Pick'N Save
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- **Chuck Kauffman**, Andronico's Community Markets
- **Sue Knop**, Food Pride
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- **Anthony Machado**, Raley's Family of Fine Stores
- **Cedric Patrick**, The Kroger Company
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- **Ryan Tanner**, Raley's Family of Fine Stores
- **Ron Tarini**, Big Y Foods, Inc.
- **Josh Tefel**, Food Maxx
- **Kevin Thalken**, Hy-Vee, Inc.
- **Mike Underwood**, Coborn's, Inc.

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



LINDA GIOVANNOZZI
Director of Business Development
B-Fresh Flowers
Carpinteria, CA

Linda Giovannozzi may be a floral industry veteran since high school (when she began selling bedding plants at Walkers Florist & Greenhouses in Hockessin, DE), but she has been reading *PRODUCE BUSINESS* for more than 20 years “since produce and floral have many similarities,” she says.

Giovannozzi received formal training from the South Florida School of Floral Design, and eventually became manager of its retail operation. “After attending the University of Delaware as a Plant Science major, I moved to Amsterdam, Holland and worked for S.

Zurel & Co. B.V., which was the largest Dutch flower exporter at the time.”

Her career path led her to work for companies such as Queens Flower Group, Dole Fresh Flowers, The Elite Bouquet and now B-Fresh Flowers. “I create new designs and ways to package all types of floral bouquets or products, which entails extensive knowledge about flowers, greens, hard goods, packing and logistics. My broad experience enables me to create a new product and have it cost-efficient, with the ability to be mass produced, then shipped to our customers.”

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

WIN A ROLLING GARDEN CART

This heavy-duty Rolling Garden Cart is a garden lover's dream. It holds up to 18 medium-to-long handled tools, such as rakes and hoes. The lift plate on the front is ideal for transporting heavy bags of mulch and peat — moving up to 150 pounds. The cart's design and sturdy wheels allow it to stay balanced. There's a handy holder for garden debris and pulled weeds. Some assembly is required.



QUESTIONS FOR THE JUNE ISSUE

- 1) How many products comprise the Wonderful Company? _____
- 2) What three fruits does Pura Vida Farms provide for retailers, wholesalers and foodservice operators? _____
- 3) How many years has J&C Tropicals been distributing to South Florida? _____
- 4) What is the phone number for The Consalo Group? _____
- 5) What is Sun World's web address? _____
- 6) What letter does the Ocean Mist head of lettuce represent in the company's ad? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
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Thank You!

The Center for Produce Safety would like to show their appreciation to those who support CPS and its mission.

The commitment of the fresh produce industry and its partners is paramount to safeguarding public health and increasing consumer confidence.

The Center for Produce Safety provides and shares ready-to-use science-based solutions that prevent or minimize produce safety vulnerabilities. Ongoing administrative costs are covered by the Produce Marketing Association, enabling industry and public funds to go exclusively to research.

To discuss the benefits of becoming a Campaign for Research Contributor, please contact:
Bonnie Fernandez-Fenaroli
Executive Director of the Center for Produce Safety
bonnie@centerforproducesafety.org · (530) 757-5777

2015 SYMPOSIUM DATES ANNOUNCED: **June 23 – 24, 2015. Grand Hyatt in Atlanta, Georgia**

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To learn more, please visit us at our new website www.centerforproducesafety.org



Immigration Reform Remains In Limbo After Latest Congressional Activity



BY JULIE MANES, DIRECTOR,
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

For years, our industry, along with many others, has been pounding the steady drumbeat to Congress of America's broken immigration system. Long before it became a popular buzzword, we actively engaged members of Congress and educated their staffs on the need for immigration reform policies that specifically address agriculture's unique labor needs. Still, year after year, and from one presidential election to the next, we hear a lot of talk but see little action in terms of practical, market-driven solutions to immigration reform.

Agriculture is a labor-intensive industry. Regardless of the product, the agriculture industry relies on people working in fields and on the farms to help bring strawberries, lettuce, blueberries, and more to market. From years of tracking employment statistics, preferences and trends, we know that these seasonal, temporary and often transitory jobs do not appeal to most Americans, but rather immigrants and guest workers. Of the 2 million hired agricultural employees, it's estimated that 60 to 70 percent are unauthorized to work in the U.S., even though they presented work authentication documents that appear legitimate.

Last November, President Obama issued an Executive Action that laid out criteria for which certain individuals who entered or remained in the U.S. without legal authority could apply for deferred deportation. Additionally, the order called for the facilitation of visas for professionals entering the U.S. for research/development purposes; modified federal detention procedures; and provided additional resources for border security.

On the surface, these measures, coupled with our existing agricultural visa program (commonly known as H-2A), may appear promising. In reality though, these actions alone are not enough. The agriculture guest

We support immigration reform. But we need reform that will provide a strong, market-based approach allowing farmers, ranchers, growers and others in agriculture to feed Americans, and the world, to have access to a legal, reliable and stable workforce.

worker program supplied less than 10 percent of workers needed on America's farms and only applies to temporary/seasonal work.

The only way to permanently fix agriculture's labor shortage is through legislation. Unfortunately, Congress's latest series of actions — should they move forward — will only create an even more devastating impact for an industry struggling to find a skilled workforce.

In both the House and the Senate, bills were introduced that, on their own, would have devastating consequences for the fresh produce industry. In March, the House Judiciary Committee passed H.R. 1147 (the Legal Workforce Act), which would require all U.S. employers to use E-Verify to ensure their employees have official work authorization documentation. Operated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the E-Verify system checks the Social Security numbers of newly hired employees against Social Security Administration and Department of Homeland Security records, ensuring they are either citizens or legal immigrants.

In late April, Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) introduced S. 1032, The Accountability Through Electronic Verification Act of 2015. Much like its counterpart in the House, S. 1032 would also require employers to use the E-Verify program, but it would lift or decrease penalties for companies that do not comply but can prove they "acted in good faith."

As part of the Agricultural Workforce Coalition (AWC), United Fresh has been actively working with dozens of organizations representing diverse needs of agricultural employers across the country to oppose efforts like these that do little to help agriculture. In a coalition letter this March, the AWC expressed strong opposition to H.R. 1147 — warning members of Congress that mandatory immigration enforcement without a program flexible enough to address labor needs of fruit, vegetable, dairy, nursery, and other farms and ranches, puts American jobs, rural communities and agriculture production in jeopardy. Lest we forget, those 2 million employees support two to three other full-time American jobs in transportation, marketing, retail, farm equipment, food processing and beyond.

The likelihood of mandatory E-verify legislation being passed in both the House and Senate and becoming law in the near future remains doubtful. H.R. 1147 has also been referred to the House Education and Workforce Committee as well as the Ways and Means Committee. At this time, both committees indicated they have other immediate priorities to tackle. As for the Senate, Grassley's bill isn't anticipated to gain traction.

Even so, United Fresh will continue to sound the alarm. We support immigration reform. But we need reform that will provide a strong, market-based approach allowing farmers, ranchers, growers and others in agriculture to feed Americans.



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TRANSITION



CALIFORNIA GIANT WATSONVILLE, CA

California Giant promotes **Kristin Kleiber** to serve as the marketing and sales analyst, which is a new position established for the company. Kleiber was previously a sales coordinator supporting the blueberry category manager. Kleiber had been working in sales support but showed

significant interest and talent in marketing efforts

As a result, Kleiber has been blogging for the company, participating in recipe development, managing all in-house photography and assisting with seasonal promotional programs for the past several months. As the marketing and sales analyst, Kleiber will report to Cindy Jewell, vice president of marketing, and assist with all activities to support the expansion of California Giant's products and brand. In addition, she will develop and publish retail newsletters, consumer blog content, analyze product movement and sales trends, and continue to conduct analyses of market, customer and competitor data for the sales team.

TRANSITION



BC HOT HOUSE FOODS

Langley, British Columbia, Canada BC Hot House Foods (BCHH) welcomes **Colin Chapdelaine** as president. Chapdelaine brings a wealth of produce knowledge, personality, and passion to the position.

The BCHH team is confident that his knowledge of sales, financial statements, operations, IT and tactical expertise in business decision-making will serve the company well.

TRANSITION



TODD LINSKY CONSULTING BAKERSFIELD, CA

Todd Linsky, a 28-year produce industry veteran, former Grimmway/Cal Organic vice president of organic sales, started a new international company designed to move the organic industry forward for the next generations. Todd Linsky Consulting

is focused on serving the comprehensive needs of businesses worldwide. The company's goal is to help build brands and increase supplies while maintaining the integrity of the natural products industry.

TRANSITION



OKANAGAN SPECIALTY FRUITS SUMMERLAND, B.C., CANADA


Jennifer Armen, a 30-year veteran of the produce industry, is named director, business development and marketing for Canada-based Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc. (OSF) and is now an official employee of OSF's parent company, Intrexon Corporation. In her now expanded role, Armen will drive OSF's business strategy to market the firm's nonbrowning Arctic apple varieties and will oversee all aspects of commercial development for the company. Arctic apples received commercial approval in Canada and the U.S. earlier this year, and Armen will be working with OSF's partners to bring the company's first two non-browning varieties, Arctic Granny and Arctic Golden to market. She will also be responsible for the development of new market initiatives, assessing new markets and analyzing business opportunities for OSF.


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


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CONGRATULATES
LEAH BRAKKE
on her graduation from the
United Fresh Leadership Program



Black Gold
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 LET'S DIG DEEPER.


Congratulates
Kami Weddle


 On her graduation from the
 United Fresh
 Produce Industry Leadership Program

ANNOUNCEMENT

KBFRUIT & INTERFRESH TO BRING GOLDIES PINEAPPLES TO RETAIL

KBfruit, a fresh fruit importer and packer based in Exeter, CA, partnered with Interfresh, Inc., an Orange, CA-based national fruit and vegetable supplier, to distribute the Costa Rican-grown Goldies-brand pineapple. KBfruit brings the fruit on a year-round basis to the Port of Los Angeles.

The fruit is the industry-standard MD-2 variety, however it is subjected to KBfruit's strategic vertical integration standards from the selection of growers to importation management. In the future, KBfruit will explore setting up programs for the growing of Goldies pineapple in Panama and Colombia as well as the Philippines.



ANNOUNCEMENT

DUDA LAUNCHES BASEBALL-THEMED PROMOTION



Duda is working with top national brands to do in-store and on-pack cross-promotions that are applied to special baseball-themed bags. Three of the company's top-selling, fresh-cut celery bags have baseball packaging from now through October (during regular baseball season); the theme is "An All American Snack." The company is spreading the word by engaging with followers on all of its social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest) during baseball season.



PROCACCI'S FRUIT TRIO FLAUNTS NEW EAT BRIGHTER! PACKAGING

Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation unveils new Eat Brighter! packaging for its "Fresh Fruit Trio" item in the Garden Sweet line of assorted premium fruit and vegetables. The Fresh Fruit Trio is Procacci Brothers' second item that utilizes Sesame Street-themed packaging, joining Santa Sweets Authentic Grape tomatoes. Available in 4- and 5-pound bags, the Trio is a year-round item comprised of Navel oranges, Granny Smith apples, and either Gala or Red Delicious apples.

NEW PRODUCT

CRUNCH PAK TO LAUNCH THREE PRODUCTS AT UNITED FRESH



Crunch Pak, Cashmere, WA, will launch three items at the United Fresh Expo this year: a DipperZ snack tray featuring the Disney character Olaf from the popular Frozen movie; a Tart Apple with Salted Caramel DipperZ; and a Sweet Apple with Strawberry Greek Yogurt DipperZ as extensions of the Crunch Pak branded DipperZ line. The relationship between Disney and Crunch Pak is an effort to engage kids who need better choices in the healthy snacks category.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Frieda's congratulates the Produce Industry Leadership Class 20



We're especially proud of Frieda's 3rd generation of women leaders - Alex Jackson!



ANNOUNCEMENT

GIUMARRA LAUNCHES NUTRITIONAL AVOCADO INITIATIVE WITH NEW BAG DESIGN

Giumarra Agricom International announces the debut of its new Nature's Partner avocado nutrition initiative spearheaded by a redesigned bulk avocado bag targeting increased consumption of the category. The bag promotes Hass Avocado Board's (HAB's) "Love One Today" nutritional messaging by communicating "naturally good fats + cholesterol free" benefits of avocados. To complement the bag, Giumarra offers its customers Nature's Partner branded avocado racks for retail display purposes. The back of the bag features a HAB-created recipe for an Avocado, Feta, and Apple Sandwich. New, rotating recipes highlighting avocados' versatility and flavor will be included in subsequent production runs of the bag.



ANNOUNCEMENT

BOVA FRESH LAUNCHES IN SOUTH FLORIDA

Boca Raton-based produce entrepreneur and broker, Robert Wilhelm, launches Bova Fresh, LLC, a grower/packer/shipper/broker of fresh fruits and vegetables. Bova will be handling items such as citrus, eastern and western vegetables, peaches, potatoes, onions, with strategic focus on growing and marketing both conventional and organic strawberries, as well as watermelons. Bova Fresh, LLC is currently shipping various fresh items out of Florida, California, and Texas and began its Florida watermelon program out of Arcadia, FL. Next winter, the company is planning to ship both organic and conventional strawberries out of Plant City, FL.

ANNOUNCEMENT

VISION PRODUCE'S PHOENIX FACILITY GOES SOLAR

Vision Produce Company, Los Angeles, CA, installed a solar power generation system at its produce distribution center in Phoenix. It includes 1,930 solar panels and uses a roof-friendly mounting structure. The First Solar Cadmium Telluride solar modules installed in this project are ideal for desert conditions, as the nature of its thin film technology enables them to produce more energy per watt due to their superior performance above rated temperatures. The new system is expected to supply 59 percent of the electricity Vision Produce consumes in Phoenix every year. Vision is funding the cost of this \$536,000- enterprise with support from JP Morgan Chase, as a commitment to sustainability, preservation of the environment and expected cost savings in power usage over the long term.



Vision Produce Company

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ANNOUNCEMENT



TO-JO MUSHROOMS SUPPORTS 13TH ANNUAL PRODUCE FOR KIDS CAMPAIGN

To-Jo Mushrooms, Avondale, PA, is partnering with Orlando, FL-based Produce for Kids to support its relationship with ACME Markets and Feeding America (Produce for Kids's newest philanthropy partner). In addition to a direct contribution to Produce for Kids, To-Jo will donate funds from the sales of its 8-ounce Whole and Sliced Mushrooms through June 4 to support the cause. The campaign is supported at local ACME Stores through in-store signage, online meal information, and many stores are hosting recipe demonstrations, special events, and displays featuring characters from the Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs movie. Recipes include easy-to-prepare items featuring To-Jo products. In-store materials also direct shoppers to the Produce for Kids website where more than 150 produce-centric recipes and healthy tips from real parents are featured.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PLANNING UNDERWAY FOR SOUTH AFRICAN SUMMER CITRUS 2015 SEASON

The Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF), Citrusdal, South Africa, conducted its annual planning sessions for the Summer Citrus export program to the U.S. Much discussion linked the importance of the African Growth & Opportunity Act (AGOA). The purpose of the meetings was to share goals, outline the program for the season, identify potential challenges, and define solutions prior to the first fruits arriving in the U.S. More than 125 representatives involved in the program assembled in the heart of the Western Cape's citrus growing region for the series of meetings that included growers, U.S.-based importers, receivers and service providers, shipping partners, and government representative and representatives from some of the largest retailers in the U.S.



(left to right) Kelly Davis, Wakefern Category Manager for Produce; Suhanra Conradie, CEO of Western Cape Citrus producers Forum; Johan Mouton, Chairman of Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum; Mayda Sotomayor, CEO of SealdSweet at the annual WCCPF Planning Session in Citrusdal, South Africa.

NEW PRODUCT

GREEN GIANT FRESH LAUNCHES NEW CAULIFLOWER CRUMBLES

Green Giant Fresh, Salinas, CA, rolls out new Cauliflower Crumbles in U.S. and Canada, offering consumers a convenient way to enjoy cauliflower. In addition to the time-saving value and consumer appeal of Cauliflower Crumbles, the patent-pending process provides a paleo friendly, gluten-free ingredient, while extending shelf life and preventing discoloration. This extended shelf life and consistent color is beneficial to retailers; and the value-added convenience of Crumbles is ideal for time-starved consumers.



NEW PRODUCT

EXETER PRODUCE LAUNCHES SALANOVA LIVING LETTUCE



Exeter, Ontario greenhouse grower, Exeter Produce, announces the launch of its product line, Salanova Living Lettuce. This unique locally grown product is now available year-round at local supermarkets. It offers freshness and healthy eating with an

excellent shelf life. The product has three times more baby-sized leaves than conventional lettuce, which allows consumers to pick off a few leaves and store the rest for future use as they are sold with the root ball still attached.

ANNOUNCEMENT

NATIONAL MANGO BOARD CELEBRATES MANGO MONTH

For operators, June is prime time to celebrate the mango's contribution to dining pleasures. Self-proclaimed Mango Man, Chef Allen Susser, shares his recipe for a pleasingly spicy Mango & Watermelon Salad on the National Mango Board's website. To achieve his desired effect, Chef Allen seasons refreshing fresh mango and watermelon with pickled jalapeño, then tosses the fruit with garlicky lemon vinaigrette, fragrant cilantro and peppery watercress.



NEW PRODUCT

NEXT LEVEL FRESH LAUNCHES INNOVATIVE SINGLE-SERVE

WHOLE EAR SWEET CORN

Next Level Fresh, a Belle Glade, FL-based marketer, launches Fresh Life Harvest Whole Ear Gourmet Sweet Corn, complete with seasonings such as the delicious chili pepper-lime-flavored Tajin (tah-HEEN). Developed by Next Level Fresh's managing partner, Daniel Whittles, Fresh Life Harvest corn is one of the company's initial products.



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The Value Of Flavor

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Here is the story: The head of produce for a major retailer gets called into the chief executive's office. The chief executive has laid out a blind taste test. Three samples of strawberries are presented. Sample one, from this particular chain, comes in last in the taste test. A more upscale chain had the other two berries — one, part of a lower price range, comes in second place for taste; and a third strawberry, also from this upscale chain, but this time from a top-end range, is clearly most delicious.

The chief executive wants this situation fixed. The head of produce thinks attention is going to have to be paid to the fact that the most delicious of the berries costs more than double what the least tasty berries cost.

Adding complexity to the story, this real life happening took place in England among two stores that both market virtually exclusively under private labels. None of the berries was marketed as any kind of proprietary variety.

The existence of such a wide variety in flavor of products marketed as essentially the same poses large challenges for the industry. Generic promotion efforts seem likely to be less effective if they can't vouch for the consistency of the product.

The immediate response of retailers presented with this scenario is an appeal to consumer sovereignty: We will sell a broad range of products and let consumers make the choice!

Yet this resolution is somewhat problematic too. One can sell many different types of cars, for example, at many different price points. But the price differential is supported either functionally — car A is a subcompact and car B is an extra-large SUV — or by appeals to status and exclusivity — car A is a Chevrolet and car B is a Ferrari.

Yet the flavor of the strawberries seems closer to the essential nature of the product. Surely everyone buys a strawberry in anticipation of a quintessential strawberry flavor or taste.

Consumer sovereignty may be a successful justification, but one wonders if consumers are actually making the choices inferred in this idea of offering consumers a wide range of product. Do consumers actually say to themselves: "I'm going to buy the cheaper strawberry. I know it is not delicious and flavorful like the more expensive one, but I will sacrifice flavor and taste to stay on my budget?"

Isn't it just as likely, maybe even more likely, that consumers assume the higher price point may represent luxury branding — black packaging and so forth — or social and environmental positioning — organic, non-GMO, higher paid labor, etc. — but do not think the core flavor proposition is any different.

Certainly the industry doesn't do much to encourage the notion

that products have flavor differentiation based on price. British supermarkets will simultaneously carry many types of strawberries. These would be labeled in words that vary from chain to chain, but retailers would use words, such as Organic Strawberries, Specialty Strawberries, Essential Strawberries, and King Strawberries or with a geographic or provenance reference, such as Essential British Strawberries, Dutchy Organic Strawberries, Tiptree English Strawberries, etc.

In the United States, there is often even less description! Certainly none of these descriptors would lead a consumer to realize that he or she is buying sub-standard flavor strawberries.

Retailers seem willing to acquiesce in the marketing of distinct branded concepts — say Pink Lady, Kanzi or Jazz apples or Sun World's Sable Seedless or Scarlotta grapes — where the brand is heralding a distinct taste experience. Retailers seem hesitant to acquiesce in the consumer marketing of tranches of flavor, perhaps because such marketing inherently disparages the less flavorful lines.

Yet in a world of cell phone apps, one wonders if the trade shouldn't question the whole idea of selling sub-standard product without qualification. Almost all the online services make a point of ranking each produce item available with a bottom ranking acknowledging that the product is quite bad and a consumer should only buy it if absolutely necessary — say as a minor ingredient in a recipe the consumer really wants to prepare.

Abstractly the idea that retailers give consumers choices is appealing, but the deeper we dive into this subject, the more it seems that retailers — and retailers are the face of the industry to consumers — are not giving consumers the tools needed to allow consumers to make informed choices. So consumers are buying product and finding the flavor disappointing.

We don't really know whether strawberry consumers would pay more if they understood the options, or would switch to another produce item if they saw themselves as making flavor trade-offs. Would they switch to frozen product or non-produce items? Once again, we don't really know.

It does seem, though, that robust flavor is a reasonable expectation by consumers, and if we are going to disappoint, we probably should make that clear. After all, building a brand is about building trust. And we want an industry brand in which consumers feel safe buying fresh produce and knowing they will have an excellent eating experience.

The existence of such a wide variety in flavor of products marketed as essentially the same poses large challenges for the industry.

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JUNE 3 - 4, 2015

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Conference Venue: The Grosvenor House Hotel, London, England

Conference Management: PRODUCE BUSINESS, Boca Raton, FL and FRESH PRODUCE CONSORTIUM, Peterborough, England

Phone: US - (561) 994-1118

UK - 44 (0) 20 3143 3222

Email: info@LondonProduceShow.co.uk

Website: londonproduceshow.co.uk

JUNE 8 - 10, 2015

UNITED FRESH CONVENTION

Conference Venue: McCormick Place Convention Center, Chicago, IL

Conference Management: United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C.

Phone: (202) 303-3420

Email: jwoodside@unitedfresh.org

Website: unitedfreshshow.org

JUNE 8 - 11, 2015

FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE SHOW

Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, IL

Conference Management: Food Marketing Institute, Arlington, VA

Phone: (202) 452-8444 • Fax: (202) 429-4519

Email: mgrizzard@fmi.org • Website: fmi.org

JUNE 8 - 10, 2015

INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXPO

Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, IL

Conference Management: Diversified Business Communications, Portland, ME

Phone: (207) 842-5313 • Fax: (207) 221-1471

Email: customerserve@divcom.com

Website: floriexpo.com

JUNE 28 - 30, 2015

SUMMER FANCY FOOD SHOW

Conference Venue: Jacob Javits Convention Center, New York, NY

Conference Management: Specialty Food Association, New York, NY

Phone: (212) 482-6440 • Fax: (212) 482-6459

Email: eriveria@specialtyfood.com

Website: fancyfoodshows.com

JULY 11 - 14, 2015

INSTITUTE OF FOOD TECHNOLOGIES ANNUAL MEETING + FOOD EXPO

Conference Venue: McCormick Place South, Chicago, IL

Conference Management: Institute of Food Technologists, Chicago, IL

Phone: (312) 782-8424 • Fax: (312) 416-7933

Email: info@ift.org

Website: ift.org

JULY 24 - 26, 2015

PMA FOODSERVICE CONFERENCE TOURS & EXPO 2015

Conference Venue: Monterey Conference Center, Monterey, CA

Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

Phone (302) 738-7100 • Fax: (302) 731-2409

Email: bkeota@pma.com

Website: pma.com

AUGUST 23 - 25, 2015

WESTERN FOODSERVICE & HOSPITALITY EXPO

Conference Venue: Los Angeles Convention Center, Los Angeles, CA

Conference Management: Urban Expositions, Shelton, CT

Phone: (203) 484-8051

Email: atencza@urban-expo.com

Website: westernfoodexpo.com

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Replacing the annual Fresh-Cut Workshop, this conference is an international gathering of colleagues focusing on issues and technologies relevant to the fresh-cut produce industry.

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Conference Management: UC Davis - Post Harvest Technology Center, Davis, CA

Phone: (530) 752-6941

Email: postharvest@ucdavis.edu

Website: fresh-cut2015.ucdavis.edu

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Conference Venue: Chatham Bars Inn, Chatham, MA

Conference Management: New England Produce Council, Burlington, MA

Phone: (781) 273-0444 • Fax: (781) 273-4154

Email: nepc2@rcn.com

Website: newenglandproduceCouncil.com

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Conference Venue: Wild Dunes Resort, Charleston, SC

Conference Management: Southern Produce Council, Millen, GA

Phone: (866) 226-2627

Email: info@seproduceCouncil.com

Website: southerninnovations.seproduceCouncil.com

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Supermarkets Increase Health And Wellness Investment

BY CATHY POLLEY, RPH, VICE PRESIDENT OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS, FMI/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FMI FOUNDATION

More than ever before, food retailers are investing in health and wellness promotions in stores. In 2014, more than half of food retailers (54 percent) established health and wellness programs for both customers and employees. At the same time, a majority of food retailers (61 percent) reported that their companies' overall health and wellness programs and activities increased moderately or significantly between 2013 and 2014.

Increased programming by food retailers highlights a shift in focus from merely talking about health and wellness to creating opportunities for customers and employees to participate in their own health and wellness activities. For example: Price Chopper's "Know Your Produce" advisory program online allows customers to search different produce and learn about an item's nutritional value, peak season, cooking tips, etc.; Carlisle, PA-based Giant Food Stores' "Passport to Nutrition" program provides an interactive toolkit to teach kids about healthy ideas. It's a full school curriculum for ages 8 through 12 years old.

The Food Marketing Institute recently launched a first-of-its-kind collaboration among the FMI Foundation, grocers and their valued customers to share, inspire and help each other prepare more family meals at home. This September, we kick-start National Family Meals Month, a movement to promote the benefits of family meals and help bring mealtime home to the family table. (Learn more about this exciting initiative by visiting fmifamilymeals.com.)

With an impressive 96 percent of food retailers committed to expanding in-store health and wellness initiatives in the coming years, it is clear that today's food retailers (70 percent) identify this area as one with significant business growth opportunity.

Measuring Success

As investment in health and wellness activities increases, so does the need for companies to set quantitative business goals to track and measure program effectiveness

With an impressive 96 percent of food retailers committed to expanding in-store health and wellness initiatives in the coming years, it is clear that today's food retailers (70 percent) identify this area as one with significant business growth opportunity.

and determine the path forward. In 2014, more than 63 percent of retailers established health and wellness business goals and implemented mechanisms necessary to track results and to measure success. The most commonly utilized tracking mechanism today — employed by nearly 90 percent of companies — is quantitative customer participation. Qualitative respondent feedback comes in second at 80 percent, and at just below 50 percent, sales figures ranks third. Despite a 30 to 40 percent drop, the effectiveness of sales figures to track results rivals the reported effectiveness of both customer participation and feedback.

Rx For Implementation

The trend is to empower pharmacy leadership teams (59 percent) and nutrition leadership teams (50 percent) to guide companywide health and wellness strategy. In instances where health and wellness strategy decisions remain with a company's president and chief executive officer (36 percent), the pharmacy and nutrition teams are often still charged with implementation. Sixty-seven percent of retailers report that their pharmacists and dietitians work together to plan and develop health and wellness programs. For many, this professional collaboration extends to how they service health-seeking customers.

Forty-eight percent report collaboration on customer-specific recommendations, and 52 percent report customer referrals between pharmacy and nutrition services.

Whereas the pharmacist is a well-established, trusted health care provider at most supermarket chains, the supermarket dietitian is a relatively new phenomenon. However, with 95 percent of retailers now employing dietitians at some level — data suggest the phenomenon is here to stay, and for good reason.

Retailers are not only interested in servicing sick customers; 74 percent report organizing health and wellness offerings to balance engagement with both well and sick customers. To add value for health-minded customers, supermarkets are turning to dietitian-provided services like store tours to help shoppers navigate the grocery aisles.

Retailers are also employing chefs in greater numbers — 76 percent employ a chef at all or some stores. A near equivalent 74 percent now offer cooking classes. In sync with these trends toward culinary and healthy eating, 84 percent of retailers report actively promoting communal eating, such as family meals. While relatively few of these programs have been formalized, the family meal concept and research supporting the health benefits have clearly been embraced by retailers across the country.



Data for the 2014 *Report on Retailer Contributions to Health and Wellness* was generated by a survey conducted among FMI members in December 2014. Survey respondents represent a strong sampling of food retailers' health and wellness initiatives nationwide. It is estimated that survey respondents represent a total of more than 6,800 stores, including local, regional and national retail operations. The location of the stores operated spans every region of the United States. Data analysis was conducted by The Ginger Network, LLC, a marketing communications firm based in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

A New Vision Of The Grocery Store

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

It is undeniable that supermarket retailers have good reason to focus on health and wellness programs. Health care is one of the fastest growing areas of the economy, and there is a sense that traditional methods of delivering health care, mostly through doctors, is simply too expensive. So the future seems to be an odd dumbbell, with lots of primary care providers — such as physicians assistants and nurses delivering primary care often at an in-store clinic — and then very high-end specialists to help when one is discovered to have a serious illness such as cancer.

It is also clear why supermarkets would want to emphasize various healthy eating objectives. The basic retail model is for supermarkets to sell what customers want to buy, which isn't typically healthy. So by emphasizing dieticians and healthy eating programs, supermarkets position themselves on the side of the angels. Retailers can be presented to the public, the media, non-governmental organizations, and the government as doing its bit to fight obesity and make the populace healthier.

Fighting for programs that encourage family dinners at home make retailers look engaged and concerned, and it allows stores to promote something most clearly in their interest — eating at home.

Yet the exact role supermarkets play in boosting health is uncertain. Having a dietician on staff is nice from an image point of view and, perhaps, a dietician can sway consumers on the margins through a column, video or interview with a journalist. But dieticians aren't given authority to veto assortment choices. Even if they were, people are very diverse. Obesity may be the big, publicly discussed problem. But there are people who are underweight, young children with different nutritional

Maybe the grocery store of tomorrow won't actually stock much food, but have health advisors ordering for customers.

needs, people undergoing chemo-therapy, people who exercise many hours, etc. The issue is what people choose, not what is available.

Somewhere in all this, though, one senses a new definition of the grocery store beginning to emerge. The dietician, the chef, the pharmacist, the in-store clinic, the cooking school, etc., somehow retailers are sensing that the days when they could point to consumer choice as justification for selling anything are winding down.

When one looks to purchase stocks, one has to fill out an information sheet that, among other things, forces an individual to declare his or her investment goals. Is it preservation of capital or a wild race to maximize returns? Is all you have in this one account? Or do have many reserves elsewhere?

Perhaps we could imagine a world developing where consumers would make similar declarations with their eating and health goals, and grocers would collaborate with consumers to help them achieve their goals or the goals set for the family.

How this might evolve is unclear. Will it be mandatory? We require people to get prescriptions for many medicines, yet the food one eats, the type, the quality, and the quantity can impact one's health just as dramatically.

Will it be an upscale indulgence? Like having a personal trainer, whereby the rich will get advised and they and their families will become healthier than those who cannot afford the counseling?

Or maybe technology will bring what is now costly advice down to a price almost everyone can afford.

Imagine your Apple Watch cautioning you that you are buying whole milk, and your goal is weight reduction, so you would better off with skim. Or maybe you are picking up a prepared food, and your Artificial Intelligence system reminds you that you are on a low-sodium diet, so it downloads a simple recipe telling you how to make the dish yourself with less sodium.

Maybe the grocery store of tomorrow won't actually stock much food. Maybe it will only have a little convenience store-like section. The space might be given over to counselors and medical personnel of different types, and — in the context of working with them — one orders everything, but the items are delivered directly to the home. The real estate in grocery stores is better used for interactive engagement.

It all seems a little science fiction right now, but the trends are there. Though the past is always prologue to the future, the future can't always be grasped from the present.

pb

PMA FOODSERVICE BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #40

CALAVO FOODS
 Santa Paula, CA

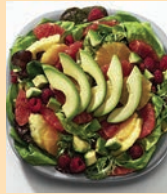
You have health-conscious eaters, we have the dessert they'll love. Calavo Avocado Chocolate Mousse — serve alone or as a filling in your cakes and pies. Stop by to try our Avocado Hummus with Red Onion.



BOOTH #41

CALAVO GROWERS
 Santa Paula, CA

With avocado demand increasing, why not choose a supplier with an abundant supply, the best quality and competitive pricing? Ripe, green, or any degree in between.



BOOTH #106
CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION
 Irvine, CA

Fresh California Avocados are at their peak. Visit the California Avocado Commission to learn more about the quality, versatility and reliability of U.S.-grown fruit.



BOOTH #23
CHURCH BROTHERS
 Salinas, CA

Church Brothers produces more than 500 premium fresh vegetable SKUs year-round for foodservice. See our heirloom red spinach and other new salad blends.



BOOTH #67

CRUNCH PAK
 Cashmere, WA

Crunch Pak, the sliced apple specialist, will unveil variety-specific peel and reseal bags at the PMA Foodservice Expo. Our other new staple for foodservice operators is our sweet apple peeled items



designed just for foodservice operators available in multi-packs and a 12-ounce bag.

BOOTH #26

DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE
 Coral Gables, FL

Del Monte Fresh Produce offers retailers and foodservice operators an array of innovative solutions to address the changing tastes and lifestyle needs of today's consumers. Our extensive distribution network allows just-in-time deliveries of our premium quality fresh products to your doorstep.



BOOTH #137

DUDA FARM FRESH
 Oviedo, FL

See the latest labor-saving, fresh-cut celery and radish items at the booth for Duda Farm Fresh Foods. Duda will also feature its Simple Salad in Seconds at the expo.



BOOTH #125
GIUMARRA COMPANIES
 Los Angeles, CA



The Giumarra Companies is a global family working together with our grower and customer partners to deliver high-quality fruits and vegetables packed under the Nature's Partner brand.

BOOTH #7

HAMPTON FARMS
 Edenton, NC

Hampton Farms is a processor of nut and nut butter products. The company has a true seed-to-shelf story, selling peanut seed to American farms and working with them throughout the growing season to ensure the finest quality crop year after year.



BOOTH #32

HMC FARMS
 Kingsburg, CA



HMC Farms, the pioneer of year-round foodservice grapes, continually creates new solutions to address today's consumers and the applications they seek.

BOOTH #50

IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION
 Eagle, ID

The Idaho Potato Commission is the marketing arm for the entire Idaho potato industry and represents more than 35 shippers, many of which are exhibiting at this show.



BOOTH #139

MANN'S FRESH VEGETABLES
 Salinas, CA

Mann Packing is a leading third-generation supplier of premium fresh vegetables, specialty lettuces and commodity products to the foodservice industry. View our full line at our booth.



BOOTH #69

MISSION PRODUCE
 Oxnard, CA

Mission Produce is a global packer, grower, importer and distributor of avocados. Our ripening and distribution centers in California, Denver, Chicago, New Jersey, Atlanta, Dallas, Seattle and Toronto, enable just-in-time delivery to customers nationwide. Mission also has operations in Mexico, Peru, New Zealand and Chile.



BOOTH #66

NASH PRODUCE
 Nashville, NC

Introducing Mr. Yam's 1.5-pound steamable bag, a perfect solution for a healthy buffet item that is ready in just 8 minutes. Petite potatoes make a wonderful side addition and save time while tasting fresh and delicious.



BOOTH #120

OCEAN MIST FARMS
 Castroville, CA

Ocean Mist Farms, the largest grower of artichokes in North America, will showcase multiple items at the PMA Foodservice Expo — including Heirloom artichokes, a 3-pound package of Kalettes and Brussels sprouts in multiple bags and cartons.



BOOTH #76

PAKSENSE
 Boise, ID



Cold Chain Monitoring at your Fingertips. PakSense helps restaurants, retailers, suppliers, and growers ensure that only the freshest and safest foods reach consumers. Learn more about our comprehensive cold-chain monitoring system, AutoSense.

PMA FOODSERVICE BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #81 POTANDON PRODUCE Idaho Falls, ID

America's leading marketer of fresh potatoes and onions. Potandon Produce can provide complete category solutions for retail, wholesale and foodservice customers.



BOOTH #131 PROPHET NORTH AMERICA Bakersfield, CA

Prophet North America is dedicated to meeting the software needs of the produce industry. We offer management solutions fully configurable to incorporate end-to-end functionality. Let us help you accomplish your profitability goals.



BOOTH #82 SAN MIGUEL PRODUCE Oxnard, CA

"The Growing Standard of Greens." Vertically integrated grower/processor from California and Georgia celebrating 20 years of the original Cut 'N Clean Greens. Organic greens, Asian vegetables and Persian herbs are also available.



BOOTH #99 SILVER CREEK SOFTWARE Boise, ID



Accounting solutions for produce distribution, processing, inventory, sales, purchasing, traceability and financial management software. Windows-based for the produce industry.

BOOTH #140 SUNKIST GROWERS Valencia, CA

With thousands of grower members in California and Arizona, the Sunkist cooperative reflects the values and legacy of its 120-year history: multi-generational family farmers committed to growing the highest quality citrus, being responsible stewards of their land and dedicating themselves to innovation.



BOOTH #63 WADA FARMS Idaho Falls, ID

Wada Farms Marketing Group has been family-owned since 1939 and has grown to be one of the largest growers, packers and marketers of potato, onion and sweet potatoes in the country. Starting with our 30,000 acres of farm ground in Idaho, we specialize in Russets, colored potatoes, organics and specialty items. Add our logistics and outstanding customer service.



BOOTH #49 WESTMORELAND- TOPLINE FARMS Leamington, Ontario, Canada

Westmoreland-TopLine Farms grows the most flavorful gourmet greenhouse produce year-round, direct from the grower. Visit our booth and add some flavor to your relationships.



BOOTH #98 WEST PAK AVOCADO Murrieta, CA

We invite you to learn about our history, dedication to quality, innovation, and service, through our value-added services, "JustRipe!" avocado pre-conditioning program, and technology-driven category management expertise.



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Tesco Must Go 'Cold-Turkey' To Overcome Crack-Cocaine-Like Addiction To Supplier Cash

When Tesco made its move into the U.S. as Fresh & Easy, the stores failed to realise the sales that had been anticipated. Being that the product sold is the cheapest thing a retailer has — with labour, rent, energy, marketing, etc., being the majority of costs — Tesco did what seemed to be the intelligent thing; it deeply discounted its products, offering coupons of various denominations.

So it might have mailed out a coupon giving consumers US\$5 off a purchase of US\$20. The idea, of course, was to gain consumer trial on the new Fresh & Easy concept and hope the consumers would return as satisfied customers ready to pay full price. The price strategy didn't work.

The problem was that consumers brought in by the couponing did not return as full-price customers. In fact, the very nature of the promotion attracted consumers mainly interested in discounts, and when the discounts stopped, they didn't return and business collapsed.

Long-term, the answer was obvious: invest in a better offer, invest in marketing that sold quality and values, and woo in the clients who cared about the things Fresh & Easy tried to do — as opposed to being promotional. But that was a long-term proposition. The panic of seeing sales drop every time the retailer turned off the juice kept Fresh & Easy discounting to the end — rather than building a sustainable competitive advantage.

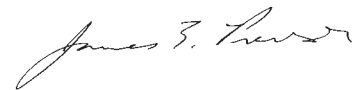
Now, in the UK, Tesco announced a restructuring of supplier relations, with

plans over the next two years to reduce supplier incentive payments, such as slotting fees, promotional fees, etc., from 24 types to just three. That may simplify the process, but it won't solve the problem, which is that Tesco and many retailers are hooked on supplier cash and need to bite the bullet of a few horrible quarters as they switch to a more sustainable business model.

The issue is not how many types of payments retailers demand from their suppliers. It is not how much money they get from these fees. It is not even the potential for abuse with the timing and recognition of these payments. The issue is how retailers shifted focus away from delighting consumers to one that is obsessed with supplier cash. Once again, Tesco has to overcome a crack cocaine-like addiction, this time to supplier payments.

In a sense, there is no problem with a supermarket demanding fees from a supplier to gain slots in the warehouse or shelf space in the store. Although some suppliers get upset, calling them "bribes" and using similar pejoratives, in fact, they are fees paid to the business, not the individual, and are simply a function of how that particular retailer has decided to make money.

In fact, most of these fees were not even an invention of retailers. In the U.S., the idea for slotting fees came from the suppliers themselves. Partly they were a response to President Nixon's initiative to freeze wages and prices. As rumours of wage and price controls led vendors to



JIM PREVOER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

want to raise prices dramatically so they would be at a high level when such price controls were imposed, vendors offered large fees to compensate.

In addition, large consumer packaged goods companies, notably Procter & Gamble, saw such fees as a competitive edge. It is very hard to always have the hot laundry detergent, but if such companies could raise the ante to play the large retail game, requiring the ability to pay substantial fees up front, then smaller players would have difficulty gaining entry.

Tesco announced that after the restructuring, there will be three areas acceptable for supplier payments: premium positioning, extra volume, and compensation for recalls.

The recall issue is complicated, mostly because many recalls are not always government-required and the compensation levels are often excessive. But this is a separate issue.

So we are left with special payments for premium positioning and volume.

LOCALLY GROWN MAMEY.
Sweet!



For over **50** years J&C Tropicals has been the most diverse and largest locally grown grower and distributor of tropical fruits, roots & vegetables in South Florida. Like our Mamey, always fresh, always sweet. It's no surprise that today we continue our tradition of delivering fresh, good quality products grown right in your back yard. What can we say? **It's in our roots.**



The problem here, of course, is that the decision regarding product placed on a premium end should not be determined by the ability or willingness of a supplier to make a payment; it should be determined by what will best serve the consumer, with the notion that service to the consumer is the root to maximising sales and profits.

Even the idea that a retailer should receive a supplier payment for increasing the volume of its product sold is very dangerous for a retailer. Why? Because retailers can increase volumes of purchases in many ways. They can expand distribution by putting the product in more stores; they can expand the merchandising of the product, incorporate it in ads and even force distribution down to stores that don't want that much product. They can pre-buy and store product.

Many retailers are hooked on supplier cash and need to bite the bullet of a few horrible quarters as they switch to a more sustainable business model.

Many of these strategies can sometimes be wise — compelling stores to sell a new product with long-term potential. But, whether executing on any of these strategies is wise or not is a question independent of whether the chain can earn a vendor bonus on doing this.

Tesco would be much better off announcing that it will accept no supplier payments but will insist on the lowest possible prices.

Then, everything Tesco does can work

around delighting consumers. Nothing could more quickly reinvigorate Tesco than sending word down the ranks that from now on, Tesco is dedicated to making money on the sell, not the buy ... that great merchandising and extraordinary marketing are the traits henceforth to be rewarded ... that Tesco is going to earn its money from now on as a fantastic merchant.

All over the world, the fastest growing retail concepts are built around a laser-tight focus on the consumer. Whole Foods Market, Costco, Aldi, on down to fast growing ethnic independents, succeed by looking at their consumer base and adapting to have the right assortment.

An independent Latino retailer in Los Angeles goes to the wholesale market and finds soft tomatoes, too soft to make it through the receiving standards of a large chain, but this retailer knows that he has a customer base that wants to make salsa, and these soft tomatoes are perfect for that. So he buys the product at a bargain price, re-merchandises the store to give the salsa tomatoes a big display at the store entrance and winds up offering his clientele a perfect product at a value price. And all he ever thought about was delighting his consumer.

A massive chain, such as Aldi, adjusts its specifications to buy a different sized apple, landing itself in the "sweet spot" where price and quality intersect, thus keeping the chain's focus right on the value proposition it offers consumers.

This is the world all retailers now live in, and all have a choice. To the degree they focus on supplier cash, they will be vulnerable to retailers who use their time and expertise to focus on winning over consumers.

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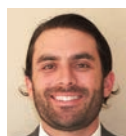
Meet the class of 2015

JACOB ABRAMSON
PETE AIELLO
DEAN ANDES
MATTHEW V. BLACKWELL
ADRIAN CAPOTE
NICK CHAPPELL
ALEX COTO KELLY CRANER
JOSEPH J. D'AMICO JR.
RYAN EASTER
ANDREW ENGLES
F. SCOTT FEIN BLAIR GREENHILL
TRISH JAMES KRISTA JONES
PATRICK ANDREW KELLY LYNSEY KENNEDY
NICK LANGEL
BRIAN MAGUIRE
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JASON STEMM
MICHAEL STROCK MELISSA SYLTE
CHRIS THOMSEN
SCOTT VANDERVOET
JOB VILLANUEVA JAMIE VOSEJPKA
JENNIFER WESTERHOFF
MEGAN ZWEIG

UNDER FORTY

*Listed alphabetically by last name.



Jacob Abramson, 32
Product Manager
Markon Cooperative
Salinas, CA

Hometown: Salinas, CA

Hobbies: Golf, tennis, traveling, cooking, working out, snowboarding, hiking

Personal: Married

Community: Gives to YMCA each year; practicing Judaism; assists in his temple's annual fundraiser; Central Coast Young Farmer and Rancher meetings; Corral de Tierra Country Club member

Motto in Life: You cannot have a million dollar dream with a minimum wage work ethic.

Professional Accomplishments: Abramson started his produce career as a quality inspector roughly eight years ago with Salinas, CA-based Markon Cooperative. In this role, he inspected fields as well as visited processing plants and coolers. His main responsibility was ensuring Markon's stringent private label specifications

were met at the field and packing level. Just before the end of his first year, he was offered a buying position in the Markon office. He started buying citrus, melons, bell peppers, squash, chili peppers and avocados. After two years, he moved to buying Northwest items such as apples, potatoes and onions. A year later, he moved to his current role, purchasing Salinas and Yuma vegetables (also known as the lettuce and leaf desk). He currently manages approximately 25 percent of Markon's business as well as buying fresh produce for more than 70 distribution centers throughout the U.S. and Canada. His duties include developing category knowledge and expertise, building and maintaining relationships as well as creating and managing processes. Major duties entail negotiating and settling prices, communicating current markets, supply, quality, forecasting markets, seeking price deals to offer the membership and ensuring 100 percent fill of orders in Markon's private label.

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

A: In the next five years I hope to hold an upper management or director role where I am making bigger, overall decisions for the company. I hope to continue learning from my peers and those above me. I look forward to gaining respect from industry leaders as someone who understands the industry, is motivated in my career and has something to teach as well.

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

A: Over time, you realize how important relationship building is in the produce industry. You count on strong relationships to get you through tough challenges that arise.

Q: What advice would you give to someone new to the produce industry?

A: My advice would be to learn, establish and

build strong relationships through your journey. One of Markon's key motives is "People Matter." It really goes back to the Golden Rule: Treat others how you would like to be treated. Communicating effectively and working well with people will get you a long way. I was told very early in my career by a highly respectable veteran in the produce industry to never "lose your temper" and "keep cool" as your reputation is always on the line. Those words have always stuck with me and in tough situations are in the back of my mind. I would also tell them to learn as much as possible and not just your own job duties. Stay current with the news and trends within the industry and know what other departments do and how they operate within your company. Knowing more about your customers and your competitors doesn't hurt either — in fact you should always know what your competitors are doing and what the customer expects.

Q: How has the industry changed in your tenure?

A: I started in 2007 right before the economy crashed, which I believe created a dramatic change for the industry. Pricing became the focus more than ever. During this time, we saw many companies having to let go of employees and some even went out of business. This made obtaining competitive pricing, capturing more units, cutting cost and a strong will to succeed even more important for our company's existence. Today, companies are expanding their roles and products, are becoming more versatile, more innovative and diverse and I am seeing a stronger focus on customer service. Business is a right that is earned not a privilege, and that became apparent more than ever since 2008.

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

A: A couple big trends on the horizon are technology and the movement to organic/local growers. Technology is opening the door for innovation. Drones are entering the agricultural world for food safety and monitoring quality and harvesting equipment and processing facilities are becoming more productive and efficient because of technology. Mechanical harvesters requiring far fewer people than traditional ways of harvesting produce are now being used due to labor shortages. Consumption of organic fruits and vegetables is growing, and I believe it will continue to grow due to increase of health concerns and their hesitations of conventional growing methods with respect to pesticides and GMO's. Supporting local and small farmers is a strong movement today. Buying fruits and vegetables from your local/organic farmer implies the

produce is fresher, healthier, and better for the environment leaving a smaller carbon footprint.



Pete Aiello, 40
Owner/General Manager
Uesugi Farms, Inc.
Gilroy, CA

Hometown: Morgan Hill, CA

Hobbies: Snowskiing, ice hockey, skeet/trap shooting, attending professional sporting events

Personal: Father of two children

Community: Founder and principal of Michael Aiello Memorial Agricultural Scholarship Fund; Santa Clara County Farm Bureau board member and past president; Central Coast Groundwater Coalition board member; Heritage Bank of Commerce advisory board member.

Motto in Life: No matter what adversity or challenges await you when you wake up in the morning, get up, dress up, show up, and never give up.

Professional Accomplishments: Since the age of 7, Aiello had his impact in the business his father started in 1979. From working with the Napa cabbage harvesting crew, to picking peppers, to forklift driver and shipping receiving manager, he worked in every position at Uesugi Farms. Now as general manager and co-owner, he helped engineer a 365 percent growth in revenue since taking over in 2002. During this time, he's pushed Uesugi Farms into new growing areas (Brentwood, Holtville, Maricopa) and pushed acreage expansion in Gilroy and Mexico. He's helped advance efficiency in growing practices and harvest, and implemented new innovative packs and products.

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

A: I was born into this wonderful industry and fell in love with it at a very young age. I remember riding along with Dad in his pickup helping him check fields, count rows, fix sprinkler heads, turn pumps on and off. He even taught me how to weld and operate various kinds of equipment, such as forklifts and tractors. I loved being outside, active, and playing in the dirt. I specifically remember many sunrises and sunsets out in the fields.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: I want to see Uesugi continue to prosper by adding acreage, increasing production, developing new business and by growing our portfolio of commodities and products. While we already have a year-round operation with our various

growing areas, I see a lot of potential in Mexico. There is a lot of business to do there. It is my goal to fill this supply gap in the next five years. Also, I want to see Uesugi get involved in the value-added business at the retail level, which means new products, and specialty packaging. The modern-day consumer demands this kind of convenience and innovation, and there is a ton of growth coming in this sector. One last focus I have is to increase our presence in the organic sector. There is a quickly growing demand for organic products, so we need to be there and provide the supply.

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

A: How to be more political and diplomatic. When you're a young professional with all kinds of fire in your belly, sometimes there is a tendency to charge ahead full speed without regard for side effects or consequences. It's important to think and act quickly and decisively, but you need to be cognizant of humanity, personalities, egos — there is a ripple effect with every decision you make and you need to be aware of where those waves are going.

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

A: Besides the company's growth and increased efficiencies that have taken place during my watch, I designed and oversaw construction of our new cold storage facility, photovoltaic solar system (which offsets 100 percent of our energy usage at our company headquarters) and retail store (where we sell our products directly to the public, along with products from other local farmers).

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

A: Urban/indoor farms, organic production and boutique/hobby farms are thriving. But, there will always be a need for the larger, conventional and outdoor growing operations. We simply cannot sustain the growing population of our planet without these big players in the game.



Dean Andes, 30
Produce Buyer
Four Seasons Produce Inc.
Ephrata, PA

Hometown: Lockport, NY

Hobbies: President of the Reading Rugby Football Club; riding motorcycles

Personal: Married with one child

Community: Volunteer to build the sport of rugby



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at the youth high school level. This program (Exeter Rugby) has won multiple tournaments and placed very well in its league since the program's inception.

Motto in Life: It is impossible to excel at something you don't enjoy.

Professional Accomplishments: Andes has worked his way up through the ranks at Four Seasons Produce Inc. He began at Four Seasons Produce in 2006 as a ripening associate and worked full-time while finishing a bachelor's degree from The Pennsylvania State University — Berks campus. During this time he learned a lot about how the company worked from the operations side and worked hard to lay the foundation for strong relationships within various areas of the company. Upon completing his college coursework in 2009, he transitioned into a buying position and hit the ground running. He essentially took over and expanded the organic department at Four Seasons and was promoted to handle the full line of potatoes, onions, tropicals, bananas, and value added products. Through relationship building, he has effectively managed conventional and organic fruits and vegetables, growing these business relationships and understanding the variables that impact market trends and pricing. During the last 12 months, he has been charged with helping a team select a new ERP software system that will drive the way the company does business; he currently sits on this team as a subject matter expert for procurement. He has also been recognized for exemplifying the company's core values by Four Seasons' chief executive.

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

A: I moved to Pennsylvania in 2006 and applied with Four Seasons Produce. At first, I was attracted to the beautiful facility, the nice cool warehouse in the hot-humid summer, and the vast array of friendly faces as you walked through the facility. However, it didn't take me long to realize I had started working for a company that is truly best in class at what they do. It is very humbling for me to be part of the food supply chain.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I really found my passion for produce in buying and building the relationships with the people I work with. I love working with the growers and farmers directly and the opportunity to make a difference in their lives with every purchase made. The passion growers put into the ground and their crop is contagious and inspiring. Simply put, my job isn't a job because I am passionate about it — I guess that's the best part.

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

A: The future is now. Organics are a huge trend and will continue to be a huge trend in the industry in the near future.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Soak the knowledge and experiences in like a sponge from the people around you. Take every opportunity you can to learn about product, growing, retailing, and any other aspect of this industry because it's truly fascinating; and it will come in handy.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: I think the industry needs to showcase how much fun and how dynamic the produce industry can be. I have met some of the most interesting and fun loving individuals that absolutely love what they do in this industry. Really showcasing this side could be very contagious and attractive for a recent college grad. Who wants to go buy car parts where the market changes quarterly or yearly when you can be involved in markets that are changing by the hour or even minute — now that's dynamic.



Matthew V. Blackwell, 34
Vice President
Aurora Products, Inc.
Orange, CT

Hometown: Monroe, CT

Hobbies: Brewing, playing guitar, auto racing

Personal: Married with two children

Community: Annual donor to Paws, a no-kill animal shelter

Motto in Life: Set realistic goals, and achieve them. Be a shark only when necessary, always moving and constantly trying to better yourself.

Professional Accomplishments: Blackwell started his career as a research analyst at ACNielsen BASES in Parsippany, NJ. After a few years working on the Colgate-Palmolive and Bayer accounts, Blackwell decided to transition into his family's business, Aurora, as operations manager, and later, as director of operations. In his current position as vice president, he oversees every step of the production process — including purchasing, receiving, quality control, shipping, sales and marketing.

His biggest accomplishment may be the oversight and management of the company's relocation from Stratford, CT to Orange, CT. The company consolidated the contents of two leased facilities and bought a custom-built

100,000-square-foot facility. The move allowed Blackwell to design the new production floor and facility layout in a way most conducive to efficient and intuitive production. His next big challenge will be overseeing the addition of a 40,000-square-foot warehouse to the existing building.

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

A: I grew up in the family business. My father and mother started Amalgamated Produce Inc. when I was a boy and so I've been able to follow the development and evolution of the company. In a way, Aurora and I grew up together. I remember spending weekends with my mother packing dried apples and cranberries for Aurora. The following weekend, my Dad would have us assist in packing sprouts for Amalgamated Produce. Literally and figuratively, we survived off of produce.

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

A: Finding work-home balance. After a stressful day, it is tremendously difficult to not bring some of that stress and frustration home with you. However, a 2-year old daughter has no idea (nor does she care) about your issues. She just wants a hug.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: The Food Safety Modernization Act was a great start, but the implementation of it has not been as seamless as it could be. I know from personal experience that the FDA is severely underfinanced. While it would prefer to be a proactive entity, is more reactive. At the same time, I believe the recall process needs to be re-evaluated. I read all too often of companies closing up shop because of a recall that has not harmed a single individual. We need a safety net of sorts, particularly for our smaller and/or newer companies.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Attend the shows and stay active in our community — it is smaller than you may think. Always understand what your competition is doing and never sit still.

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

A: For today's consumer, it is no longer enough to just consume the food and judge it on its cost and taste. Now, consumers want to know everything about where and how that food was



INNOVATION

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grown, whether the people picking it were fairly compensated, whether or not it is a genetically modified product, organic, kosher, free trade certified, carbon neutral, etc. (The trend is toward socially responsible, symbiotic plants that care as much about the environment and the end consumer as they do about the bottomline.)



Adrian Capote, 38
VP Of Sales/Owner
J&C Tropicals
Miami

Hometown: Miami Beach

Hobbies: Diving, fishing, boating, hunting

Personal: Married with 3 children

Motto in Life: Wake up every day and be thankful for another day. Be happy, enjoy life to the fullest. Family is critical to how we operate. Live a healthy life, so I can live another day. Control my own destiny. I don't allow materialistic things to get in the way of my life. Everything has a solution, and don't have any regrets.

Professional Accomplishments: With 20 years of experience in the industry, Capote is a top producer in tropical produce sales. He leads a team of eight to exceed monthly sales goals and is dedicated to his customers. Agriculture and farming has been in Capote's family for many generations. Shortly after graduating high school in 1985 he realized college wasn't for him and that he instead wanted to immediately become engaged in the family business. He started from the bottom, in the repack department, moved on to being a picker, loading trucks, and then to shipping manager. In 1997 he was brought into the sales department. After analyzing the business and realizing that 100 percent of the business was in the hands of terminal markets wholesalers, he undertook a change in the sales department culture. In 2004 he took on the role of vice president of sales and focused all efforts on revamping the clientele base — a risky proposition. The company immediately went from a 100 percent wholesale customer base to 50 percent retail and 50 percent wholesale with continuous overall growth.

Q: How did you end up in the produce industry?

A: My father and grandfather were farming in Cuba since the early 1900s. My father came to the land of opportunity in 1959 as a political refugee and established J&C Tropicals. At an early age I was exposed to the farming and sales world. In the summers my father would take my brothers and me to avocado fields to harvest. We would pack the fruit and head to

the market the following morning to sell our products. It was during those days that I realized I wanted to be in the family business.

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

A: I go to my customers and also to my mentors who helped me get to where I am. Most importantly, I go to my family.

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

A: How important it is to be in front of your customers and growers — less time in the office. I realized more quality time with customers and suppliers and gaining a better understanding of their needs is what drives the business forward.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Continue to educate upcoming generations. Also, have better government support. Many industries like the automotive industry have tremendous support from our government. Farmers have the highest risk factor of any industry. We depend on so many unforeseen variables, such as weather and crop threats from diseases and insects.

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

A: Farm to table, locally grown, health and freshness. In the past five years the largest growth in sales and demand we have experienced has been in our locally grown programs. Consumers want fresh and organic. We all want healthy lives and healthier produce.



Nick Chappell, 33
Sales Representative
California Giant Berry Farms
Watsonville, CA

Hometown: Watsonville, CA

Hobbies: Hunting, Fishing, Snowboarding, Boating, Softball, Golf, and being with his family

Personal: Married with one daughter

Community: Spring Lamb Annual BBQ Committee and Event benefitting the American Cancer Society; Annual California Giant BBQ to benefit local foundation, Jacobs Heart; supporting kids battling cancer; various other Santa Cruz County charitable organizations.

Motto in Life: If there's a will, there's a way.

Professional Accomplishments: Chappell began working at California Giant Berry Farms straight out of college 10 years ago as a coordinator. Now in sales, he works with some of the company's

largest accounts. In his role at Cal Giant, he strives to exceed quarterly sales goals, build strategic relationships with key customers and generate new business growth through industry networking.

For the past seven years, he has posted the highest sales in the office. He develops and implements annual and weekly strategic sales plans to accommodate corporate goals, and partners with field personnel to ensure accurate forecasting and inventory. Chappell maintains strong client relationships through face-to-face interaction and delivers tailored sales presentations to key accounts. He also monitors market trends, product innovations and industry competition, manages the sales support team and contributes to marketing efforts.

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

A: Currently the water situation here in California is a concern. Additional challenges within our business include the decreasing availability of labor; rising costs to the farmer with material and fuel prices; and, of course, the daily challenge provided by Mother Nature.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more personal interaction with our customers. With increased advances in technology, EDI, and electronic communication I am concerned we are getting further and further away from those valuable relationships with our customer. We spend less time across the desk or across the furrow learning about each other's business.

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

A: Being part of industry networking and educational opportunities like the Emerging Leaders through the PMA, being selected as one of four recipients of the 2014 United Fresh Caplan Family Scholarship, having the highest sales in our office for the past seven years, and most recently forming Chappell Farms, LLC starting with a ten acre ranch of blackberries.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Have a "yes" attitude, seize every opportunity that will allow you to continue to learn, take initiative, and put your career first. Be a leader in your own way — you don't have to be in a leadership role to be a leader.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Stay up to date with technology, including social media, apps, etc. Reach out to those who are not directly connected with a close friend or family member who is already in the produce business. Also, I think the produce industry trade associations need to keep developing new programs targeting young people into produce.



Alex Coto, 39
Senior Sales Executive
Robinson Fresh
Eden Prairie, MN

Hometown: McKinney, TX

Hobbies: Exercise and sports

Personal: Married for 14 years with 2 children

Community: Part of both St. Gabriel Catholic Church and St. Mark Catholic Church; supports St. Jude Children's Hospital

Motto in Life: Treat others as you would want them to treat you.

Professional Accomplishments: Coto has been involved in the produce industry since his father worked for Dole Pineapples in Honduras for more than 30 years. He grew up between pineapple fields and working summers at the Dole offices in La Ceiba, Honduras. After graduating from college at Louisiana State University (LSU), he took a position with C.H. Robinson Worldwide (CHRW) in New Orleans. In less than three years he became the sourcing manager for the New Orleans branch. Internal changes in the company moved him to Houston and finally to Dallas. In his 17-year career with CHRW, he has held many positions including key account manager, produce manager, sales manager and now his current position as senior sales executive.

In his current position, he manages a team that has been instrumental in diversifying and expanding the business portfolio from primarily wholesale based to include major retailers. He provides complete supply chain solutions leveraging product, service centers and transportation solutions to meet customer's needs. His flexible nature builds winning relationships. He has earned several "Produce Vendor of the Year" awards from his retail accounts. He is a graduate of Robinson's Key Account Sales Program (KASP) and is a recipient of the Sourcing Performance Excellence Award. He spends a good deal of time attending regional food shows and touring customer groups through major growing regions worldwide — connecting retailers to growers.

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

A: Growing up in the Dole Pineapple operation in La Ceiba, Honduras, I always had pineapples

around my house and that is where the love for the land started. I pursued this natural passion for the industry by getting my first degree in Agricultural Studies and a second degree in Agribusiness at LSU. The people who knew me from the start, know it hasn't been easy since English is my second language. However my knowledge of farming and crops helped compensate for that. I had the pleasure of working for a veteran in the industry, Duane Leier at CHRW, who pretty much took me under his wing and taught me as much as he could.

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

A: I'm very proud of reviving our Chilean Welch's program — of being an integral part of the creation of our Welch's strawberry program and starting several small new niche programs for our customers. But my greatest accomplishment has been to learn to balance my personal and professional life and to keep my beautiful wife and two kids together as a strong family.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Knowing our industry is so global now, I would love to see more uniformity in the way business is conducted across borders so all countries have the same playing field and risks are minimized.

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

A: How to listen and delegate.

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

A: Hispanic items are going to be the next big thing. I see a huge trend in incremental sales on Hispanic-oriented items. Also, as global markets open up more and more, we'll see many more new specialty items try to gain traction in our marketplaces.



Kelly Craner, 34
Sales/Marketing,
Vice President, Partner
B & C Fresh Sales Inc.

Orange, CA

Hometown: Orange, CA

Hobbies: Family, golf, music/guitar playing

Personal: Married with one child

Community: City of Hope Food Circle Produce and Floral Committee; Walk for Hope/Team Produce Committee

Motto in Life: Be me. Be only me. Be the best

of me.

Professional Accomplishments: Craner's adventure into produce began when he went to work for family owned and operated B & C part time while finishing school. He has been with the company ever since and followed the company through several changes during that time. Because B & C is a small company, he is required to know everything there is to know about how the company operates and manages its customers and sales. His daily duties focus on dealing directly with customers and shippers and logistics infrastructure. He also manages inventories of customized products and ensures customers' category and quality needs are being met, while striving to drive sales and category growth. He handles all sales and purchases and oversees all marketing projects. Craner serves on the board of directors for the Fresh Produce & Floral Council (FPFC). He served as co-chair of the FPFC task force for the creation of the Apprentice Program and was instrumental in developing the program as the newly formed Apprentice Program, serving as co-chair. He also serves on the FPFC luncheon committee and the FPFC website task force. He has graduated from the PMA Emerging Leaders program and will be attending the PMA Mid-Management Course.

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

A: At B & C Fresh Sales we make it our purpose to have all of the issues that can, and do arise throughout the supply chain be of negligible impact (at worst) to our customers. Of course our customers know what is going on in the category, in the industry, but we strive to handle all the headaches of these issues so they don't have to.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see the industry as a whole embrace the components of psychological marketing that the 'junk food' industry so expertly implements. Consumers buy so many things that at the very least aren't as good for them as the things we sell and market. As an industry we can and should better embrace their marketing tactics and tools. Certainly differentiation from so-called junk food is good, but we can utilize tactics that have worked for them in the process. Doing so industrywide can effect change for generations to come.

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

A: Well I see a mega trend starting to arise, and that is the move to outside. For years and years it has been common to see folks growing

bigger with things as they grow in their lives. Families grow, thus house sizes grow, and then car sizes and count per family grow. However I am sensing a shift in this mentality. People are downsizing their houses or at least willing to live with less these days. Some with regards to carbon footprint, some for the sake of being green. Smaller cars or no cars, smaller dwellings must mean that people are, or are considering spending more time outside; less car time, less in-house time. Porches, outdoor kitchens and outdoor living spaces are becoming a new trend also; these are creating more ways to spend more time outside. Technology is constantly developing more and more ways to “cut the cord.” I see this mega trend of embracing outside with a renewed and modern vigor compared to generations past. The produce industry can and will be affected by this. A great challenge for the produce industry of my generation will be figuring out how to re-imagine the cold chain. Can the cold chain be mobile with the consumer? Can the ‘cords of the cold chain’ be cut?



Joseph J D'Amico Jr., 35
Vice President/Co-Owner
To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc.
Avondale, PA

Hometown: Landenberg, PA

Hobbies: Fishing

Personal: Married with one daughter and twin sons

Community: March of Dimes: served as the Ambassador Family for the organization to help spread the nonprofit's appreciation for its business partners and key donors; volunteer at the Annual Mushroom Festival held in Kennett Square, PA.

Motto in Life: Farming is like any other job — except you punch in at age 5 and never punch out.

Professional Accomplishments: D'Amico, Jr. owns and operates To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc. and leads the management team along with his brother Tony. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Delaware Valley College in 2002 where he studied Ag Business, and was captain of the football team his Junior and senior years. D'Amico grew up on the farm with his brother Tony and sister Anita.

D'Amico leads a team of skilled harvesters and industry leaders and has seen To-Jo emerge as one the leading mushroom farms in the country. To-Jo currently has more than 325 workers in five business units. He has been an integral part of the strategic growth of the business, and under his leadership the company

has more than doubled its sales since taking over for his father in 2007. He is credited for putting the needs of his employees before his own and fostering a family-centric work environment promoting trust and efficiency among the workers. His unwavering commitment to growing the highest quality mushrooms and ability to think outside of the box is evident in the company's accelerated growth, which has doubled in size since he assumed full responsibility of To-Jo's growing operations. He currently sits on the board of directors of the American Mushroom Institute. In addition to his regular responsibilities on the board, he participated on the Executive Director Search Committee.

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

A: I was born into this industry. It is in my blood. I love farming, and I could never imagine doing anything else in my life. I began like most in our industry: learning the business from the ground up. I watered houses, picked mushrooms, ran tractors/compost turners, etc. As the years went on, I was rewarded with more responsibility. My dad instilled the family culture and values into me at an early age, and I try to carry on that legacy. I learned early on that hard work and dedication were the cornerstones of any successful business.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: I am excited to be designing and building a new state-of-the-art growing facility. Utilizing the best technology available, it will enable To-Jo to increase productivity, efficiency and greater consistency of quality. It will be one of the biggest projects To-Jo has undertaken.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more automation at the harvesting level. As labor shortages continue to rise, the industry is going to need to adapt and find solutions through new technology.

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

A: I am very fortunate to have my brother, Tony, as a partner. Tony and I collaborate on many decisions and we continually look to participate in leadership programs that enable us to develop our skill set. Every month, I participate in an executive peer advisory group hosted through an organization called, Vistage. Also, my Uncle, John D'Amico, has played an integral part in my life and I would not be the farmer I am today without his guidance and advice over the years.

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

A: One of the biggest personal accomplishments in my career is starting a compost operation with my uncle from the ground up. We started with one bale of hay and a compost turner from the 1960s. Today the compost wharf produces 130,000 cubic yards of compost per year.



Ryan Easter, 28
Regional Marketing Director
Sage Fruit Company
Minneapolis, MN

Hometown: Springfield, MO

Hobbies: Basketball, watching the Kansas Jayhawks, going to Timberwolves and Twins games, fishing, exercise, traveling, spending time with friends and family, spending time outdoors.

Community: Volunteer at the local YMCA as a youth basketball coach, combining his love for kids and passion for basketball while coaching 8 to 10 year olds.

Motto in Life: While a senior on his high school basketball team, he advised underclassmen to “play every game like it is your last.” The evolved version more relevant to his career today is: “Approach every opportunity as if it might not arise again.”

Professional Accomplishments: Easter has been with Sage Fruit his entire career. He joined Sage as a trainee and spent his first year in Yakima, WA, learning the apple business. From there, he was quickly promoted to regional marketing director and was moved to Minneapolis. Easter has made great progress building his customer base and strong relationships throughout the country. He was promoted again in December 2013 to a bigger territory with more responsibilities and customers. In his current position, Easter is responsible for the upper Midwest and Southeast territories and travels to meet with current customers to develop sales and marketing programs to grow business. He is also responsible for new business development within his territory. Along with sales and marketing responsibilities, he also handles category management for key accounts and manages one of the largest accounts for Sage Fruit Company. His service to Target does not end with simply constructing sales programs, but he is often actively in the stores, conceptualizing and constructing displays. Easter has also been instrumental in the success of private label programs between Sage Fruit and Target.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce

industry?

A: Produce is in the blood of the Easter family. My great grandfather was in produce at Dillon's in the 30s. My grandfather was in produce for Dillon's and Fleming for several years and was also on the board of the PMA and my dad was a produce director for 25 years at Dillon's. Through networking, I learned of a career opportunity with Sage Fruit Company. After learning about Sage Fruit and what the job entailed, I accepted the position.

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

A: My biggest challenge is also the biggest opportunity. When I meet with a potential new customer, the first thing they see is my age. Sometimes my age creates a barrier and potential new customers are less willing to open up and give me an opportunity to help them grow their business. For others, it does not take more than a few minutes for them to recognize my passion for produce and they realize I want to do a great job for them.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I enjoy discovering new opportunities to grow sales within my territory. I enjoy trav-

“Sometimes my age creates a barrier and potential new customers are less willing to open up and give me an opportunity to help them grow their business.”

— Ryan Easter

eling throughout the upper Midwest and Southeast, meeting new people and customers and discussing apples. The growers of Sage Fruit apples place their trust in me to be the face of Sage and it's not a responsibility I take lightly.

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

A: My dad has vast experience in the produce industry and he is usually the first person I go to. Within Sage, I feel like I can go to my boss, Chuck Sinks, and my counterpart in Ohio, Kevin Steiner. They have both been great mentors since I came on board at Sage.

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

A: I am most proud of the relationships I have been able to build throughout the country with my customer base. In my five years at Sage, I learned great relationships with customers are the key to long-term partnerships.



Andrew Engles, 31
Commodity Manager
Markon Cooperative
Salinas, CA

Hometown: Pacific Grove, CA

Hobbies: Golf and exercise

Community: Middle school girls' basketball coach

Motto in Life: What we do in life echoes in eternity

Professional Accomplishments: Engles has been with Markon for nine years. As a manager, he oversees the purchasing of Northwest commodities including apples, onions, and potatoes. In this role, he is ultimately responsible for growing produce sales by establishing markets, providing commodity updates, servicing customers and suppliers, and fostering relation-

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U.S. Patent Nos. 6,024,489; 6,030,120;
6,190,044; 7,163,339; 7,798,715; 8,550,717

ships and building new ones. He graduated from Saint Mary's College in Moraga, CA in 2006 and started at Markon in the role of sales coordinator. Though starting in this support role, he successfully took the lead in a high-volume purchasing position and in 2007 became produce manager. Persistence and tenacity along with integrity has contributed to his success in purchasing. Last spring, Engles graduated from the Produce Marketing Association's Emerging Leadership Program.

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

A: Although I grew up near the "salad bowl of the world" in Salinas, CA, I never considered working in produce until I was on the brink of graduating from college. A friend of my father worked in the industry and commented to him how I would be ideal for produce because I was "good with people and always on the phone." Humbled by the compliment, I researched the business by connecting with people who had worked in the industry for a number of years. Through this research, I liked what I heard, went for an interview at Markon Cooperative, and thankfully got the job.

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

A: Remaining stuck in similar routines. We tend to become creatures of habit and to keep this industry alive and progressive, it is important to not fall into the everyday, mundane cycle. Like great athletes are constantly looking to improve their craft, the same applies to the workforce. There needs to be a strong sense of urgency and continuing implementation of evolving change.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Walking in the door every day; not knowing what to expect. The industry remains fast-paced and ever evolving. Whether Mother Nature wipes out a berry field or the department of transportation puts a hold on trucks hauling fresh produce, we always need to react and problem solve to sustain the food chain supply.

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

A: Expanding my leadership role within my current organization and within the community as well. Teaching others to not make the mistakes I've made and learning from young professionals.

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

A: The growth of food safety and the impor-

tance of eating healthier. When the First Lady of the United States shows up on the Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon to promote healthier eating habits at home and in schools, there certainly appears to be a cultural shift with what we are putting into our bodies. Further, the marketing of new products through social media applications (i.e. Instagram and Twitter) will separate organizations from their competitors.



F. Scott Fein, 39
Supply Group Manager,
Northeast Region
Robinson Fresh

Eden Prairie, MN

Hometown: Philadelphia, PA (Northeast section)

Hobbies: Family, work, lawn, Penn State athletics

Personal: Married with two daughters

Community: Member of Board of Trustees for Amherst Farms HOA since 2010, currently serving as president (since 2011).

Motto in Life: Do something and do it with passion.

Professional Accomplishments: Fein served in various capacities in his more than 17-year career at C.H. Robinson/Robinson Fresh giving him a unique background in account management, supply management, systems development and leadership. Fein has been instrumental in helping Robinson Fresh expand its presence locally. Over the past three years, he has been working to support multi-generational farmers in 15 different states along the East Coast from Florida to Connecticut. The program covers seven different commodities. He is an ambassador for business to the state governments and works directly with the New Jersey Ag Department and Delaware Ag department to promote state programs.

In 2014, he received the Phillip Alampi Industry Marketing Award by the New Jersey Agricultural Society. He was voted an "All Star" in a Robinson Fresh division-wide contest to recognize a peer that embodies the attributes of a winner, motivator, cheerleader and game changer. He received a "key" for outstanding performance in the Robinson Fresh Key Account Sales Program.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: There is an opportunity to improve the supply chain, specifically the shipping and receiving process. As capacity becomes a scarce resource, a more efficient process would go a long way to distinguish oneself as a grower/shipper/receiver of choice.

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

A: First, focus on the solution not the problem. Pointing fingers never feels as good as celebrating a victory, especially one that didn't seem likely. The time for accountability is after the issue is resolved or has reached a conclusion. Second, never stop learning and striving to develop your skills and behaviors. Success is a journey, and you'll need every tool you pick up along the way.

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

A: The 2014 Phillip Alampi Marketing Award for my work with New Jersey agriculture. Being honored for doing something you take such pleasure in doing was a very special feeling and something I did not expect.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: This is an industry where your words matter and your actions define you. Focus on developing relationships not sales and make sure you are proud of every interaction you make. Sales are a result of a healthy relationship.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: The expectations of the customer have changed. No longer will sharp prices and/or a friend as a buyer sustain your business. You need to have a three- to five-year plan for growth and constantly focus on innovating their supply chain with solutions and analytics to support.



Blair Greenhill, 38
Director of Purchasing
Nickey Gregory Company
Atlanta, GA

Hometown: Born in Oakville, Ontario, Canada; grew up in Charleston, SC

Hobbies: Following Clemson Tigers especially in football, basketball, and baseball, golfing, and watching movies with his wife

Personal: Married for eight years with three children

Community: Helped with Save it Forward (a program to help needy families with school-aged kids); No Longer Bound (a men's ministry for overcoming addictions); and St. Vincent DePaul Society to help feed the hungry. Also starting to get involved with Upward Soccer leagues for children.

Motto in Life: To quote Dr. Charles Stanley, "Trust in God and leave the consequences to him."

Professional Accomplishments: Skills in

problem solving and negotiating led Greenhill to start as a produce sales rep with C.H. Robinson in 2002 after graduating from Clemson University with a BS in Economics. He became the veg/ value-added category manager for the Southeast Region (Atlanta, Tampa, Miami, and Puerto Rico) after only a few years. He transferred to the Miami office in 2005 learning other aspects of the company and then made the move back to Atlanta in 2006 as the produce site manager at age 29. He led the produce division of the Atlanta office for eight years. During that period he managed the company's largest accounts and rebuilt the team. In addition to being at the forefront of the C.H. Robinson/Robinson Fresh evolution to grower shipper, Greenhill also served as regional category manager for melons (working closely with Timco, the CHR acquisition) and helped to manage MelonUp! and Pink Ribbon sales/inventory at multiple shipping locations.

Currently, as director of purchasing for Nickey Gregory Company, a family-owned wholesaler, he has consolidated purchasing for Atlanta and Miami, reviewed and subsequently added/ subtracted grower/shippers where necessary, and set up contracts. He oversees both the company's DC's and buys Western vegetables/

fruit. He is known as being a "good produce man" and is widely regarded as honest and hard working.

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

A: Trading has been a part of my life since I was young when I honed my negotiation skills collecting and trading baseball cards. There's something about making a deal and negotiating between two different parties that I really enjoy. I graduated from Clemson in 2002 when the economy was still reeling. At that point I had seen C.H. Robinson at two career fairs. They represented their company and jobs as requiring heavy problem solving, which I like and excel at. I ended up starting with C.H. Robinson as a produce sales rep in the Atlanta office in 2002.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: The produce industry needs to make USDA guidelines more understandable. There are also terms like "price after sale" that the industry uses but they are not recognized by governmental entities. Let's reduce the amount of gray area and streamline communication standards to make things easier for all.

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

A: Soak it all in. I was a sponge when I started but could have been even more so. I'm still learning everyday and will never stop. I really thought that was a cliché but it's definitely not.

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

A: I'm probably most proud of not letting the Atlanta Produce office of CHR fail through tough times and ultimately growing the office. When I took over as produce site manager I knew we were on the verge of losing most of the business from our biggest account. I wasn't prepared for the employee attrition we experienced soon after but with the help of the rest of the crew — most notably Jody Newberry at the time — we persevered, rebuilt, and ended up growing the office.

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

A: Convenience trends will continue. Time is a scarce commodity. Healthy trends at QSRs like "kale probably coming to McDonald's" and "Chick-Fil-A adding more produce items to its menu" will gain even more traction.



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Trish James, 35
Vice President
Produce for Kids
Orlando, FL

Hometown: West Grove, PA

Hobbies: Reading, photography, watching her kids' sports

Personal: Married with two boys

Community: Co-chair of Children's Formation Board and Sunday School Teacher at Episcopal Church of the Advent; EPC Women's Leadership liaison to Girls Scouts of Southeastern PA; former Shoes That Fit corporate liaison; former Big Sister for Big Brothers/ Big Sisters.

Motto in Life: Life is short, and we do not have much time for gladdening the hearts of those who are traveling with us. So be swift to love and make haste to be kind. (Adapted quote of writer and philosopher, Henri-Frédéric Amiel)

Professional Accomplishments: James started working in the grocery industry in 2004, holding various operations, marketing, and merchandising positions for several years. In 2010, she began working in the produce department at ACME Markets. From there, she moved to retail merchandising and marketing consultant for an international grower. In her current position as vice president of Produce for Kids, she is responsible for overseeing the Produce for Kids staff, managing day-to-day organizational operations and budget, as well as coordinating the strategic development and creative positioning associated with brand development, consumer outreach, and in-store campaigns. She is responsible for developing relationships with sponsors and supermarket retailers as well as generating new opportunities for brand awareness and partnerships. She manages the overall P&L for Produce for Kids along with the financial impacts of each campaign and program. She leads the Produce for Kids' team with both its B2B and B2C branding. Initiatives include several in-store marketing campaigns in retail markets across the country.

After joining the Produce for Kids team in 2013, she has been able to establish the groundwork to not only raise funds for children's nonprofit organizations, but also drive produce sales through Produce for Kids flagship campaigns and new programs. She led the organization to and past \$5 million raised for children's charities and forged a new primary charity relationship with Feeding America for donations starting in 2015. Leading the launch of the new Produceforkids.com in 2014, her team was able to drive an overall website traffic increase of 145 percent and increased mobile visits to the new mobile

friendly site by 235 percent. In August 2014, she led the team in their first digital campaign with the launch of PowerYourLunchBox.com. Through this new program, Produce for Kids was able to engage an active community of moms, bring additional awareness to the participating brands, and drive incremental donations to Produce for Kids' children's charities. Finally, Produce for Kids launched their first e-cookbook, Festive Flavors in November 2014. Along with its robust social media campaign.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: To continue to lead Produce for Kids as an industry-leader and a recognizable brand for consumers. Under my tenure at Produce for Kids, I hope to reach the \$10 million raised for children's charities and make an impact on kids (and families) eating nutritious foods.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I think the produce industry can do a better job speaking to consumers where they are today, and where they will be in five years. Mobile technology isn't going away, and today's shoppers spend more time on their phones and tablets than ever before. This will only continue. It is important that produce brands think like CPG brands in order to promote produce consumption to families and kids. Social media (not just Facebook) and mobile-friendly website marketing must be an important part of your marketing strategy. In store, it is important for retailers to make the shopping experience quick and easy. Offer solutions for customers to pick-up easy (but healthy) dinner ingredients, lunchbox items, or sport snacks.

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

A: Sometimes it's really hard to see the forest from the trees. Have confidence that hard work will pay off and just relax.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Study! The produce industry is complex and always changing. It is important to know your commodities and consumer trends.

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

A: More pre-packaged, pre-cut fruits and veggies making healthy snacking easier; solution-oriented sales (think Blueapron.com, but at a retail level); home delivery of groceries (including fresh produce); continued focus on

increasing produce consumption and marketing to children and young adults.



Krista Jones, 39
Director Brand Marketing
and Product Innovation
Crunch Pak

Cashmere, WA

Hometown: Wenatchee, WA

Hobbies: Fishing, hiking, playing outdoors with my boys

Personal: Two children

Community: Cashmere Chamber of Commerce; Greater Wenatchee Technology Association Social Media Speaker; Washington State Apple Blossom Festival; Vale Elementary; Wenatchee Valley College; Cashmere High School (career mentor); Entiat High School (career mentor); FBLA Regional Judge

Motto in life: Don't Worry, Be Happy

Professional Accomplishments: Jones is a strategic part of the sales and marketing team at Crunch Pak and her integrated marketing communications programs are driving business results and have won national awards. She manages advertising, public relations, special events and social media, as well as directs new product development efforts. She is known for working effectively with people inside and outside the company and juggling multiple tasks, priorities and demands. She manages productive relationships with external vendors and marketing partners such as Disney, Marvel and the NBA and has secured product placements at several high-profile entertainment events including the Academy Awards, Superbowl, AT&T ProAm Golf Tournament and the American Academy of Country Music Awards.

After graduating from Washington State University, she held positions in the apparel industry at Nordstrom and Cutter Buck; in those roles she traveled internationally assisting with social compliance and quality inspections at garment industry manufacturers overseas. After having children, she wanted to return to her hometown of Wenatchee and was referred to a marketing position at Crunch Pak. In the span of just three years, she has now become director of brand marketing and product innovation.

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

A: Since I grew up in Wenatchee, I always had a high degree of respect for the agricultural industry and the economic impact it made on our community. My first job was working in the warehouses during cherry harvest every

summer. It wasn't surprising then for me to end up at Crunch Pak. Tony Freytag brought me into the company and has been a generous mentor.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: We eat a lot at home; I try to teach my boys to eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables and build that into their everyday eating habits. I have my own mini test market for Crunch Pak's new products.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: It's like fashion — there are trends and consumer demand changes on a regular basis. I really enjoy promoting healthy eating to consumers of all ages.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: That distribution into new channels would be easier for fresh products. For example, most convenience stores don't offer healthy grab-and-go options due to the lack of being able to get products into their stores via the current supply chain vehicles.

Q: Whom do you go to when in need of advice?

A: Crunch Pak's Tony Freytag.



Patrick Andrew Kelly, 29
President
Kelly Brothers, Inc.
Exeter, CA

Hometown: Orange, CA

Hobbies: Basketball, golf, hiking, overall Cross Fit competition running such as Spartan Beast, decorating his house, pogonotrophy (cultivation of beard growing) and traveling the world with his family.

Personal: Married with two children

Community: California Citrus Mutual; International Pineapple Organization; Central California Blood Drive Center; The Well Community Church; Grace Community Church; Visalia Sports and Recreation; guest speaking at local college in entrepreneurship and leadership.

Mottos in Life: The only way to create value is to care, believe, and be fair. Expect excellence of yourself not others. Always want to be No. 1, but know you are your biggest competitor, and above all never give up. Promote your passion through your mind and your heart. Follow your own path no matter what society thinks. Go ahead and do your best toward everything, success starts with one thing — a dream.

Professional Accomplishments: Kelly entered

the produce industry as young boy picking oranges in the fields of California and Florida for local processors and packers. He officially started his produce career at the age of 21 with LoBue Brothers, Inc. a subsidiary company of Sun Rapt Foods, LLC in 2007. In 2009, he and four partners who were local growers and packers in California's Central Valley formed Jasmine Marketing, LLC with the purpose of increasing grower returns. In 2010 he partnered with a separate investor after the sale of Jasmine Marketing, LLC and started All Seasons Fruit Supply, Inc., selling grapes, stone fruit, and citrus. In 2010, he left All Seasons Fruit Supply and started Kelly Brothers, Inc. focusing on processing citrus for juice and cut fruit, stone fruit, grapes, watermelons, and pineapples. The company operates under the vision statement: "Fresh premium produce with quality and integrity you can trust." He currently manages the P&L and the financial structure of the organization along with the sale and marketing.

During his produce career, he has developed trademarked brands for the pineapple industry. He also completed his bachelor's in Entrepreneurship while starting Kelly Brothers, Inc. from 2009 to 2012 and completed an MBA in Executive Leadership and International Business from 2013 to 2014. He received support and leadership awards from the International Pineapple Organization (IPO) and lobbied for the citrus industry. He is currently a part of California Citrus Mutual Legislative committee and a committee member of the IPO.

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

A: My father, Kenneth Kelly from Sun Rapt Foods, has been in the industry for more than 20 years. I always had a passion to follow my father and soon followed him to the industry. During my life, I helped my dad with many parts of his operations when needed. I loved the connection with all different types of people from different demographics, culture, and ethnicity. It is great to be able to learn about the places where people come from along with the fruit we purchase from different countries. Some things you just can't learn in college.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: I envision my career leading to multiple international brands for my organization, along with a growing presence through the global economy.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Communication, quality of buyers, more Millennials and Baby Boomers working together. Change is a good thing!

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: The industry would attract more Millennials if the struggle for power with the Baby Boomers was not so tender.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: I have seen things change with food safety drastically along with multiple problems such as huanglongbing (disease) in our citrus and the economy closing down packing houses. The industry's people are changing rapidly. Gaining respect and loyalty is getting harder and harder in today's changing world.



Lynsey Kennedy, 31
International Marketing
Manager
Pear Bureau Northwest

Milwaukie, OR

Hometown: Milwaukie, OR

Hobbies: Reading, going to the movies, cooking, travel, running, watching sports

Personal: Single

Motto in Life: "If you work really hard and you're kind, amazing things will happen." (from Conan O'Brien)

Professional Accomplishments: Kennedy studied Spanish and business in college, and received her MBA from Oregon State University, where she frequently worked in teams with international students. She started her career at a small marketing and design firm, working on brand strategy and project management for clients consisting of industry associations and non-profits. She has been with Pear Bureau Northwest for almost seven years. She works with a small team near Portland, OR, coordinating with 15 international marketing representatives to manage USA Pear promotion programs in 33 countries around the world. The Pear Bureau represents more than 1,500 growers in Oregon and Washington that make up 84 percent of the fresh pears grown in the U.S. and 92 percent of U.S. fresh pear exports.

She coordinates a wide range of both trade and consumer activities for the Pear Bureau, including managing its international trade show participation and reverse trade missions, bringing foreign buyers to visit the growing region and meet with USA Pear shippers. Each year she plans a trade reception co-hosted with other fresh

fruit industry groups in conjunction with PMA's Fresh Summit. More than 400 people typically attend, including industry members, importers and retailers from top markets including Latin America, Russia, India, China, and Southeast Asia. Much of her work is also behind the scenes, coordinating grant funding compliance and reporting requirements, including the Bureau's participation in the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service's Market Access Program.

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

A: I was initially drawn to the actual position at Pear Bureau rather than the industry specifically. The job description fit well with a lot of aspects of my experience — marketing, working with people internationally, and the opportunity to speak Spanish since Mexico is the top export market for Northwest pears and Latin America overall is a big growth market for the industry.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I eat a lot of produce — it's where I spend the bulk of my grocery dollars. Since joining the industry, I've enjoyed trying new items and definitely pay more attention in the produce department to what's available and where it comes from.

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

A: Working on a small team to manage a promotional program in more than 30 countries around the world definitely keeps me busy — good time management is important to stay on top of everything to make sure that we are not only conducting good promotions that benefit the Northwest pear industry, but also meeting all of the requirements of our grant programs.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I love working with people all over the world, as well as traveling and seeing the differences between markets, their supply chains, and how pears ultimately end up in the consumers' hands.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I like the discussions going on about the importance of women and the role that they play in the industry; I would like to see these discussions continue to draw attention to the issue so women can be as equally considered as men for leadership opportunities. Women bring a lot of experience and complementary skills to the table, and it's wonderful to see them given the chance to step out of supporting

roles and making what has traditionally been a male-dominated industry more well-rounded.

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

A: I wish I had had more confidence in myself starting out to overcome the uncertainty at the beginning of my career — a little bit of confidence goes a long way, and if you work hard, you'll gain the confidence and experience for a strong career path.



Nick Langel, 30
Senior Product Manager -
Refrigerated Products
Union Pacific Railroad

Omaha, NE

Hometown: Norfolk, NE

Hobbies: Golfing, traveling, volunteering, being with family

Personal: Single with one son

Community: Active member of the Omaha Junior Chamber of Commerce; Development Committee for Youth Emergency Services in Omaha; Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands; Pancreatic Cancer Research Foundation; Joslyn Art Museum Young Art Patrons; the Food Bank for the Heartland; Creighton University Jaybacker; member of St Cecilia's Parish in Omaha.

Motto in Life: Make the very best day of your past the very worst day of your future.

Professional Accomplishments: After five years working on grain products for Union Pacific Railroad (UP), Langel began his career in produce by applying for and obtaining a position on UP's food team. His current responsibilities are to manage UP's refrigerated products portfolio, a \$400 million annual revenue piece of business. He is responsible for the strategic direction setting, forecasting, rate making, capital acquisition, program development and management, logistics monitoring, and business development efforts in UP's temp-controlled sector. In produce, he helps prepare for and manage the shipment season for many products. He is currently working on establishing new expedited transportation options for moving Mexican produce into the U.S. and distributing to the East Coast. One of his most notable and pertinent accomplishments for the produce was the work to secure necessary capital for new refrigerated boxcars for the produce industry. He was successful in securing more than \$385 million in new capital needed to build roughly 375 new refrigerated boxcars.

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

A: I grew up in small-town Nebraska that was heavily dependent upon agriculture to drive our economy. I learned how important agriculture is to not only our region of Nebraska but also our nation and the rest of the world. It was fun to learn about the various grains we grew and the commercial uses for those products. After I graduated college and started working for UP, a position on our food team opened up to manage our refrigerated products portfolio. Since I grew up around agriculture and had some experience with grain, I wanted to push out past my comfort zone and learn about a completely different part of agriculture.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I take pride in eating as much produce as I possibly can. From picking/eating mulberries off the tree in our back yard to standing at the end of our driveway selling green beans and zucchini from the family garden, I have been a big advocate (and consumer of course) of produce ever since I was a young child. This year, my family decided to buy into a CSA (community supported agriculture) program here in Omaha, and we'll get one whole bag of various fruit and vegetables grown locally, per week, through the summer. I think this will be a lot of fun as it will nudge us to try a lot of various new types of produce that we typically do not use in our normal diet.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see a reinvigorated expedited rail network for shipping produce from the West Coast to the Eastern markets. One thing we are working very aggressively on here at UP is to re-establish an expedited coast-to-coast rail program that our produce customers can utilize. The focus is to get from the fields and factories to the distribution centers at destination as quick and consistently as possible. This is going to change a lot of the way we do business today with our customers but overall is going to create the best long-term and sustainable rail shipment program possible.

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

A: The inspiration for my work and care for the produce industry is further investment in refrigerated boxcar assets, which are a 50-year usable life asset. I want to be able to look back when I retire and see UP-owned refrigerated boxcars moving on our lines and know I had a hand in acquiring the capital, building the car, and implementing them into our network. The produce market is in dire need of long-term

sustainable transportation capacity and that is something UP can help out with. Being able to see the fruits of our labor is a very motivating factor for me.

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

A: The availability of new types of produce is going to continue to grow. The recently developed technology for the temp-controlled freight sector is very cool. The ability to remotely monitor and resolve issues with refrigerated boxcars and containers, the establishment of expedited transit programs, and the life-extending applications on many goods is really helping to bring new types of produce to the consumer. Things that have never been able to be done due to perishability and damage concerns are now completely irrelevant. I think we'll continue to see this type of diversity in our grocery stores and restaurant chains continue, especially since the demand from the consumer for these new and traditionally unattainable types of fruit and vegetables continues to rise.



Brian Maguire, 33
**Account Executive/
Commodity Sales**
JOH

Billerica, MA

Hobbies: Golf; huge sports fan

Personal: Married and expecting first child

Community: Volunteer at The Travis Roy Foundation for more than five years now, in that time his group has raised more than \$100,000 dollars for the foundation.

Motto in Life: Don't talk about it, be about it.

Professional Accomplishments: Maguire started working for the JOH sales desk in 2006 calling on many large retail stores and learning the produce business. In 2008, he was given the opportunity to represent some growers and was introduced to the commodity business. Seven years later, this has become a substantial and growing piece of JOH's business that he is proud to be a part of. JOH currently represents 25 grower/packer/shipper clients and is doing business in the New England and New York markets. His current responsibilities at JOH include managing more than 45 clients at three large retailers for value-added products and presenting new items and programs. He also manages the 25-grower/packer/shipper commodity clients in New England and New York.

Q: How did you get into the industry?

A: I have a lifelong knowledge of the produce

businesses. I started working at the Market Basket produce warehouse unloading trucks during my summer breaks in high school. In college I worked for JOH doing retail store checks for companies like Fresh Express, NatureSweet and Apio. I graduated from Plymouth State University and two days later I was a full-time JOH associate.

Q: What is the biggest challenge about your job?

A: My biggest challenge also happens to be what I like most about my job. In this business, it is all about building relationships and trust. Each client and customer I manage has a different set of expectations, business plan, strategy and tactics. It is my job to not only understand what the goals are but to know how my clients and customers want to execute to attain those goals. I have to know my clients inside and out to build the trust and knowledge necessary to make them successful.

Q: Where do you go to seek advice?

A: I consider myself very fortunate to be surrounded by so many outstanding industry leaders. There are two people, however, that I continuously turn to for advice and guidance. Tom Casey, executive vice president and regional director of Produce at JOH, is truly an amazing person who thinks outside the box when it comes to the brokerage business. The other person is my father, Mike Maguire, director of produce operations at Market Basket. He has been in the business for more than 40 years, working his way up the "food chain." He has helped guide me through the ups and downs but if there is one thing he has taught me it is "if you work as hard as you can, people will notice."

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

A: I wish I knew it was all right to deliver bad news in this business. I have a very vivid memory of one of my first ads with a major customer on TOVs. The grower called to tell me he would not have the two truckloads of tomatoes for the weekend's arrival. I thought I was going to faint. The buyer was out that afternoon so I had to wait until the next morning to call him. I did not sleep a wink that night worrying about letting down a customer. The next day, I called the buyer and he said, "Don't worry about it. There isn't a TOV to be had in the country. Move the orders out and deliver when you can." I learned that sometimes things are out of my control in this business. When a market is tight, it's tight. So just deliver the news as soon as you know and be proactive with solutions.



Stacey Miller, 29
Senior Brand Manager
Litehouse Foods
Sandpoint, ID

Hometown: Sandpoint, ID

Hobbies: Hiking, competitive horseback riding (jumping/dressage), bicycling, anything outdoors, playing piano, traveling, reading

Personal: Married; 2012 Executive MBA; 2008 Graduate University of Idaho

Community: Leadership Sandpoint; Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce involvement; 4-H (youth development program) horse leader; Association for Dressings and Sauces, volunteer horseback instructor, Relay for Life, community fundraising campaigns

Motto in Life: If your dreams don't scare you, then they're not big enough.

Professional Accomplishments: Miller has been with Litehouse Foods for six years, starting out as an assistant product manager and working her way to her current position. During this time, she has excelled in many aspects of the business ranging from national promotions, project management, business analysis and financial analysis. She started the company social media platforms with great success. Within the company, she is known as a leader and is valued for her can-do attitude. She has a leadership role on many cross functional teams with R&D, operations, finance and sales to bring new products to market and manage existing SKU's. She also was instrumental in creating a Quality Assurance board across all departments to proactively bring awareness and drive quality throughout the entire company.

Miller managed the company's Freeze-Dried Herb line since 2010. Under her lead, sales have sustained annual double-digit growth by repositioning the line to educate consumers about the Instantly Fresh benefit, by transitioning the label to communicate more effective messaging, and by supporting the line with advertising, digital presence, and marketing promotions. The product line won several consumer awards over the years, including the prestigious Prevention Magazine's "Cleanest Packaged Food Award" and the "Clean Eating" award from Clean Eating magazine. As the previous national promotions manager, she executed successful promotions with many companies in the industry in both the U.S. and Canada, increasing sales and awareness in the produce category through these partnerships. She collaborated with Mann's, Fresh Express, Fresh Gourmet, Taylor Farms, Nature Sweet, and numerous retailers, as well as companies from the meat, dairy, deli and wine

industry to create campaigns bringing consumers to the produce department from other areas of the store.

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

A: One of the biggest challenges of my job is continuous innovation — bringing something new to the industry that is healthy for our consumers and will drive more sales to our retailers. Innovation is extremely important and necessary to grow as new consumer trends are constantly evolving. Being two steps ahead and knowing what our consumers want before they do is an exciting challenge to overcome.

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

A: Though I had several mentors throughout the years, the one who stands out the most is Roxie Lowther. She has been with Litehouse for 33 years, currently the director of marketing communications. She has always provided great insight and advice when I needed it the most. Not only is she one of the ones who hired me, she has been a constant encouragement and supporter throughout my career at Litehouse.

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

A: General education on the produce industry would have been helpful and would have given me a quicker understanding into the industry itself. As for specific skills, more education in cross-functional management would have been beneficial since this is a critical part of many positions in business.

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

A: As a senior brand manager, it's exciting to be able to lead our Brand Team and drive quality products and innovation to the consumer. I had an opportunity to manage almost every retail product line at Litehouse, which helped me have a greater understanding of business and to help my team grow. I went back to school full-time to get my EMBA while continuing to work at Litehouse full-time. It was a challenge juggling life, school, and work, but was well worth the effort and knowledge I received from it.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Work with educational institutions. The biggest challenge is educating people in the industry at a younger age and showing the opportunities available in the produce industry. As more awareness is brought to food and nutrition,

I believe more people will become passionate and want to be involved.



Daniel Moznett, 39
Director of Marketing
Grower Direct Marketing
Stockton, CA

Hometown: Linden, CA

Hobbies: Coaching youth sports, cooking

Personal: Married with three children

Community: March of Dimes Celebrity Chef Auction; Presentation School Charities

Professional Accomplishments: Moznett came to Grower Direct Marketing, LLC after having produced cooking shows with celebrity chefs for nearly 15 years. In this role, he energized the company's product marketing group and demonstrated outstanding sales acumen. In addition to produce marketing and company branding, he took over fresh sales in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Dubai and major European destinations including Switzerland and the United Kingdom. He won an Emmy Award for a television series and has a James Beard Award Nomination. He produced 300 cooking show episodes for PBS, ABC and CBS. He created the World's Largest School Lunch tray for California Ag Day and created Frito-Lay Flavor Kitchen atop Times Square broadcasting, which reaches millions of people every week.

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

A: I grew up on farms and orchards in the vibrant Linden, CA fresh fruit industry, picking and delivering tree fruit and ultimately selling fruit for Linden Associated Growers before I left for San Diego State University (SDSU). After attending SDSU, I was fortunate to enter TV food show production. This led to several international trips to uncover the best in fresh, work with chefs from national and international destinations and understand the culture of food production around the world. After this amazing experience, I decided to enter the produce industry and work with my local network of family growers.

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

A: We have a distinct group of leaders here at Grower Direct. Our managing director, Jim Hanson and our founder Del Gotelli, who is now in his 80s and continues to define our industry, are my primary sounding boards for new ideas and advice.

Q: What accomplishments are you most

proud of in your career?

A: Having produced more than 500 episodes of television shows, some in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Tasmania and Europe, are experiences I treasure. I have been nominated for coveted James Beard Awards, Telly and multiple Emmy nominations. It was a very exciting time.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Ask questions, find a mentor you can trust and learn as much as you can and explore. There are amazing people in this business.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: We need to underscore the camaraderie in this business. The industry is comprised of many great people willing and interested in teaching new industry talent.



Josh J. Padilla, 34
Coordinator of Produce
Merchandising & Operations
Krasdale/Alpha 1 Marketing

White Plains, NY

Hometown: Weehawken, NJ

Hobbies: Going to theaters, trying out new restaurants, wine tastings

Personal: Single

Community: Coached Little League baseball for 10 years before finally retiring in 2010

Motto in Life: "Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."
— Winston Churchill

Professional Accomplishments: Padilla started in produce almost 16 years ago as a part-time produce clerk for Pathmark Supermarkets. He assumed different roles and responsibilities going from a second shift produce supervisor, to assistant produce manager, to a produce manager. In early 2011, he joined Whole Foods Market as part of their Leadership in Training program, and after a couple months was promoted to produce assistant team leader. In 2012, he became a produce team leader at their Ridgewood, NJ store. In March of 2013, he left Whole Foods and joined Weis Supermarkets as an assistant store manager mostly in charge of perishable departments.

Later in 2013, Joe DeLorenzo, produce director of Krasdale Foods and Alpha 1 Marketing recruited Padilla to join his team as a produce specialist and merchandiser for this coop of more than 250 independently owned stores in the New York metro area and Florida. His responsibilities included visiting stores, identifying areas

of opportunities for improvement in their produce department, and educating and mentoring store owners, managers and department managers on produce industry standards, food safety, shrink, gross profit, new products and merchandising. He also created produce planograms and reset produce departments, and assumed the director's responsibilities on his days off. In July 2014, he temporarily assumed the responsibilities of the produce director, which entailed directing the produce operations of the company, writing ads, managing the merchandising team, and building partnerships with industry trade associations and growers. He also identified opportunities to help grow the company's sales either by expanding product mix-up or through marketing strategies. After the death of the produce director in November 2014, Padilla was tapped to lead the produce operations as coordinator of produce operations and merchandising.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like the industry to label GMO produce. It is right for consumers to know what products contain genetically modified organisms. With Americans overwhelmingly supporting such labeling, the food industry should drop opposition and be more transparent about GMOs.

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

A: I was very skeptical of cut fruit/veggies, to the point that I did not commit a lot of my labor dollars into producing the cut varieties. I asked myself: "Who would pay \$5.99 per pound when I can cut it myself for cheaper?" But over time, I was able to realize from an operational standpoint, it helped with margin, product rotation, and sales and also fulfilled a consumer need: convenience. Now I never short change the category.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Hold tight, and be patient with Mother Nature, she causes havoc on the industry and your plans.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: One of the allures the produce industry should emphasize, to attract young talent, is to emphasize that the work in this industry is meaningful and will help make a difference in the world. But it doesn't just stop there, the industry must demonstrate they have the willingness to invest in the leadership development and career progression.

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

A: Food waste and addressing it should be an industry focus, the selling of ugly fruit/vegetables will be a big trend for retailers and wholesalers. In addition, with consumers' concern about helping the local farmer and wanting to experience great taste, local will become even bigger.



Thomas Padilla, 39
Asia Export Sales
Mission Avocados
Oxnard, CA

Hometown: Fillmore, CA

Hobbies: sports, fishing

Personal: Engaged to be married in October 2015; one adult daughter on active duty U.S. airforce.

Community: active member San Buenaventura Mission Church

Motto in Life: Never let being good stop you from becoming great!

Professional Accomplishments: Padilla has been with Mission Produce going on five years. Prior to Mission, he worked in the flavor and spice industry for eight years. At the start of his career at Mission, he was given the task to grow the company's export business in Asia. His experiences allowed him to travel throughout Asia and learn the cultures and the import export business. During his time at Mission, he has been a part of growing the avocado category in Asia and seeing the new and creative ways the avocado has been incorporated in to Asian diets. Over the past five years, he travelled to China, Singapore, Japan, and Korea several times — marking triple digit growth across the boards. He has been able to work with several key retailers to develop avocado sales promotions as well as how-to-eat promotions.

Q: How did you end up in the produce industry?

A: Mission was looking to develop an export program and it worked well with my experience.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: Exporting Avocados to greater Asia

Q: Who do you see when in need of advice?

A: Senior Management at Mission have been a big influence in my career at the company.

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

A: Seeing the avocado category grow in China and Southeast Asia and being a big part of that growth. During the past three years, I have been a part of educating consumers throughout Asia on what an avocado is. When I first started traveling to Asia, it was rare to see an avocado display in a retail store or even at the wet markets. Today the avocado has become a staple item for many Asian markets. In the U.S., we take for granted how an avocado should be eaten. In many Asian countries they have never see an avocado. This category will continue to grow throughout Asia, and I am looking forward to being a part of it.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Keep an open mind to new ideas and how fast our industry is changing.



Jennifer Pierce, 39
Sales & Marketing
Giro Pack, Inc.
Vidalia, GA

Hometown: Bryan, OH

Hobbies: Traveling, DIY crafting and home projects, youth coaching, spending time with family and friends

Personal: Married with two children

Community: Volunteering through church, 4-H (a nonprofit youth organization), school and various sporting and community activities.

Motto in Life: Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

Professional Accomplishments: Born and raised in the country, Pierce has always been around agriculture and developed an affection for the ag community through 4-H. She has been an avid part of sales, product development and designing in the produce and floral industry for over 14 years. In her current position with Giro Pack Inc. as a sales and marketing representative of mesh packaging solutions, she gained respect from colleges, clients and upstanding executives in the industry for her commitment to promote great products. Her passion is to develop healthy environmentally focused packaging with reduction of environmental footprints and her work yields consistent packaging with environmentally safe, fully traceable solutions. She is known for her desire to drive relationships and the ability to overcome obstacles with continued sales increases year after year, as high as 76 percent and as low as 3 percent, and an increase in client base of 10 to 25 percent year after year. Prior to Giro, she was a Regional Sales Manager for more than nine years selling floral upgrades,

fruit basket supplies/accessories and pre-made fruit baskets. She is a graduate from The Defiance College and holds a bachelor's degree in marketing. She also studied Agriculture at The Ohio State University.

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

A: My initial start was through a company in my hometown that offered floral upgrades, fruit and gift basket supplies and pre-made fruit baskets. I actually never expected to be doing what I'm doing, but I love it. I thought I'd be an ag leader or work in 4-H extension, but those dreams changed when I was offered a college internship at a local bank as a marketing associate. I developed a love for promotion and design at the bank. After a few years in banking, lots of mergers were happening, and I was a displaced worker. One of the ladies I worked alongside mentioned a position open with her husband's company. I landed the job and would then be re-connected with the ag industry by selling floral and produce items.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Meeting and working with many different organizations. Each relationship is the foundation of a web of networks within the produce industry. No matter who you meet, everyone can make an impression on your career and life. Each relationship allows further ability to learn, understand and continue to grow within the produce industry.

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

A: I envision a fully launched program of our convenience style sustainable packaging solutions to all grocery and convenience store sectors.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I'd love to see more produce offerings in place of all of the starchy, sugary options at the convenience store and checkout lanes. When I travel, I am always shopping at the grocery store for healthier solutions. If our industry could tackle ease and convenience, we would be living in a healthier country. Eat Brighter! and Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools have helped promote and offer more produce to kids. I would also love to see a kid-focused program allowing kids the opportunity to see, touch and taste produce. When I share current, new and unique produce with family and friends at gatherings, sporting events, potlucks, and playdates, it's amazing how much they enjoy various produce items.

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

A: Acknowledge mistakes and learn from them as soon as it occurs. Everyone makes mistakes and most people are willing to work through an honest mistake.



Brandon Rankin, 34
Director of Exchange Interruption*
Brooklyn, NY

Hometown: Hanover, NH

Hobbies: Mountain sports, writing music, gardening

Personal: Married

Motto in Life: You never know if you never try.

Professional Accomplishments: Rankin joined interruption* seven years ago after meeting the fair trade company's chief executive, and now close friend, Rafael Goldberg. He oversaw domestic logistics and made great strides before he soon took over the management of international logistics operations. In 2011, he took his experience into the sales office to help grow fair trade organics as a category. Now five years and counting, Rankin built an impressive portfolio of clients from independents to multinationals, spanning North America to Europe. During his time at interruption* he has seen farming operations expand from a handful of Argentine offerings to now encompass nine countries throughout South, Central, and North America across dozens of sustainably grown, ethically produced, fair trade and organic certified healthy fruits and vegetables under the Taste Me, Do Good* Brand.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I'm a bit of a fresh juice fanatic. The amount of produce you can condense into a glass is astounding. I try to keep my food ratio of vegetables+fruit to meat+dairy at 4:1.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I get tremendous satisfaction from the way we're changing this food system for future generations. There is a strong culture here at interruption* where the farmer comes first. Each interrupter fights tirelessly to make the most positive impact possible so we as consumers can have more responsibly sourced, healthier food options available at our favorite grocery store. Our work helps to evolve the current food system structure, and provides the opportunity to support small and mid-sized family farms, building cooperatives that share best farming practices and market condition feedback, and

empowering growing communities to make dreams become reality.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Better food safety initiatives and more labeling transparency to help consumers know the full picture of what they're putting into their bodies. Making more direct connections between shoppers and farmers and helping to educate people about better eating habits.

Q: What inspired your work in the produce industry?

A: Seeing the positive change of workers and growers who left conventional farms in order to follow the fair trade organic path, hearing how we helped transform livelihoods and strengthen the communities we support, reading quotes from our workers' assemblies that show at the end of each harvest everyone involved democratically decides how to invest the premiums generated during the season: building healthcare programs, afterschool clubs to keep children safe and off the streets, offering vocational education to further people's careers, building materials to improve working conditions and housing in the community, and emergency relief support systems. We experienced overwhelming support from shoppers, and lots of praise from retailers. There is so much gratitude.

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

A: Global community supported agriculture, supermarket rooftop gardens, juice bars in grocery stores to minimize shrink, and biodynamics.



Giuseppe S. Rubino, 37
Director of Purchasing/Packaging
Mastronardi Produce Ltd.

Kingsville, Ontario, Canada

Hometown: Leamington, Ontario

Hobbies: Foodie, classic cars, kids sports (soccer, swimming, karate), motorcycle enthusiast, working out, family

Personal: Married with two boys

Community: MS Society (the top individual fund raiser in the area for the past five to six years at Mastronardi); Autism Ontario/Windsor Essex County Society; Southwestern Ontario Gleaners Chapter of Leamington, which is a nonprofit organization that dehydrates local fresh fruits and vegetables and packs and ships them to developing countries; local Italian Association.

Motto in Life: We're not here for a long, but here for a good time! What this quote means to me is don't take anything for granted, appreciate what you have, and cherish time spent with your family and friends.

Professional Accomplishments: Right out of completing a four-year business program with honors in marketing at the University of Windsor, Rubino landed a sales representative position for a master distributor in London, Ontario. He was given a territory generating approximately \$300,000 in sales, and he quickly became the specialist in the greenhouse sector and jumped to the Top 3 sales representatives generating the most revenue for the distributor. His territory grew from \$300,000 to \$3,500,000 within five years with a focus primarily on agriculture/greenhouse supplies and packaging materials. During his five-year tenure, he also completed courses at the Richard Ivy School of Business, continuing his education and further expanding his skill set.

In 2005, Rubino took advantage of an opportunity at one of his largest greenhouse customers, Mastronardi Produce (MPL), and was hired as a packaging/production manager. His role emerged to focus strictly on packaging materials, and he was responsible for procuring all

materials, managing a budget of approximately \$15 million. In 2008, the company merged the packaging department and marketing department within the same office. Rubino became the director of purchasing with the responsibility of purchasing all non-produce materials and negotiating service and labor contracts. The purchasing team grew to four people with a budget of approximately \$35 million. His responsibilities now included sourcing and procuring materials worldwide via travel and trade shows, product development/R&D, packaging material sales, and customer support with product launches.

During his 10 years with MPL, he has been recognized by key customers as a packaging specialist and consulted on packaging outside of MPL's core product offerings as well as speaking at top yearly client meetings to provide his outlook on packaging trends. With his team's support, his department has made some great achievements including: the 2010 PMA Impact Award, 2012 United Fresh New Product Award, 2012 FTA Gold Award, 2013 PAC Leadership Award, 2014 United Fresh New Product Award; the 2015 PAC Food Waste Package Award and 2015 PAC Sustainable Packaging Award. This past March, MPL selected Rubino to attend a PMA

Emerging Leader program in partnership with Thunderbird School of Global Business.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: In five years I still see myself here at MPL. The company is growing and expanding in different areas of produce. I know there is plenty of opportunities here at MPL, so I am just now skimming the surface of my potential.

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

A: The nice thing about working at MPL is there are many key passionate people with a ton of experience. Over the years, the company endorsed an open door policy and still remains true to that. From a fourth generation president and chief executive to any mid level manager/supervisor, the people in those positions are very personable and approachable. They are always willing to advise or help.

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

A: I think I'm most proud of how I remained true to myself. Since my start in produce I have always been in a management position. Being able to lead and gain the respect of those around me has



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had its challenges; however I have been able to overcome them in a proactive and professional manner. Being able to reach my organizational goals is also gratifying.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Always be factual and learn from any shortcomings. Remain true to yourself, and you will find you will always have the support of those around you.



Emmanuel Ruiz, 28
Senior Sales & Operations
Manager – Miami Office
World Class Flowers

Doral, FL

Hometown: Miami, FL

Hobbies: Music, Running

Charity Involvement: Actively gives back to his native country of Nicaragua; participates in charity supported half marathons.

Professional Accomplishments: Ruiz has been a leader at World Class Flowers, running all Miami operations. He acts as the farm liaison and has recently seen success in sales. He has grown his sales accounts more than 50 percent within a six-month period. He is known as being one of the hardest working individuals in the industry. His team surrounding him feeds off of his desire and motivation. Ruiz has been with World Class Flowers for more than nine years. He began as a buyer of consumer bunches, bouquets and bulk in 2006. In 2010 he became operations manager for the Miami Office. In 2013, he took on the added position of senior sales account manager. He has been involved for the past five years at PMA and IFE events and World Class was awarded booth of the Year at the 2014 IFE Show.

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

A: My hometown environment led me to the produce/floral industry. At a very young age, I needed to work to help support my family. Luckily, I grew up in the hotbed of Colombian imports. As a junior in high school, I started working nights and weekends moving product in the cooler and loading trucks.

Q: What is the biggest challenge about your job?

A: The floral industry itself is a huge challenge. To strategize, cultivate, harvest, and ship take months of preparation, and any unforeseeable turn of events may dramatically change everything. There are simply not enough hours in

the day, or days in the week to get everything done precisely.

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

A: I still see myself in the floral industry and it playing an intricate part of my lifestyle. It is something I love doing and have a strong passion about. There is never a dull moment when you have an endless amount of work, improvements and creative opportunities ahead of you.

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

A: I wish I knew that most scenarios never go as initially planned, and that the real feeling of success and accomplishment come from being able to adapt to and grow from the new challenges you face. Dealing with a perishable and highly sensitive product like flowers has many factors you simply do not have 100 percent control over.

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

A: The World Class Flower team. They have been the biggest group of mentors I have ever come across. They operate as an exceptional team and strive for perfection in everything they do. I have been privileged to work with individuals that have the right attitude and mindset. It starts with the president of our company, Robert Gravitz; he continually reminds us that the customer always comes first, and that the phone ringing off the hook is a very good problem to have.



Nicholas Joshua Ruiz, 35
Innovation Manager
Church Brothers Produce
Salinas, CA

Hometown: Salinas, Ca

Hobbies: Starting and operating a small family winery, Twisted Roots Wine. Since the first year, the company has grown to include four full-time employees, and two regional sales people within California. The wines have won many awards as well.

Personal: Married

Community: Supporting, teaching, and giving to youth interested in Agriculture: Chairman of the North Salinas FFA Advisor Board (10 years); Member of the North Salinas Ag Boosters; Young Life Pumpkin Patch; Monterey County Farm Bureau; MeEarth; Ag Against Hunger; California ALS Foundation; Peace of Mind Dog Rescue.

Motto in Life: Never ask someone to do some-

thing that you have not already done or are not willing to do yourself.

Professional Accomplishments: Ruiz started his professional career at River Ranch as an intern while he was an undergraduate student at California Polytechnic State University. During that time, he consolidated 20 years of planting history into a usable database. After graduating from Cal Poly, with a bachelor's degree in Agribusiness and Crop Production, as well as a master's degree in Agribusiness, Ruiz returned to Salinas and River Ranch, first as a planting schedule and crop planning assistant, then was promoted to broccoli supervisor where he helped develop an iceless broccoli program. He was one of the first people who found, through trial and error, an iceless broccoli product that when handled, harvested, and cooled correctly could be successfully shipped across the country. He was then promoted to broccoli crop manager.

After about two years there, he went to work for Tanimura & Antle, where he began a career as a production analyst. After about two years as an analyst, he was promoted to director of harvest when he developed and refined cauliflower harvest equipment for the company that saved 25 percent of the labor costs and increased efficiencies and crew capacities. He ultimately became the general manager of harvest for iceberg lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower; and celery. He also helped integrate the printed Kwiklock sealers into the iceberg lettuce program. At the start of 2014, he began a new career with Church Brothers, where he was named innovation manager. In this position with Church Brothers, he is responsible for the new broccoli floret harvesting method and is an integral part of the agriculture operations team. He is constantly thinking about the next generation of harvest, growing, and methods to improve current operations.

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

A: I wanted to be a farmer and feed the world. I started working on a farm during high school, and then worked into more of the shipper side of the business later on. Agriculture started and stopped at the grocery store for my family, but being born and raised in the Salinas Valley, ag was all around me growing up. So one day in high school, I decided I should find out more about this stuff growing all around me. I drove out to the first field I could find, asked the farmer if I could ride with him, and just see what it was all about, and the rest is history. I instantly fell in love with the idea of feeding the world, and the people that were in the business, and made my mind up right then.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would really like to see more automation in my lifetime with the produce business. The rest of the work has adapted and changed to allow technology to fit into their business or industries, and the produce business has been one of the last to do that. Over the past five years there has been a lot of improvement, but I think we have a long way to go yet. I would really like to see the day when our delicate, specialty crops, are machine harvested.

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

A: This one is simple for me, when I need advice, either in business or in my personal life, Pat Staffard has been the guy I go to. Since the first day of work at River Ranch when I met Pat as his intern, he has always been there to help me, and more importantly teach me, which has been invaluable in my career. I also had the great fortune to work for Bob Antle, and that time was such a great experience, as Bob truly taught me a lot about the produce business.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce business?

A: That this is a tough business to be in, and that if agriculture is not your passion, and is not in your heart, it won't be easy. You have to want to get up early, work late, and struggle, simply because you love going through it, and because you want to succeed.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: Today, as compared to when I started, there are far more rules and regulations, both on the farm and with labor. Today the rules and regulations make it increasingly difficult for everyone involved in the produce business, from the field staff, to companies that employ them. The overall quality standards have changed a lot as well since I started in the business. The basics of what we do have changed very little, while the regulations and or guidelines have changed significantly.



John Scherpinski, 32
Director of Sales
D'Arrigo Bros. Co.
of California

Salinas, CA

Hometown: Salinas, CA

Hobbies: Golf, triathlons, camping

Personal: Married for seven years with two daughters

Professional Accomplishments: Scherpinski started working at D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of California in July of 2005 after graduating from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Prior to being hired full time, he worked as an intern for four years holding various responsibilities within the shipping facility (receiving/cooling/shipping). After his graduation, he was offered a sales coordinator position. From this initial position nine years ago, he has gained much perspective on the diverse industry. Currently, as the director of sales, he is in charge of guiding the sales programs in the retail sector. He also manages a commodity list including Romaine, Green Leaf, Red Leaf, and Butter and is responsible to mentor and guide the company's junior sales associates.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: The fluidness of the day and adapting to an ever-changing environment. Also, in terms of my current job, the part I respect most is that once trained you are empowered to make decisions. With that, there is a freedom of ownership of that decision. This autonomy demands accountability, and thus I have become a more thorough decision maker in the process. The best part is getting to pick your own path and to foster that relationship with a customer. Now we certainly have to answer to every level regarding performance of both accounts and commodities, but the day-to-day execution is up to you.

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

A: Develop and lead strategies that will enable the Andy Boy brand to expand its presence specifically in retail and wholesale marketplaces. Learn to guide and motivate our young team to increase our company successes.

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

A: I received much of my sales guidance from Chad Amaral and Dave Martinez as they are my direct bosses. Fortunately, because of the structure of our company, I have also had the opportunity to gain perspectives from Steve DeLormier (vice president of operations-Salinas), Alan Luke (vice president of operations-Yuma), along with gaining valuable insight from our president John D'Arrigo.

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

A: I like to believe I have a strong work ethic and moral base that guided me through the early stages of my career. I hope to inspire, motivate, and guide others on our team so that they continually see the potential they have to grow and share in the bright future of this

great company.

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

A: In becoming a trusted/respected source for information that does not only pertain to Andy Boy specifically, but also the industry as a whole.



Leslie Simmons, 32
Marketing Manager
Dave's Specialty Imports
Miami, FL

Hometown: Grew up in Cincinnati, now lives in New York

Hobbies: Making all things homemade, natural household and beauty supplies, baking and cooking, and various crafts

Personal: Married with one child

Community: PMA volunteer; Women's Fresh Perspective Advisory Board

Motto in Life: Leave everything more beautiful than how you found it.

Professional Accomplishments: After graduating from the University of Tampa with a bachelor of arts in communications and being awarded the communication department's prestigious Visual Aesthetics award in 2004, Simmons worked as an event planner in the Tampa area. After moving to New York City in 2005 she began to build a career in marketing and advertising, working her way up to account supervisor in a Manhattan agency. Her efforts focused on strategic, tactical, and media planning as well as finance, and client services. She joined Dave's in 2011 to become the third generation in the family business. She is currently focusing on new business development, branding, strategy and general marketing efforts for the company; and she also works closely with the company's food safety, traceability and sustainability programs.

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

A: As the third generation in my family's company you might expect my career in produce was arranged from an early age, but that wasn't the case. It was only after building a career in marketing and advertising in New York that I decided to make the switch. I gained a broad understanding of strategic planning, client services, and brand development and I reached a point where I was ready for a new challenge. At the same time my grandfather was looking to lighten his workload and my father was taking on a bigger role in our company. So, I entered the family business and the world of produce and I haven't looked back.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would love to see more women taking leadership roles throughout the associations and in their individual companies. The industry seems to be moving in the right direction but there is definitely room to grow.

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

A: Foremost, I seek my father's advice. But I think it is important to look outside of our company and to bounce ideas off of other industry friends, colleagues, and anyone I consider a mentor. Getting an honest opinion from a range of people you trust can make a big difference when it comes to the tough choices.

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

A: I am inspired by my grandfather's story and the name he created for himself. My daughter Ruby also inspires me. At only a year old she eats an enormous amount of produce and I know that it is really making a difference in how she will grow-up. I want every child to not just eat, but to really love and understand the beauty behind all of our fruits and vegetables.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Take a chance. Be the one who starts the conversation even if you don't have all of the answers. Show up to a meeting and be the only person you know in the room. You aren't going to know everything or everyone but you have to start somewhere. When I began my career in this industry I was often on my own and it has challenged me to reach out of my comfort zone. It has also allowed me to create some of the most rewarding relationships I have today and I'm constantly learning from those around me. Stay open and true to yourself, and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know the answer, but I am happy to find out for you."



Youye (Lola) Song, 26
Asia Account Executive
Mayrsohn West Company,
a division of Mayrsohn Inter-
national Trading Co., Inc.

Miami, FL

Hometown: Harbin, China

Hobbies: International travels, languages and cultures, dancing, marketing

Personal: Single

Community: Shanghai Young Professional Group Founder and Key-Coordinator, Institute of Food

"I would love to see more women taking leadership roles throughout the associations and in their individual companies."

— Leslie Simmons

Technologists (IFT) Second award winner at IFT 2013 graduate student poster competition; Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) Network; Cornell Alumni Association of Northern California; Cornell Women's Network

Motto in Life: Work hard and be kind. Amazing things will happen.

Professional Accomplishments: After studying Agriculture and Business at Cornell University and receiving a marketing strategies certificate at Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management, Song worked briefly in a Germany-based company as a food safety researcher. In 2013, she had the great honor to become one of the 40 award winners in the Pack Family Career Pathways Program and attended PMA's Fresh Summit. At the show, she connected with current employer Mayrsohn. Promoted from sales associate to Asia account executive, Song changed work locations from the headquarters in Miami, FL to Moraga, CA. In California, she managed a range of responsibilities from client acquisition and servicing, export sales and logistics to general business strategic planning. In September 2014, Song was relocated to Shanghai, China to start a new division for Mayrsohn in Asia. She is now managing all Asian accounts in real time and also actively developing new business.

Shortly after she joined the company, her team revised its logistics and sales strategies and as a result witnessed a 50 percent increase in Asia export business. In early 2014, she flew to Mainland China for two weeks and resolved a claim situation with another senior colleague at the company. Her multicultural backgrounds allowed her to not only speak both English and Chinese fluently, but to understand the two cultures at a very profound level and lessen the misunderstanding causing the business problem. Her other efforts at the company include marketing and technology upgrades. She started introducing B2B and B2C marketing strategies to the company and started building digital data by utilizing customer relationship management (CRM).

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

A: My biggest challenge as an international produce trader is to keep the work up and always stay alert. Mother Nature is unpredictable and perishable foods like fresh fruits and vegetables can be very unforgiving if there are any mistakes in shipping. Dealing with U.S. fruit going on water for weeks to the Far East takes not only experience but also unyielding dedication toward details.

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

A: I envision a huge growth in business in Asia where I am most active. I would love to see our West office double sales every year and grow in size to a team three times bigger. I want to supervise as many young people as I can, because I believe in the potential of fresh minds and fearless spirits. I also envision Mayrsohn getting so much bigger in Asia Export that our name becomes a brand and a legend, and I can proudly state that I contributed to that.

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

A: I wish I knew I was going to become a produce trader when I was in college. I could use a bit more education on international laws regarding agricultural product trading.

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

A: Branding. I feel growers and packers in produce are just starting to realize how powerful marketing can be for their products. More efforts will be put into marketing research, advertising, packaging innovations and brand differentiations.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Go and recruit in universities and colleges! I was in one of the best agriculture schools and had no idea this industry needs people like me. I thought all they needed were plant engineers and farmers.



Jason Stemm, 39
Vice President
PadillaCRT
Minneapolis, MN

Hometown: Normal, IL (yes it exists)

Hobbies: Cooking, traveling, teaching his 5-year old daughter to ice skate, swim and play tennis

Personal: Married with one daughter

Community: Traveled to Florida, South Carolina, Alabama and Mexico to build houses and help communities recover from natural disasters

through St. John's Lutheran Church in Bloomington, IL; volunteers at New York-area food pantries; helped coordinate fresh produce donations in New York City following Superstorm Sandy; served as president of IFEC (International Foodservice Editorial Council) and volunteered on numerous conference committees and its five-year strategic planning team.

Motto in Life: The harder I work, the luckier I get.

Professional Accomplishments: Stemm aided industry members and produce associations for more than 16 years to help grow consumption and give value back to producers for specialty crops. Over the years at Lewis & Neale and now PadillaCRT, he worked with the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, Avocados From Mexico, North Carolina Sweet Potatoes, Florida Sweet Corn and Tomatoes, and leading shippers such as Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Del Monte Fresh Produce and Country Fresh Mushrooms. He managed multiple award-winning campaigns honored by the Produce Business Marketing Excellence Awards and the International Association of Culinary Professionals, as well as awards from leading public relations trade publications, PRWeek Awards and the Holmes Group SABRE Awards.

As a 14-year-old boy, he worked at Kroger,

spending most of his days tray packing sweet corn and restocking bananas. His career in marketing fresh produce began at 23 when Anita Fial at Lewis & Neale hired him, assigning him to the North American Radish Council and the Southern Supersweet Corn Council. His marketing work in fresh fruits and vegetables included fully-integrated programs incorporating public relations, advertising, promotions and social media. Through research-driven strategy, comprehensive industry knowledge, and a commitment to clients, he worked on accounts that helped to more than triple blueberry consumption, double avocado consumption, significantly increase sweet potato consumption, and helped Florida sweet corn growers reach record May shipments in the past two May periods.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Less fearful communications about fresh fruits and vegetables. Whether it is organic versus conventional, pesticides or GMOs, we should avoid trying to scare consumers about our competitors and grow produce consumption across the board.

Q: What are some of the most exciting

moments in your career so far?

A: When we introduced Duda's red celery during a PMA Fresh Summit to a group of media (mostly produce trade) at the opening. Before the end of the day, it had been picked up by AP and Reuters, Dan Duda had interviews with CBS Radio and NPR and it culminated in the *ABC World News Tonight with Diane Sawyer's* national broadcast covering it with images of the product and the seed developer that I supplied. Currently we are executing an ambitious and one-of-its-kind digital push for Florida Sweet Corn that includes a number of innovative social engagements, digital advertising and database building elements to help be competitive with the big boys of packaged and fast food.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Talk to everyone, and listen more than you speak. Never stop learning.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Dispel myths of agriculture and engage them in new ways/places. It's great to take them to the farm but how about taking the farmer to the store, restaurant or kitchen?

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

A: More transparency and connection to the source of our fruits and vegetables.



Michael Strock, 28
Director of Business Development
S. Strock & Co.

Boston, MA

Hometown: Wakefield, MA

Hobbies: Ice hockey, golf, automobiles and the Boston Bruins

Personal: Married

Motto in Life: Eat better, think better, and dream big!

Professional Accomplishments: Strock was born into the industry and began his produce career with a broom in his hands during summer vacations. As the years went by he progressed through various jobs including picking orders and loading trucks. During his college years, he spent time in the office learning the business inside and out. After graduating from college, he was looking to make his mark within the produce industry. His job at Strock entailed bringing in new business ventures and ideas for the company, so he took on the challenge of creating an organic business. Almost seven years later, it's now a multi-million dollar part of the company's business.

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

A: I was born into it. Sam Strock, my grandfather, is a legend in the business, and my other grandfather Louie, owned a successful produce retail store. This is also how my parents met.

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

A: My wife would say the hours. I am so consumed by the job and tend to fall asleep with my phone in my hand on the couch most nights.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Hands down, the people I am privileged to work with day in and day out, including co-workers, vendors and customers. It's the people who make this industry great.

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

A: To continue waking up bright and early every morning with the same relentless goal: to make myself a better leader and the company a better organization.

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

A: Sam-pa (Grandpa). His 85-plus years of experience is an invaluable resource on life lessons and expertise in the produce business. Google is no match for Sam Strock.



Melissa Sylte, 31
Marketing Manager
RPE, Inc.
Bancroft, WI

Hometown: Plainfield, WI

Hobbies: Spending time with family and friends, camping, hiking, home improvement projects, helping on family farm, scrapbooking and cheering on the Wisconsin Badgers.

Personal: Married

Community: Wisconsin FFA (Future Farmers of America) Alumni Association; co-chair of Rally to Fight Hunger for Wisconsin FFA since 2009; co-chair of Day of Service for Wisconsin FFA since 2009; judge for FFA speaking contests; volunteer for local Public Museum Development Committee since 2013; volunteer for ThedaCare Foundation Annual Fund Drive since 2010 and event chair since 2014; Junior Achievement volunteer from 2010 to 2012; member of local church.

Motto in Life: The key to happiness is having dreams. The key to success is making those dreams into realities.

Professional Accomplishments: Growing up on a farm, Sylte started her own successful agribusiness at age 10, raising and selling chickens, and demonstrated her passion for marketing. During her time at RPE (Russet Potato Exchange), she created a professional internal marketing department for the company and its partners; successfully launched multiple consumer brands; and planned and executed successful integrated marketing campaigns to support and sell those brands. The addition of RPE's Tasteful Selections baby potato brand, along with Sylte's knowledge and zeal for marketing, has refreshed and reinvented the entire potato category.

In addition to infusing excitement into the potato category, she developed strong internship and community outreach programs. Prior to her position at RPE, Inc., Sylte served as development director at a regional non-profit organization and as an assistant director of marketing at Indiana University.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: As the world becomes more connected through the means of technology and social media and consumers ask for more and more transparency about the origin of their food. It's

important for the industry to continue to make strides to tell the produce story to consumers through education and marketing.

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

A: There will be challenges you won't see coming, and projects you don't expect. However, taking these in stride, and learning from each step along the way, you will accomplish new things for which you never planned.

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

A: At Indiana University, I was able to help my team win six creative excellence awards for our marketing campaigns. It was definitely a milestone for my team and me. At RPE, the greatest accomplishment was helping create our Tasteful Selections bite-sized potato line, which changed the landscape of the entire potato category. Additionally, I worked hard to inspire future generations of young professionals by developing an internship program and working with youth organizations like FFA to encourage students to hone career development skills.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Don't underestimate the experience and talent people can bring to the table based on their age or their time within the produce industry. There are a lot of talented young professionals from other industries that would be great fits within the produce industry.

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

A: As consumers become more connected through technology and social media, the more important it will be for us to tell our story and educate consumers where their food comes from, telling the story from field to fork. Producers marketing directly to consumers will become more and more important as the Millennial generation steps into the role as the largest demographic of consumers in history.



Chris Thomsen, 37
Head Grower
Mushroom Farms Inc.
(Monterey Mushrooms)

Watsonville, CA

Hometown: Fresno, CA

Hobbies: Avid mountain and road bike rider; enjoys building and flying remote control planes, including a model with a jet turbine; actively

involved with the local homebrew community, having won awards for beer brewed with the mushrooms he grows.

Personal: Married with two children

Community: Involved with the Monterey Bay chapter of Team In Training and Leukemia Lymphoma Society. In 2010 he was motivated to fundraise as an athlete training to ride 100 miles around Lake Tahoe. In the years since, he has been a mentor helping new athletes meet fundraising and physical goals. Also involved with the Monterey and Santa Cruz chapters of Young Farmers & Ranchers. On the Santa Cruz Farm Bureau Board of Directors for two years. California Leadership Farm Bureau program graduate. Leadership Salinas Valley program graduate.

Motto in Life: Don't worry about the small stuff, and it's all small stuff.

Professional Accomplishments: Thomsen hails from a family farm in Nebraska and his dad has worked in the agriculture chemical industry as a pest control advisor for more than 40 years. Through his time at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo he was afforded the chance to work with companies spanning from the ag chem industry to working on electric tomato sorting equipment. These internships allowed him to realize he wanted to be involved with production agriculture. Following graduation, Thomsen worked in the breeding department at Sensient Dehydrated Flavors in the dehydrated onion, garlic and chili powder industry. He then pursued an interest in the precision irrigation industry with Jacobsen Consulting where he helped improve growers' irrigation efficiencies, which helped them improve crop quality.

Thomsen joined Monterey Mushroom as a quality assurance and food safety manager where his understanding of cropping systems and aptitude for integrating technology lead to more development in the growing department. Later this year, he will begin a new chapter as production manager at Monterey Mushrooms' sister company, Amycel Spawnmate.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I believe the produce industry needs to be more visual. Just being on the supermarket shelves is not enough. There is a strong effort to educate the population outside of our industry, but I think we have just scratched the surface.

Q: Who do you seek out when you need advice?

A: I am fortunate to have mentors within Monterey Mushrooms whom I can rely on for advice. Wayne Bautista, general manager of Monterey Mushrooms, is someone I seek out

“I believe the produce industry needs to be more visual. Just being on the supermarket shelves is not enough.”

— Chris Thomsen

for guidance and who taught me about the mushroom industry. David Ghiglione, operations manager of Monterey Mushrooms, has helped provide me with prospective on best-growing practices. And, when life and career interchange, I have yet to run into an issue my wife or parents could not help me figure out.

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

A: I am most proud of the team effort to convert our farm to organic production. Within Monterey Mushroom, this is only the second time that this had been done, so best practices had to be established, developed and implemented. Outside of Monterey Mushrooms, my proudest accomplishment was representing California Agriculture through Leadership Farm Bureau in Washington D.C.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Don't paint yourself into a corner. There are endless opportunities in agriculture. Allow yourself the freedom to explore and find your true calling.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: In my short career, I have seen the industry mature and refine. A once male-dominated industry has become an industry with women driving positions of great leadership and influence. My grandfather had a notebook, and now we are using advanced technology and management tools. I look forward to seeing how the industry further develops and changes in the coming years.



Scott Vandervoet, 35

**Sales
Vandervoet and Associates,
Inc.**

Nogales, AZ

Hometown: Tubac, AZ

Hobbies: Hiking, mountain biking, gardening,

spending time with family

Personal: Married with one daughter

Community: Board President of local nonprofit, Friends of the Santa Cruz River

Motto in Life: Ignorance is more expensive than education.

Professional Accomplishments: As is common in a small, family-operated company, Vandervoet wears many hats, and is known to embrace challenge with skill, a curiosity to learn, and a desire to improve things. He is responsible for the buying and selling of fresh produce for spot market and contractual movement. He is also responsible individually or as a team member for grower relations, publicity, food safety, accounting, strategic initiatives, GHPs, GMPs, traceability, and pretty much anything else that can go on in a small company. From sales to food safety, he is not afraid to learn the skills and new information he needs to help his company succeed.

In addition to working in his own business, Vandervoet understands the importance of working on issues impacting the greater good. He has been closely involved in an ongoing international agreement between the United States and Mexico concerning cantaloupe and food safety protocols. Additionally, he spent countless hours working collaboratively with others in the cantaloupe industry to develop the National Cantaloupe Guidance document, bringing to the table the perspective of his cantaloupe growers in Mexico and representing other FPAA members involved in the importation of cantaloupes. These are initiatives impacting cantaloupe growers across North America.

He volunteers a significant amount of time to the FPAA and is also deeply involved in local issues of water quality, water infrastructure improvements, and environmental concerns. Those activities include monitoring water quality of the upper Santa Cruz River, advocacy of securing and improving water quality and quantity in the upper Santa Cruz River, supporting waste water infrastructure improvements in Nogales Sonora and working with local land owners to support riparian habitat in Santa Cruz County.

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

A: Keeping the big picture in mind, while still focusing on the details. There is a phrase in Spanish used in this region in respect to the weather that says, "Febrero loco, Marzo otro poco," which translates as "February is crazy, and March even more so." Understanding the effect of seasonal climate variability on open field spring crops, and translating that for production estimates and marketing purposes is one of our

most difficult tasks.

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

A: Creating stronger relationships and better information sharing and projections between growers and sales offices.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: More fluid movement through ports of entry, both at land and sea.

Q: What inspired your work in the produce industry?

A: Growers who take risks related to weather and markets to provide consumers with healthy foods.

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

A: Representing interests specific to Nogales, AZ, importers in both Washington, DC, and Mexico City, as well as actively carrying-on dialogue with state-level politicians in an effort to improve the image of border communities and commerce in the eyes of Arizona legislators in Phoenix.



Job Villanueva, 37
Organic Sales Manager
The Giumarra Companies
Los Angeles, CA

Hometown: Nogales, AZ

Hobbies: Sports (basketball & boxing), music, family activities

Personal: Married with two children

Community: Sacred Heart Church: religious education instructor and middle school retreat program minister; youth basketball coach; Boy Scouts volunteer.

Motto in Life: Put God first, and the rest will fall into place.

Professional Accomplishments: Although Villanueva started at The Giumarra Companies by sweeping and scrubbing floors, he didn't limit himself. He learned how to work the forklift and pallet jack and was soon loading and unloading trucks. Eager to learn, he helped in the dispatch office and worked there for quite some time. He educated himself by studying the various commodities received at Giumarra including all aspects of color and ripeness, quality, condition and descriptive characteristics. Management then recommended him as the new, official (one member) Quality Control Department. As the company began reducing rejections and

minimizing quality issues on arrivals, demand for product grew substantially. As volume expanded, he was ordered to build a real QC team and hired two people and trained them. To this day, they are team leaders and trained many others. As his interest in more of the Giumarra operation grew, the company noticed and offered him the opportunity to sell. For the next three years, while still managing the QC department, he worked the sales desk. Though the company reached a point where they were contemplating focusing solely on conventional product, he convinced them to give the organic category one last shot. He was given one year to make it work. He started with only 15 acres and over the past five years the operation expanded to 330 acres with a full line of organic commodities. Its rate of growth is still climbing as growers and customers now look to Giumarra as an industry leader in the organic arena.

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

A: I grew up in a small border town sustained by the produce industry. That influence, along with my family's economic difficulties, led me to start a new journey in the produce business. I just started college, when my family began going through financial duress, my priority at the time was to help my parents, as I am the only male of 10 siblings. To my parents' dismay, I made the difficult decision to leave college and come home. I quickly found employment at The Giumarra Companies, where the only position was in the maintenance department.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: Achieving even more diversity in regard to the organic product line. I'd like to expand our presence beyond retail to institutional, having a real impact in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers and health-minded restaurants.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: An enhanced way to educate consumers on the health benefits of fresh produce, focusing especially on our kids eating healthier — enlightening the next generation.

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

A: When I was struck with the aspiration of becoming a salesman, I put it in God's hands, and in prayer — I was guided by Him. I always go to Him with my doubts and concerns.

Q: What do you know now you wish you

knew when you first started your career?

A: I would not change anything I experienced so far in the produce industry. What I know now has been gained by trial and error and training in the field. Had I known then what I know now, the learning experience I now treasure so much may have been jaded.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Listen to the voice of experience, learn from your surroundings, and have an open mind to the endless possibilities.



Jamie Vosejka, 39
Category Manager – Melons,
East and Central Regions
Robinson Fresh

Eden Prairie, MN

Hometown: Lonsdale, MN

Hobbies: Reading, landscaping, gardening, auto racing

Personal: Married

Community: Involved in a program called "Compassion International" sponsoring children in economically depressed areas

Motto in Life: Fail to plan, plan to fail. Think differently.

Professional Accomplishments: Vosejka is known as the cornerstone of Robinson Fresh's East/Central regions melon programs. Over the years, he maintained and developed strong grower and customer relationships.

He was a driving force behind C.H. Robinson's locally grown program in the early 2000s. Vosejka began working with Robinson Fresh in 2001 in peppers and tomatoes. After one year, he was promoted to a category manager role over sweet corn, cabbage, and greens programs, as a result of working with a grower in Illinois to develop a sweet corn program in an unorthodox growing region in Mississippi. At its peak, the program was producing 1,600 acres of sweet corn and greens. He also sought out small, local growers in an effort to help bring their products to market while helping retailers attain their goal of increasing local sales. Over the years, the program provided more than 4 million cartons of locally grown produce to customers across North America, working with several universities, and in some situations, bringing products back to growing regions that hadn't grown those products in decades. He took what was started in Mississippi and brought it to Arkansas helping a tomato grower diversify products by adding greens, cabbage, and hot peppers. Thus beginning what

was considered a new model of marketing crops rather than cultivating a procurement strategy.

When C.H. Robinson acquired Timco Worldwide in 2012, a watermelon shipper in Davis, CA, Vosejka was presented with the opportunity to manage the integration of the office as their business model of marketing crops matched what he had been doing in Arkansas. He moved to California and spent two years working with Robinson Fresh's mini and seedless watermelon crop. Recognizing how the organization lacked leadership on the East Coast, he moved to Charlotte, NC in 2014 to manage East and Central region melon crops. As category manager, his current responsibilities include strategically planning crop acreage, varieties, and growing locations, as well as tactically managing sales during peak season.

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

A: I grew up in a very small town about an hour south of the Twin Cities, and spent a lot of time on my grandfather's dairy farm. It taught me a strong work ethic, and an appreciation for the farmer. I carry those philosophies with me every day, and I still talk to my grandfather weekly. I guess you can say that agriculture is in my blood. I was looking for an opportunity for a career change, and an individual I was working with in my previous job had a friend working for C.H. Robinson in logistics. When I explored the company, I saw they were also engaged in agriculture, which intrigued me to apply for a position.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: We work with several customers by making an effort to proactively plan for crops. Our motto is often to "plant for the PO" rather than "pray for the PO." I would like to see more of that from customers. Farming is risky enough without having knowledge of where you are going to bring the product.

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

A: I had no idea the amount of work it takes to get a piece of produce from the field to the shelf. The planning, land preparation, financial investment, weather, harvesting, and packing. The moment you pick that melon out of a field, you are on the clock to get that product packed and on a truck, and delivered in time. A million things can go wrong, but when the process is done correctly, it is truly a feeling of accomplishment.

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

A: There was a situation where I received a phone call from a farmer in Mississippi who planted 500 acres of sweet corn with no knowledge of the product, how to harvest it, or who to sell to. I met with this farmer and C.H. Robinson immediately jumped in to ensure trucks were on-site to get the product to market. This project eventually turned into a major production region where we worked with Dr. Lester Spell, the secretary of agriculture for Mississippi and representatives from Mississippi State University, to help build a cooler and three hydro coolers in the middle of what was a cotton field in the Mississippi Delta.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: I have been in the industry long enough to see the pendulum swing from a transactional, daily procurement model, to a more focused, program planned business, with food safety and social responsibility being the driving factors behind these changes.



Jennifer Westerhoff, 39
Executive Vice President /
Owner
Classic Harvest Produce
Paramus, NJ

Hometown: Colusa, CA

Hobbies: Shopping, gardening, painting, cooking, crafts, music, spending time with family

Personal: Married with three kids

Community: Cub Scout leader; Sunday school teacher; youth group leader; volunteer at Tulare County office of Education Theatre.

Motto in Life: The struggle you're in today is developing the strength you will need for tomorrow.

Professional Accomplishments: Westerhoff joined the produce industry as a sales assistant at Perricone Farms working with the regional sales manager setting up several national account programs. After five years at Perricone, she moved to Sunkist Growers National Accounts office. She set up and managed a major national account program, which proved to be a hugely successful account for Sunkist. After about seven years, she was recruited to Paramount Citrus to begin and manage many major national retail accounts. The move to Paramount brought her to work with many different types of retail accounts and expanded her expertise in marketing. She then joined Alliance International/Capespan North America where she was hired to help

develop a California citrus program and improve the import citrus program on the West Coast. About a year ago, she linked up with her now two partners, Adam Behar and Linda Cunningham and formed Classic Harvest Produce officially in May 2014. Working from Visalia, CA, she is now owner and executive vice president at Classic Harvest Produce, providing California with import citrus, grapes, and all varieties of tree fruit year-round. Her current duties include grower relations, managing production and harvesting plans at two California packinghouses, category manager for California citrus, managing several food-service, wholesale, and retail accounts, export sales, inventory management, and creating and implementing new marketing concepts and go-to-market strategies.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I eat produce every single day both fruits and vegetables. We grow some fresh vegetables in our backyard garden at home as well, which has been very enjoyable for my family over the years.

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

A: Understanding the risks of farming, and helping our growers and customers to become as successful as possible. To do this, you must develop trust, and developing trust means consistently performing for both our growers and customers, day after day which is not always easy to do, but I strive very hard to achieve this goal.

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

A: Within our company, we are innovative, forward thinkers so it is always exciting to see what we will be pushing ahead with next. Currently, we are putting together new go-to-market strategies we'll be rolling out over the next few years. We also have expansion plans in motion on our harvesting side that will significantly increase our California citrus production and tree fruit production over the next four years. We will be continuing to grow our import offerings on both the West and East coast. We will continue to strive to be the best we can on sustainability for our agricultural future and continue efforts with social responsibility.

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

A: During my 17 years in this industry, I have really had the opportunity to work with many strong leaders. Each of them pushed and challenged my thoughts, taught me new concepts

that added to my success and encouraged me to grow and want to learn every aspect of the produce business.

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

A: Where I am today. I had no idea the path I would be on in the produce industry, but I would not change anything about it. There is no doubt I do have stressful days, but I am honestly having the time of my life. I am very proud of the relationships that have developed and the customer and grower trust and respect I earned over my time in the industry. I definitely have a passion for the business and put a lot of focus on the needs and goals of my customers and business partners.



Megan Zweig, 39
Strategic Marketing Director
DMA Solutions
Irving, TX

Hometown: Plano, TX

Hobbies: Cooking, swimming, iPhotography,

laughing with friends and family

Personal: Married 13 years with one son

Community: Gives time and resources to various charities throughout the year.

Motto in Life: Be the best you can be in the present...and never stop dancing!

Professional Accomplishments: Zweig began in the fresh produce industry eight years ago as a new mom, when her present boss, Dan'l Mackey Almy, offered her a job opportunity that allowed her to keep a flexible schedule. Previously, she worked for a large multinational corporation, starting at the bottom and working her way up, and then at a public relations and marketing firm in Dallas. She is known for her passion for promoting fresh produce to the masses. She is considered an innovative thinker with the ability to get produce companies to think outside the box when marketing to consumers. She is a member of the United Fresh Marketing Committee and PMA Exhibitor Advisory Board.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: A lot! Over the years, fresh produce has become such a big part of my professional and

personal life. And since I'm the head chef of my home, I get to make all of the decisions relative to menu items, which most of the time involve a combination of lean proteins, fruits and vegetables. My family loves it. Why? They don't really have a choice. For my son, this is all he knows, so he adapted well to foods that traditionally, kids are opposed to eating, like kale and spinach. He loves it. My husband is just grateful to have a wife that loves food and knows how to cook.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Are you kidding? I get to promote fresh fruit and vegetables every day. As far as I'm concerned, I'm the luckiest marketer on the planet.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Marketing, marketing, marketing. From my perspective, almost everyone working in the fresh produce industry, whether in the field or behind a desk, is a marketer because we're typically developing or pitching our products or services to an audience with specific needs, whether business to business or business to consumer. If we're not honing our sales and marketing skills and growing by practice along the way, we might find ourselves getting behind in the ever-evolving and highly competitive marketing environment today. The bottom line is, if we want to sell more fresh produce, we need to be thinking about our end buyer or consumer and delivering the products and information that are most helpful to them on a daily basis. Marketing and communication is the path to relevancy with these audiences so understanding how that works as a company and an industry is of the utmost importance.

Q: Who do you go to when in need of advice?

A: I'm so lucky to have five people in my life that I turn to when I need sound advice: my husband, Aaron; my mentor and boss, Dan'l; my mom; and my two best friends.

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

A: I am most proud of the people I've been able to establish working relationships with and friendships I've developed over the years. While I am in a position to consult from a marketing perspective, each person I've met has taught me something new about the industry, farming and the impact that we are able to make as professionals in this industry. It has been a joy to be part of this amazing team of fresh produce professionals and is by far my biggest accomplishment.

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Coborn's

The employee-owned chain aims to inspire happiness, healthy living and simplicity — one guest at a time.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD



Employee-owned Coborn's Incorporated, Saint Cloud, MN, has been in the business for more than 90 years — long enough to have identified and cemented the core values of its business: dedicated service on the customer side, and determination, hard work, and pride on the part of employees. In the early 1930s, founder Chester Coborn started small with one produce market on Broadway Avenue in Sauk Rapids, MN. He gradually added dry goods, meat and other merchandise to respond to the needs of the store's shoppers. As the Coborn's chain grew from that first store, it became known at the time for such trendsetting actions as introducing shopping carts, installing checkout lanes, and — a Minnesota first — using item scanners at checkout.

Today, Coborn's owns and operates 39 Coborn's and Cash Wise Foods grocery stores in the upper Midwest, plus four recently

acquired Wisconsin-based Marketplace Foods grocery stores. In the late 2000s, Coborn's expanded its home delivery capabilities with its acquisition of Twin Cities' Internet grocer SimonDelivers.com and rebranded it as CobornsDelivers.com.

BE THE BEST; BE OUR GUEST

Dual missions drive Coborn's. At the store level, Coborn's strives to "Be the Best" by providing superior value through competitive prices, product quality and freshness, cleanliness, and safety. The company encourages employees to "be remarkable" in all that they do.

Coborn's also treasures its customers. "Our customers are not just customers; they are our guests," explains Brian Hornstein, Coborn's director of produce and floral, St. Cloud, MN, for the past seven years. "We give our guests what they need to feel comfortable and at home in our stores, and the people who work in

our departments spend a lot of time with them. Our mission is to inspire happiness, healthy living, and simplicity one guest at a time."

SUPPLEMENTING WHOLESALE WITH LOCAL

Coborn's sources most of its produce from Wadena, MN-based Russ Davis Wholesale. Shipments are delivered to individual Coborn's locations, including bulk and higher velocity items such as carrots and apples plus produce from area farmers. Hornstein notes that purchasing decisions are made on both the corporate level and at the individual stores by the produce managers. Hornstein oversees corporate produce buying and works together with a staff produce buyer.

"We also buy extensively and directly from local farms during the relatively short growing season in the upper Midwest," says Hornstein. "The exact duration of our local season depends on the weather. This year, for example, we are ahead of our usual schedule. We contract with

farmers, who bring in their crops. We then ship the items out to stores.”

Coborn's believes in building connections between its local farmers and its guests. Photos of local farmers decorate the produce section and are placed prominently on aisle-long banner displays. To learn more, guests can view farmer bios and video links on the Coborn's website. Additionally, produce departments post a “Buy Local” logo on top of refrigerated display cases and on items that are grown or produced near the store.

IT'S FRESH, OR IT'S FREE

Coborn's is so confident in its fresh produce that it encourages guests to return items for a full refund if they are not satisfied. Hornstein notes that “we ship fruits and vegetables to our stores daily at the peak of freshness. We are committed to carrying a large selection of produce items [more than 600, according to the company's website] that include organics and fresh-cut fruits and vegetables. Because our stores are located in both rural and urban areas, we have to satisfy a lot of different shoppers.”

The knowledgeable produce department staff at Coborn's is well trained to answer shopper questions and to offer guidance on selecting fruits and vegetables. An internal auditing team monitors the training process, along with retraining as needed.

MIX AND MATCH MAKES SALES

Borrowing an idea from the meat department, Coborn's produce departments recently initiated a Mix and Match promotional campaign. “In this highly popular produce promotion, we sell certain fruits and vegetables at a group price, for example, 5 for \$15 for items. These can include items like containers of strawberries or bags of apples,” says Hornstein. “We got the idea from our meat department and decided to give it a try. Sales results showed that our guests like Mix and Match a lot.”

MULTICHANNEL MARKETING SPEAKS TO GUESTS

Coborn's supplements its in-store efforts and weekly circular with a robust website that includes descriptions of, and storage information for, fruits and vegetables. The chain extends its promotional efforts with frequent social media outreach. A dedicated staff of social media specialists maintains the chain's presence and shares its news on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In addition, approximately two dozen store employees blog about their respective departments.



Mike P., the blog moniker of Coborn's retail produce supervisor, writes about featured produce items, preparation tips, and recipes. “Mike has a real passion for produce and is particularly involved with flavor profiles,” says Hornstein. “He is in the stores every day tasting everything and checking for sizing and flavor. Mike eats a lot of produce!”

Coborn's utilizes the grocery rating system NuVal in its stores and in the produce department. Hornstein notes that while the NuVal scores are higher for some fruits and vegetables than for others, consumers rarely comment on the differences, because they know that all produce is healthy.

FOUR BROTHERS' VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS COMPLEMENT PRODUCE ITEMS

The Four Brothers brand at Coborn's pays tribute to four third-generation Coborn brothers — Bob, Dan, Bill and Ron. The four brothers have contributed to the leadership

and growth of Coborn's since 1960. Four Brothers products gradually are being introduced throughout the stores.

“In 2014, Four Brothers rolled out its Creamy Caramel Dip in the produce department, and we display it with various fruit items like apples and citrus,” says Hornstein. “The next product in the line will be the Sweet Vanilla Cream fruit dip, which was named by a guest in a naming contest.” As part of its line of value-added products to complement the produce it sells, Coborn's is working on a new line of Four Brothers salad dressings.

The Four Brothers line, as an enhancement of produce department efforts, appears to be paying off. According to Hornstein, the produce department contributes approximately 13 percent of total store sales, up 1 percent from the previous year.

MATCHING THE STORE EXPERIENCE IN HOME DELIVERY

Coborn's promises the same in-store quality groceries, value, and customer service to its online guests at CobornsDelivers.com — including the freshest produce. (Russ Davis Wholesale also supplies the online operation.)

Fruits and vegetables arrive in the New Hope, MN-based warehouse (specifically for the online operation), undergo inspection, and are packed and shipped to fulfill orders. As with its stores, CobornsDelivers.com is growing its selection of organic fruits and vegetables, and it employs produce specialists to inspect and taste items before they are cleared for sale. The specialists then rate each selection of fruits and vegetables as good, better, or best to let customers know which ones are the tastiest picks at that moment. “This approach is very successful for our online shoppers who do not have the luxury to touch and feel the product that they buy,” says Hornfield. The New Hope warehouse employs its own produce director.

BEING PART OF THE COMMUNITIES IT SERVES

Coborn's has long made itself a part of the communities it serves. In addition to annual donations totaling more than \$2 million, Coborn's employees contribute thousands of volunteer hours to area causes. An advocate for hunger relief, Coborn's donates fresh produce, along with meat, dairy, and grocery items totally 1 million pounds of food, to an area food bank. Coborn's believes in treating all people with dignity and respect, and attributes part of its success to this consistent community involvement.

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RETROSPECTIVE

ROUSES MARKET'S JOE WATSON SHARES VIEWS FROM HIS 31-YEAR PRODUCE CAREER

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Broccoli and bulk merchandising were hot trends, and buying locally-grown produce was the norm when Joe Watson started his retail career at Rouses Market, a Thibodaux, LA-headquartered chain that now operates 45-stores in three southeastern states.

Watson spent his first six years as a produce manager, then two years as a produce merchandiser before moving into his current position as director of produce. Along the way, he has been actively involved in the produce industry in a number of ways. A few of these affiliations include membership on the United Fresh Produce Association's Biotechnology Task Force and the Produce Marketing Association's Foundation for Industry Talent's Fundraising Committee, as well as a board of director for the Southeast Produce Council and the Alabama Watermelon Association.

Where were you in 1985?

I was a produce manager with Rouses Markets, in Houma, LA. I was young and learning the business at the age of 21.

What was the produce department like in 1985?

We were just coming out of the unitized package trend and moving quickly into bulk/loose product merchandising. In 1985, the American Cancer Association came out with findings that broccoli could help fight certain cancers; in one year, broccoli sales increased 400 percent. Before this, broccoli was nearly a specialty item for us. SKU count was somewhere in the 200 count range, and that was if you had a large selection of specialty produce.

Local was as big for us back then as it is today, but we had virtually no food safety programs in place, nor did the farmers we were buying from. No one got sick either.

We sold our first New Zealand kiwi fruit in 1984 and Chilean grapes in 1985. We hadn't seen the first organic items in our stores at that time and our fresh-cuts consisted of sliced



Joe Watson, director of produce for Thibodaux, LA-based Rouses Market.

watermelon, cantaloupe and a pineapple cut in half. I vividly remember the range for PLU numbers was 1 through 300, and we placed PLU stickers on every product by hand with a label gun.

How would you characterize the overall retail environment back then?

Speaking for the area I am in, we were very much in a market that served a middle-class customer. The focus was heavy into the fresh meat and center-store departments. Produce meant offering a fair variety to our customers, but lacked overall market strategy and planning to develop our brand. We were competing with three national grocery chains (pre-mass market) and a slew of independents. By the way, all of those national chains have since exited our market.

When did things start to change, and what were the drivers of this change?

We started seeing major gains in produce

in the early '90s. We were behind the industry curve of 10-percent plus produce contributions to total sales, but we became quite innovative in how we went to market and the strategies we had for growing our business and being cutting-edge with selection, offerings and services. We became a different kind of merchant when we began opening stores with a fresh layout and increased perishable areas.

What are some of the biggest innovations you've seen in the produce industry during the past 30 years?

It started with packaged salads in the early '90s. What this category means to total produce sales, now and then, is incredible. PLU and UPC technology resulted in a huge drop in POS errors and improved scan data. Speaking of scanning, we installed our first NCR scanners in 1983. The affect this technology had on the produce industry cannot be underestimated. The instantaneous reporting and real-time information transformed the industry. The infor-

mation is at our fingertips, and these same technologies made produce a larger profit center for the supermarket. Food safety has been a top-of-mind item for all of us in the industry for years; however, it has now become an everyday way of life. Many food safety crisis' were avoided due to all of the protocols now in place.

How would you describe the produce department today?

It is the center-of-the-plate. The produce department is the theater of the supermarket. Produce is by far the most exciting and happening place when you consider 1,000-plus items that now include: fresh fruits and veggies; fresh-made juices and smoothies; fresh-cut programs with convenience items ready for the grill or microwave; bulk foods and nut butters; and the list goes on. Today we see moms, young professionals, fitness gurus, retirees and others who look at shopping for fresh produce as an event, not a chore. We teach, we are invested, and we love the idea of helping our customers choose healthy foods for their families, and that is very exciting.

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

We must be responsible to each other. We are connected from field-to-fork. The person who is producing the safest, freshest and tastiest foods for our customers deserves our commitment to handle and present those products in a way that upholds the dedication and lifelong investment they made to our business.

What are your views of "local"? Is it a trend or here to stay?

Most definitely it is here to stay and has been imperative for our company for more than 30 years. If the new regulations [by FSMA] push some small producers out, we will have to see what that means for us as to how we are able to source local produce in some areas. Our plan is to provide resources and support to those producers who are working to become compliant with the upcoming regulations.

What do you think will drive the produce industry in the next 10 to 20 years?

One generation will drive produce sales in the next 10 years — Millennials! This group is very sure about what they want and who they want to do business with. They are savvy, smart and very vocal. It is incumbent on us to remain focused on who our new customers are and



Watson selects watermelons at one of the JD Lowe ranches in Falfurrias, TX, for Rouses in 1989. At the time, the "High-Lowe" brand of watermelons were located in South Texas.

to work hard to meet their needs.

What are the challenges holding the industry back?

The need for a pool of young, talented and inspired people who have a desire to make a difference and have a genuine concern for the environment. Who better to be the next leaders of our great industry?

Immigration, water supply and social unrest (domestic and global) will all play a part in moving the produce industry forward or not in the coming years.

What are your thoughts on choosing produce as a career today?

I have been fortunate to serve in two industry volunteer roles working with young produce professionals and college ag students. It inspires me to know that there are some super young people who are ready to move this industry to new heights.

What advice would you give young professionals entering the produce industry?

Be patient. This is the one attribute I see both in my organization and in others. There are many bright, young produce professionals who might not be ready for the next step when they think they are. The time spent at one level to prepare for the next is something that cannot be overlooked.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

FRUIT TIE-IN PRODUCTS

Boost The Produce Ring

Smoothie mixes, dips and crepes can be the perfect complements.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Today's consumers crave quick answers to daily meal questions. What's for breakfast? What's for snacking? What's for dessert? Retailers providing these solutions can differentiate themselves from the

competition. They can also increase the ring in high-value areas of the store such as the produce department. A perfect way to do this is by tying in non-produce products such as smoothie mixes, dips and crepes with fresh fruits via displays, demos and deals.

"Tie-ins are successful and definitely work," says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral, seafood and meat at Kings Food Markets, a 25-store chain headquartered in Parsippany, NJ. "We see sales of the produce and non-produce items up in both units and dollars."

There's no question — non-produce items sell well in the produce department. In fact, nearly one-tenth (9.9 percent) of sales are items other than fresh fruits and vegetables, according to 52-week data ending February 28, 2015 provided by the Chicago, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group. Dips and dressings, for example, represent 13.6 percent of these dollars. In addition, non-produce items are nearly always purchased with their fresh counterpart thus creating two rings.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES



According to proprietary data shared by Concord Foods, a Brockton, MA-based maker of fresh produce go-withs, 61 percent of shoppers who purchased avocados also bought the company's guacamole mix, 63 percent of banana buyers purchased Concord's Chiquita brand banana bread mix, and 66 of banana shoppers had Concord's banana smoothie mix in their baskets. Looked at the opposite way, every shopper who gets a packet of Concord's guacamole mix needs to purchase two fresh avocados. Consider that the company sold more than 9 million individual packets of this seasoning mix in 2014.

SMOOTHIE MIXES AND DIPS

Fruit smoothie mixes are second in sales to guacamole mix for Concord Foods. "The Top 3 flavors are banana, strawberry and chocolate banana," says Samantha McCaul, Concord's marketing manager. "They sell well year-round; however the biggest sales spikes are in January when everyone is on a diet and during the summer."

Mango, orange and pineapple are other fruit smoothie mixes offered by Concord Foods. The company introduced a Kale and Apple mix in late 2014 and Blueberry and Banana with flaxseed in the spring of 2015.

Fruit and dips are a healthy answer to the "What's for Snacking?" question. "Our best-selling fruit dips are the Old-Fashioned Caramel Dip, Cream Cheese Fruit Dip and Chocolate Fruit Dip. Caramel Dip snack packs are typically placed with sliced apples, while Caramel Dip tubs are placed with the fresh apples.

Fruit dips pair best with cut fruit such as pineapple, melons and berries," explains Mary Beth Cowardin, director of brand marketing for the Columbus, OH-headquartered T. Marzetti Company. "Tie-ins during peak seasons make a lot of sense, because each fruit is already being promoted and is top-of-mind with consumers during this key moment in time. For example, showcasing our caramel dips with fresh and cut apples in the fall is a great way to leverage the season for both products."

Chocolate dips are popular with customers at Kings Food Markets. "We take some of the chocolate disks that the bakery uses to melt on top of its doughnuts, package them up, and sell them by the berries," says Kneeland.

Sales of chocolate dips are highest from October through January, according to Chad Hartman, director of marketing for Tropical Foods, the Charlotte, NC-based manufacturer of Dip & Devour Dipping Chocolates. The company's four-item line includes milk, dark and white chocolate as well as 2014-introduced

peanut butter melts.

"It's not just strawberries that are great for dipping in chocolate — raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, pineapple chunks, apple slices and bananas work also. That's why we're encouraging consumers to dip their favorite fruits year-round and not just at the holidays," says Hartman.

BAKED GOODS

"Shortcakes are a natural tie-in for berries," explains Jeff Fairchild, director of produce for

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New Seasons Market, a 16-store chain based in Portland, OR. “There’s a six-week window in the spring where we’ll get the cakes from our bakery and run them today in produce. Other than that, we found keeping the shortcakes in produce isn’t a good use of space. We take a targeted approach to non-produce tie-ins.”

Strawberries tucked into pre-made crepes make a quick-fixing elegant dessert. “Merchandise our crepes, strawberries and whipped cream in one display and sign it ‘Easy Dessert,’” recommends Karen Caplan, president and

chief executive of Frieda’s, specialty produce purveyor based in Los Alamitos, CA. “All three, including 2- to 3-pints of strawberries, easily adds up to a \$20 ring.”

All types of berries, as well as bananas, pair well with crepes making a year-round sweet solution.

“Retailers who sell our crepes will also carry one or all of our dessert sauces as another way to encourage incremental sales,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Los Angeles, CA-headquartered Melissa’s/World

Variety Produce.

Melissa’s offers best-selling raspberry and chocolate as well as white chocolate, caramel and cinnamon flavored dessert sauces in 15-ounce shelf-stable plastic squeeze bottles.

DISPLAY, DEMOS AND DEALS

Strong sales result when non-produce items are placed next to the products they’re meant to complement.

“Displaying dips with produce is advantageous because it links two products that go great together, so the consumer doesn’t have to look around the produce department for the other item,” says Stacey Miller, senior brand manager for Lighthouse Foods, in Sandpoint, ID. “This helps to create more impulse purchases. If it’s displayed seasonally, bigger and more impactful displays are usually created, which will deliver even more awareness.”

Many manufacturers of shelf-stable produce tie-in products offer free-standing shipper units that can be displayed next to a target fruit. These shippers are often high-graphic in design to assist in merchandising.

“Demos are a great way to bring awareness to fruit and complementary products like dips, and generate trial with consumers. It provides consumers with an opportunity to try a product that perhaps they never tried before, and is therefore a common way to drive incremental sales in the produce department,” says T. Marzetti’s Cowardin.

Taste demos are especially useful with new tie-in products. “We’ve seen sales lifts of more than 2,000 percent over the prior week when we demoed our new Kale and Apple smoothie mix. People are often scared to try a green beverage, but when they taste, they buy,” explains Concord Food’s McCaul.

Concord also promotes sales of its products by offering customers a discount incentive via coupons. Last fall and winter, the company offered more than 250,000 coupons affixed to its shipper units of Chiquita banana bread mix. Shoppers who purchased both bananas and the mix received a total of 55-cents off at the check-out. Sales of the bread mix increased 5 percent as a result of this promotion, according to McCaul.

Ad circulars are another good place to advertise fruit and tie-in combos. “Featuring caramel dip in store circulars, particularly during the fall season for example, is a proven method for driving both caramel and apple sales. These circulars are where people are going for meal and snack inspiration, so it’s a great place and time to get products in front of shoppers,” says T. Marzetti’s Cowardin. **pb**

■ FRUIT AND CHEESE — A PERFECT PAIRING

Large, bright red apples color contrast beautifully with the wheel of golden yellow cheddar cheese displayed on an end cap in the produce departments of King’s Food Markets. This fruit and cheese pairing isn’t only a seasonal feature, but a year-round cross-merchandising theme at this 25-store chain headquartered in Parsippany, NJ.

“Fresh fruit paired with cheese is a natural,” explains Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral, seafood and meat. “Plus, cheese is a high-end, high-profit item just like fresh fruit, so it makes perfect sense to cross-promote the two. There is an ample menu of merchandising ideas.”

“A couple examples are American Grana (18-month aged Parmesan) and grapes; creamy Gorgonzola and pears; crumbled Gorgonzola and pears or apples; Ricotta Salata with pineapple; Ricotta with blueberries or strawberries, Mascarpone with pears or strawberries; and Crescenza stuffed with raspberries,” suggests Francis Wall, vice president of marketing for BelGioioso Cheese, in Green Bay, WI.

Green apples with classic Fontina; peaches and Reserve Dolcina Gorgonzola; and red grapes with SarVecchio Parmesan are additional fresh fruit and cheese combinations recommended by Sue Merckx, marketing director for retail at the Plymouth, WI-based Sartori Food Corporation, which makes and sells specialty cheeses.

“For dried fruit, we like raisins and dates with our Balsamic BellaVitano and dried pineapple with classic Parmesan. Paired together, fruit and cheese can make a great snack, although highly acidic fruits typically don’t work well for pairings. When supplemented with other accompaniments like nuts, charcuterie and jams, it can be a whole meal,” says Merckx.

Fruit serves equally well with cheese-



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

based dressings. A good example is Pear Gorgonzola, a blend of fresh pear puree and light chardonnay vinaigrette with chunks of Gorgonzola cheese, manufactured by Lighthouse Foods, in Sandpoint, ID.

“This is a great dressing to pair with fruit kabobs and a fruit salad in the summer, because it delivers a sweet yet salty flavor,” says Stacey Miller, senior brand manager.

The best way to cross-merchandise fruit and cheese is side-by-side in the produce department. “It’s important to put the cheese right in with the fruit display, rather than separate, because then the two easily flow together in shopper’s minds,” says King’s Food Markets’ Kneeland.

This proximity could be as close as a combo pack. “An example would be a cut-fruit tray with Mascarpone or Ricotta in it,” says BelGioioso’s Wall.

In addition to joint displays, demos and recipe cards can be effective ways to cross-merchandise fruit and cheese. “Joint displays offer consumers a fantastic visual while demos allow them to actually experience the flavors. Recipe and pairing cards are great too because it’s something customers can take home with them,” suggests Sartori’s Merckx. **pb**



Taking 'The Peach State' To A Sweeter Spot



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGIA PRODUCTION SERVICES

The creative campaign helps farmers promote a broader range of crops.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Georgia earned a reputation for its peaches and Vidalia sweet onions decades ago, but more recently gained the nation's top spot for blueberry production, increased sweet potato planting, and added significant acreage of green vegetables (including broccoli and kale).

With nearly 60 million residents in Georgia and bordering states, farmers in this abundant regional hub enjoy large markets in close proximity.

The State Department of Agriculture bolsters demand for the diverse harvest through a promotional program that aims to translate regional pride and the desire to eat locally grown food into



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GEORGIA PRODUCTION SERVICES

a powerful market force.

"The breadth of Georgia Grown goes beyond fresh produce to the entire sector," says Gary Black, commissioner of the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Atlanta. "It's best measured by the testimony of the license holders who are using the brand."

The "license holders" Black refers to are the growers, shippers, retailers, restaurants and others who pay for much of this buy-local campaign.

"Our business model is different," says Black. "It's not about the department having a roll of stickers we send out. We have license holders ranging from entry level at \$100 to founders at \$20,000. We provide style guides and a design, and they take the Georgia Grown material and incorporate it into their business model."

INVOLVE THE STAKEHOLDERS

Hundreds of farmers, grower/shippers, supermarket retailers and restaurants signed up for a piece of the promotional action by buying a license, and their ranks are growing.

"We didn't have any license holders three years ago, and we have more than 500 now," says Black. "We will have approximately \$200,000 in licensing money this year. We're not

"We will have approximately \$200,000 in licensing money this year. We're not relying exclusively on state funds."

— Gary Black,
Commissioner of the Georgia Department
of Agriculture

relying exclusively on state funds. The tours and advertising are largely funded by the license holders."

A vital part of the success of the program is the role played by major retailers in helping farmers sell their ever-expanding list of crops.

"If you measure it by the retailers, we have active participation by Harvey's and Kroger," says Matthew Kulinski, program manager at the Georgia Department of Agriculture. "We met with farmers who are eager to diversify their offerings, and the retailers are ready."

Kroger actively promotes the purchase of locally grown produce at its Georgia stores

through this campaign.

"Georgia Grown absolutely helps," says Jeff Fullmer, produce manager at the Alpharetta location for Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger. "People definitely want local produce."

The stores display posters signaling the area of the produce department with fresh fruits and vegetables from Georgia as a matter of course. "We have signs around the store that say locally grown and give information about the local farms that supply us with produce," says Fullmer. "We have about six signs that say locally grown and talk about different farms. The signage is always hanging."

Other retailers are also building Georgia Grown areas within the stores' produce departments, and it seems to drive sales of local fruits and vegetables.

"The Georgia Grown sections in the supermarkets are growing, which I think really helps," says Susan Waters, executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee, Vidalia, GA.

The State Department of Agriculture hopes to quantify, with the cooperation of University of Georgia researchers, the power of this appeal to buy local produce.

"The University of Georgia is going to survey how many people are looking for Georgia

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quality grown
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produce," says Kulinski.

Even before the survey numbers are in, grower-shippers are enjoying the appeal of Georgia Grown fruits and vegetables.

"For local customers, like in Atlanta, we ship Georgia Grown to Kroger," says Brian Rayfield, vice president of business development and marketing at J&J Produce, Loxahatchee, FL. "For retail outlets outside of Georgia, they want good quality product. They think Georgia Grown produce is generally good quality, but it doesn't bring any kind of premium."

The desire to support local farmers runs deep in most of the country, and may run even a little deeper in Georgia.

"People want to support the local farms," says Chris Garmendia, manager of Produce Exchange of Atlanta, Forrest Park, GA. "I don't think it's quality or price. You will find the quality and price anywhere the items are grown, but people want to support local farms. If they have an option our customers will choose locally grown."

Some regional shippers let retailers know where the food was grown, and leave the promotion up to the supermarket.

"We have a farming operation in Georgia, and it helps," says Calvert Cullen, president of Northampton Growers, Cheriton, VA. "We don't use the Georgia Grown logo: we let the retailers

know where it is from, and sometimes they'll set up a Georgia Grown section."

The combination of successful promotion, local pride, and agronomic good fortune have the state's agricultural leaders bullish about the future. Georgia agriculture has a farm gate value of \$14 billion, and that number is increasing, according to Commissioner Black, and with sales and other transactions culminating in the final consumption, this number grows to more than \$72 billion added to the state's economy.

"During the past 10 or 12 years, we had a healthy growth curve," says Black. "We're well situated with water, an airport, and we're at the center of the region."

LOCAL CROPS GROW MORE DIVERSE

Georgia agriculture grows more diverse every year, in part because farmers find fruits and vegetables in demand due to that fact that they are more local.

"You are beginning to see more traditional West Coast commodities being grown in Georgia like broccoli, carrots, leafy greens, Romaine, Brussels sprouts and persimmons," says Andrew Scott, vice president for marketing and business development at Nickey Gregory Company, Forrest Park, GA. "Sweet potato

acreage also increased here in Georgia. The top commodities are peaches, pecans, peanuts, Vidalia onions, blueberries, squash, greens, corn, peppers, cucumbers, cabbage, apples, sweet potatoes, carrots, broccoli and watermelons."

Some farmers swear by the effectiveness of the Georgia Grown campaign in helping them market a broader range of crops.

"The program is really helping us," says John Williams, sales director at L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms, Lyons, GA. "We always supplied greens to one of the major supermarkets. This got us in the door and gave us a chance to show that we grow good sweet potatoes, too."

Sweet potatoes are definitely taking off as a more important crop in "The Peach State."

"Demand for Georgia sweet potatoes has really grown, and we are proud to have kicked off that growing opportunity," says Greg Cardamone, general manager of vegetables at L&M Companies, Raleigh, NC. "L&M started growing sweet potatoes six years ago in Georgia for several local retailers. The commodity not only has growth, but Georgia provides a unique window for the early fall demand. We have trialed many different varieties to come up with the best flavor for our customers."

L&M also expanded its bell pepper acreage in Georgia, according to Cardamone. Many

TAKING GEORGIA GROWN TO RESTAURANTS AND SCHOOLS

The state Department of Agriculture and local farmers are testing the restaurant and foodservice waters with their Georgia Grown campaign.

"Our affect is not just at the retail level, it's also in restaurants and schools," says Matthew Kulinski, program manager at the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Atlanta.

Around two-dozen restaurants already pay to be license holders in the Georgia Grown program, according to Kulinski.

The Vidalia onion shippers enlisted the participation of a major restaurant chain in promotion of their product.

"Last year, we did a partnership with Applebee's," says Susan Waters, executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee, Vidalia, GA. "They put it on the menu that the onions were grown exclusively in Southeast Georgia."

The Georgia Grown promotion also includes outreach to show how schools within the state can use local fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria to provide good nutrition.

"The 'Feed a School for a Week' program is an attempt to promote healthy eating at our schools," says Gary Black, commissioner of the Georgia Department of Agriculture. "We're trying to show them they can serve 100 percent Georgia Grown produce five days a week and stay within budget."

The Georgia Grown program enlisted the culinary and promotional

services of professional cooks.

"We have four executive chefs that help with commodity programs and in the school program," says Black.

Farmers are enthusiastic about the help they are getting from these professional culinarians.

"We're having chefs come in and do recipes for Georgia Grown," says William Brim, co-owner of Lewis Taylor Farms, Tifton, GA. "It really benefits us quite well."

Even with foodservice customers, the buy local campaign fits with the growing popularity of fresher produce that travels fewer miles to market.

"Retailers and foodservice operators made a push in recent years to sell and promote locally grown to their customers," says Andrew Scott, vice president for marketing and business development at Nickey Gregory Company, Forrest Park, GA. "Less food miles means fresher product hitting store shelves and local restaurants. Some restaurant menus indicate locally grown."

Part of the challenge with taking the buy local campaign to foodservice, however, can be the many steps between the local farmer and the foodservice end consumer.

"We don't sell directly to foodservice; we work with wholesalers at the Atlanta market, and some of that produce goes to foodservice," says John Williams, sales director, L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms, Lyons, GA. **pb**



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other growers in the state are also expanding acreage of vegetables more commonly associated with California.

"The greens are increasing, like kale and broccoli," says Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable growers Association, La Grange, GA. "Broccoli is a new product for Georgia; the past three or four years, we've been growing broccoli varieties suited to Georgia growing conditions. We've also grown a lot of cabbage and collards."

One spectacular story is blueberries, as the state has also almost overnight become the country's largest producer with growers riding the wave of that fast rising superfood.

"This year, we passed all other states in blueberries; we're the No. 1 blueberry producer," says Hall.

The blueberry boom has one major shipper building a new modern packing shed in Northwest Georgia.

"We have plans drawn up and hopefully we'll start construction this spring, and be ready by this fall, with around 200,000 square feet outside Valdosta and Homer," says G.T. Parris, partner at Nexus Produce, Vero Beach, FL. "Blueberries will be our main item; probably

"Blueberries were grown in Georgia before, but blueberries (in general) became more of a go-to item with interest in healthy eating."

— G.T. Parris, Nexus Produce

90 percent of it will be blueberries."

The allure of buying local should help Nexus find more tenants for space in its expansive new complex.

"Blueberries were grown in Georgia before, but blueberries (in general) became more of a go-to item with interest in healthy eating," says Parris.

Other shippers also expanded facilities in Georgia to accommodate the growing harvest. "Two years ago, the L&M Warehouse invested heavily in our pre cooling in our Moultrie, Georgia facility," says Cardamone. "We added 20,000 square feet of cooling space and the ability to force air cool up to six loads at a time — this new addition improved the



PHOTO COURTESY OF LANE SOUTHERN ORCHARDS

quality of our products."

The availability of land and water that are in scarce supply elsewhere is helping Georgia expand markets for a number of important crops.

"Georgia is best known as 'The Peach State,' however blueberries, onions and pecans are a large part of Georgia's growing agricultural industry," says Duke Lane III, director of sales at Genuine Georgia/Lane Southern Orchards, Fort Valley, GA. "The pecan industry has grown significantly in recent years. Georgia is the largest producer of pecans in the United States. And newer Georgia crops are making a name for themselves — including olives. The growth Georgia continues to experience is primarily due to the available water and land."

The state's farmers take front and center in local stores during two eagerly awaited seasons. "We have a key window in terms of supplying the retailers," says Hall. "May, June and July is our window for most of our fruits and vegetables. We do have a fall season, too; that runs from early October until frost, which could happen in early November, or Thanksgiving, or two weeks before Christmas."

This first and more important season arrives right on time for a mid-summer culinary celebration. Fourth of July is a particularly sweet promotional time for retailers, with emphasis on five Georgia Grown items including peaches, blueberries, melons, sweet corn and onions," says Lane. "Georgia's climate and ridiculously hot summer nights are perfect for harvesting flavor-filled fruits and vegetables during the

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peak summer months.”

This warm weather season includes a strong fruit harvest that extends from late spring all the way through late summer.

“Our watermelons and cantaloupes are key; we come in around July 4,” says Hall. “The Vidalias start April 29, and we’re out of Vidalia by July or August, but they can go through Thanksgiving — depending on how the storage goes. The earliest peaches are in May, and the latest varieties are in August.”

The state’s farmers harvest a varied combination of crops, and they continue to increase the number of important varieties. “From a marketing and supply standpoint, Georgia is very diverse,” says Samantha Kielgard, director of marketing at the LaGrange, GA-based Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association. “With blueberries, strawberries and peaches, we pretty much cover the fruits.”

Supermarkets within the state also find strong demand for local produce during a second harvest season later in the year.

“In the late summer and fall, we will get locally grown squash, and there’s the peaches, of course,” says Fullmer from Kroger. “Summer and fall are the times we get locally grown produce. We just use the signs, with no other promotions.”

REGIONAL HUB AND BEYOND

The appeal of the Georgia Grown campaign already carries weight with consumers in some areas beyond the state’s borders.

“Anything within 50 miles of Georgia in Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina and North Florida resonates because the Department of Ag has done a great job of promoting,” says William Brim, co-owner of Lewis Taylor Farms, Tifton, GA. “The committee and the Ag Department really does a great job for us. It gets stronger by the year. We’re moving more product; people are looking for the locally grown.”

“Our customers appreciate the fact they can load all of our commodities in one location.”

— Greg Cardamone, L&M Companies

Nearly 60 million people live in Georgia and the five states it borders. The Department of Agriculture is working on plans to extend the Georgia Grown appeal even beyond that healthy demographic.

“We’re working on a program to promote Georgia produce outside the state in cooperation with the tourist board,” says Kulinski from the Department of Agriculture.

Georgia is well situated to occupy a seasonal slot when it serves much of the country as a major source of fruits and vegetables.

“We ship a significant amount of produce; we ship more than stays in the state,” says Hall.

“Given its location, Georgia produce will be at least one day fresher than other winter growing locations for the vast majority of the Eastern United States,” says Cardamone. “Georgia produce is unique due to timing and variety. The Georgia season kicks off the spring and summer with a wide variety of products that isn’t readily available from one location until that time of year.”

Just to the south of the city of Atlanta, the sprawling 150-acre Atlanta State Farmers Market serves as the hub for shipments coming in from the state’s farmers, and out to customers everywhere east of the Mississippi.

This market is centrally located on Interstate Highway 75, close to Highway 285, and just a couple miles from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

“Atlanta is the biggest market in the Southeast,” says Garmendia from the Produce Exchange of Atlanta. “Our customers are

also from Tennessee, Alabama, Florida and throughout the region.”

There is anecdotal evidence the state’s promotional campaign is energizing shipments coming through the enormous Forrest Park facility.

“The Georgia Grown brand is becoming widely recognized in the produce industry,” says Lane of Lane Southern Orchards. “This endorsement provides authentic assurance for all the bounty that Georgia brings to the consumer.”

Some shippers developed regional markets for a list of produce items during the Georgia season. “On L&M Farms in Georgia, we start with cabbage, then move through the season to include summer squash, bell pepper, cucumbers, all varieties of chili peppers, eggplant, melons, greens, broccoli and sweet potatoes,” says Cardamone. “Our customers appreciate the fact they can load all of our commodities in one location. The variety, pricing, taste and location are all advantages to buying produce in Georgia.”

Some items from Georgia farms have seasonal markets that extend to much of the country.

“Popular items like Vidalia onions, peaches, pecans, other nuts and blueberries ship to over half the country,” says Scott from Nickey Gregory Company. “Georgia Grown carrots have become a popular item as well for half the country. Row crop veggies in the spring and fall have a good reach east of the Mississippi. Peaches, blueberries, pecans, which are exported to China, and greens earned reputations. Pecans, peanuts, blueberries, squash, greens, corn, peppers, cucumbers, cabbage, apples, sweet potatoes, carrots, broccoli and watermelons are being distributed from Georgia.”

At least one regional shipper already finds the Georgia Grown logo helps throughout the entire country. “It’s worked very well,” says Rayfield from J&J Produce. “We ship produce out of Georgia, and some of growers have Georgia Grown on the box. We ship it all over the country.”

PEACHES AND ONIONS: A BRAND OF THEIR OWN

Long before Georgia Grown became a program, peaches from the state and sweet onions from a surprisingly small patch of it established reputations that pack powerful marketplace punches.

“Few brands reach as far as the Georgia Peach brand,” says Lane of Lane Southern

“For retailers, stocking Vidalias means providing customers with the opportunity to purchase the most popular sweet onion in the category. Consumers value Vidalias for their mild, sweet flavor and inherent versatility in a variety of cooking applications.”

— John Shuman, Shuman Produce

Orchards. “The Perishables Group commissioned a study several years ago that showed the overwhelming majority of consumers surveyed across the country recognized Georgia as the Peach State. Georgia Peaches have wide brand recognition across the U.S. Available mid-May to mid-August, Georgia Peaches are a highly anticipated brand by retailers and consumers throughout North America.”

The Vidalia brand is so strong it practically created the sweet onion category, and most of the sweet onions sold in the country come from this one fairly small local area.

“Consumer brand recognition of Vidalia sweet onions is very strong throughout North America,” says John Shuman, president and director of sales at Shuman Produce, Vidalia, GA. “They are well known for their mild, sweet flavor and versatility in cooking applications. Vidalias maintain a strong presence in America as a whole, with the Georgia sweet leading the category with 62 percent of total sweet onion sales.”

Only farmers within a clearly defined geographic area, where growers swear by their sandy soils, can use the Vidalia name for their sweet onions.

“There are roughly 100 growers who farm the Georgia sweet on only about 12,000 total acres each year,” says Shuman. “The Vidalia sweet onion can only be grown within a 20-county region in Southeast Georgia in a total area of approximately 6,000 square miles. That’s only about 10 percent of the state of Georgia. And when you consider that the United States is a total of 3.8 million-square miles, that makes the Vidalia growing region pretty unique.”

This brand name carries weight with consumers and retailers throughout the country and beyond.

“For retailers, stocking Vidalias means providing customers with the opportunity to purchase the most popular sweet onion in the category,” says Shuman. “Consumers value Vidalias for their mild, sweet flavor and inherent versatility in a variety of cooking applications.

Vidalia onions are perfect for tossing with fresh summer salads and great for topping burgers or sausage off the grill. They are a staple at cookouts and the perfect addition to any number of spring and summer recipes to enjoy with friends and family.”

Farmers in this area of the state are proud of the brand that helped their product grow beyond anyone’s dreams.

“We use the Vidalia label,” says Delbert Bland of Bland Farms, Glennville, GA. “There’s a lot of interest in the Vidalia onion. We ship the Vidalia onions from April to the beginning of September, then we ship from Peru, Mexico, Texas, California and Nevada. You have to be in the Vidalia area to label them Vidalia onions. I started with 5 acres in 1982, and today we’re growing more than 3,000 acres, so I would say it has increased.”

Many of the Vidalia onion growers joined the broader Georgia Grown campaign, but they value their own local promotion more.

“Vidalia carries more weight,” says Williams of L.G. Herndon Farms. “Everyone knows it’s Georgia Grown, and I put it on the box. It has helped out. I really love that program and think they’ve done an awesome job. But I put Vidalia first.”

That sentiment is common in sweet onion country, where Vidalia comes before Georgia as a marketing tool.

“On most all of our boxes it says Georgia Grown and Vidalia,” says Waters of the Vidalia Onion Committee. “Most of the growers have boxes that include the company name, Vidalia and Georgia Grown. Vidalia is usually the biggest part.”

Peaches and sweet onions probably help the broader promotional campaign more than the other way around.

“In season the Georgia Grown peaches or Vidalia onions are well known,” says Hall from the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable growers Association.

These sweet onions can even drive sales of complementary items frequently purchased for grilling events.

“Research we conducted with [Chica-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHUMAN PRODUCE

go-based] Nielsen Perishables Group indicates sweet onions drive sales of a variety of items,” says Shuman. “Consumers with sweet onions in their carts are more likely to purchase produce such as peppers, tomatoes, mushrooms and bagged salad as well as fresh meats such as beef and chicken.”

This shipper is offering displays that can be set up in and outside the produce department to maximize these cross merchandising possibilities.

“Vidalias are a staple at summer cookouts, and show a high purchase affinity with fresh meats — the new display units are a perfect way to create increases in incremental sales during peak season through cross-merchandising in a wide variety of locations,” says Shuman.

And the firm is also offering lessons in the agricultural culture of the South, or at least of South Georgia.

“This Vidalia season, Shuman Produce is teaching consumers ‘How to Speak Southern’ with a brand new promotion designed to share the unique story behind our Vidalia onions and the families that grow and ship RealSweet Vidalias,” says Shuman. “Through a brand new website, our social media channels, a collection of creative video content, an interactive contest and information about the history behind Shuman Produce, we’re providing a glimpse into the Vidalia sweet onion industry — and life in Southeast GA — one southern expression and family story at a time.” **pb**



When It Comes To Independence Day Marketing ... Think Grilled

Appealing displays entice shoppers to buy seasonal fruits as they make their yearly debut.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD



When it comes to selling more fruits and vegetables around Independence Day, two words are on top of every produce manager's mind: "grilling" and "fresh." Industry experts say these two keywords are integral when selling popular produce items including corn, watermelons, avocados and mushrooms leading up to the Fourth of July holiday.

"Memorial Day is the first barbecue of the season, but the Fourth of July is the biggest," says Kenan Carel, the produce manager at Tom's Supermarket, a small family-owned chain based in Mascoutah, IL. As a result, most people are looking for items that can be grilled for the holiday.

In addition, many fruits are coming into season around the beginning of July. People hungry for cherries, melons and other produce that they can't buy fresh throughout the year can be enticed with the help of eye-catching, appealing displays.

In keeping with these concepts, it's no surprise Carel says corn and watermelon are his department's two biggest sellers leading up to the Fourth of July. "At least 25 percent of my entire department is just corn and watermelon, because they're such big (selling) items."

Many other fruits and vegetables also do well around this time of year. Cross-merchandising grilling products with produce, creating well-stocked and appealing displays, sharing recipe ideas and doing demonstrations are some of the most effective ways to sell popular produce items leading up to the patriotic holiday that pays homage to America's founding.

GRILLING ITEMS

Corn on the cob can easily be grilled alongside hamburgers, steaks and other holiday favorites, says Carel. He advises customers to soak unhusked corn in a saltwater solution before throwing it on the grill. "That way you get a nice salty grilled taste to it."

His other favorite grilling vegetables are summer squash, asparagus and sweet onions. The latter can be basted with a little soy sauce to enhance flavor while cooking.

Kevin Donovan, national sales manager for Phillips Mushroom Farms, a family farm in Kennett Square, PA, points out mushrooms can be a prominent part of the main course as well as a side dish. Mushrooms can be threaded on shish-kabobs with other vegetables and marinated meats.

Grilled Portobello mushrooms have been

"The California Table Grape Commission's research shows that the word 'fresh' can be a very powerful draw for consumers. It is a cue for consumers to choose an item they can feel good about."

— Cindy Plummer, California Table Grape Commission

a popular main dish in recent years, especially for people catering to vegetarians. Donovan suggests cross-merchandising Portobellos in the meat section so people think about them as an alternative to chicken, beef or pork.

In recent years, it's been trendy to cook fruit on the barbeque. Jeff Simonian, co-vice president and sales manager with Fowler, CA-based Simonian Fruit Company, says stone fruit sells really well around grilling-focused holidays. "You can cook peaches, plums and other stone fruit just like you would grill your corn or your steak," he says. "Cut them in half and throw them on the grill."

Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing at the Fresno, CA-based California Table Grape Commission, says even grapes are good fresh off the grill. She points to Mediterranean Grilled Chicken and Grape Skewers

(a recipe from the grape commission) as one of her favorite examples.

Displaying grilling necessities right next to produce is a great way to increase sales. "Stores are encouraged to consider cross-merchandising with [value-added] items such as butter or corn-on-the-cob holders," says Dan Donovan, a spokesman for Giant Eagle Inc. Giant Eagle operates more than 400 supermarkets throughout western Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia and Maryland. The company's headquarters is in Pittsburgh, PA.

Carel says he places things such as charcoal, salt and pepper shakers, aluminum foil and beer in his produce department leading up to Independence Day. "There's a lot of things you can tie into it. It's the power of suggestion. Someone may have come in to the store just looking for a few things, but if you can entice them to buy other things, that's great." He also places corn in satellite displays throughout the store.

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FRESH IS KEY FOR FRUITS

Besides marketing fruits that are great for grilling, capitalize on consumers' interest in fresh and seasonal foods to sell produce this time of year.

The California Table Grape Commission's research shows that the word "fresh" can be a very powerful draw for consumers, says Plummer. "It is a cue for consumers to choose an item they can feel good about. Their expectations may include perceptions that the product is of higher quality, tastier and healthier than others."

Locally grown, natural and seasonal are also words that resonate with consumers. Cherries, berries, peaches and watermelons are among the fruits at the peak of season or just coming in at the beginning of July. That's one thing that makes them very appealing to people.

"Watermelon is a classic American treat that complements this classic American holiday," says Juliemar Rosado, director of retail operations and international marketing for the Springs, FL-based National Watermelon Promotion Board. "When the weather is warm, watermelon is the perfect way to beat the heat. It's a great hydrator at 92 percent water."

Even some produce items not typically associated with the Fourth of July can be big sellers. Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Irvine, CA-based California Avocado Commission, reports its growers see a big spike in business around the Fourth of July; and Independence Day is one of the most popular events for serving avocados, along with Cinco de Mayo and Super Bowl Sunday.

Offering fruits and vegetables in a number of packages or sizes can increase sales. Carel says he sells watermelons whole, halved and in chunks. In addition to selling unhusked sweet corn in bulk displays, he does well with tray packs of three to five ears.

DISPLAY, SPACE CONSIDERATIONS

Rosado and DeLyser agree that setting up large, patriotic displays can go a long way toward catching people’s attention. Incorporating pictures of flags, fireworks and other Fourth of July-themed artwork clearly conveys a message to shoppers.

“At Giant Eagle, customer favorites such as corn, peaches, and berries are displayed near one another in the produce department in addition to being featured in the company’s weekly circular,” says Donovan. “During the summer months, key produce items are featured as great foods for grilling alongside other foods. Throughout the summer picnic season stores are encouraged to increase the size of their corn displays. The most important thing for store produce leaders to consider when creating featured displays is to be conscious of increasing presence without jeopardizing freshness.”

Having a variety within the fruit category can also help sell more. Many produce departments find they sell more grapes if they carry green, red and black varieties, says Plummer.

For peaches, “Include yellow flesh and white flesh,” says Simonian with Simonian Fruit Company. “It’s something that will draw people in.”

If nothing else, the quality of the produce being displayed must be outstanding. “People buy grapes with their eyes,” says Plummer. “Displays need to be refreshed often, and the quality of the grapes needs to look excellent.”

RECIPES, DEMOS ALSO TOOLS

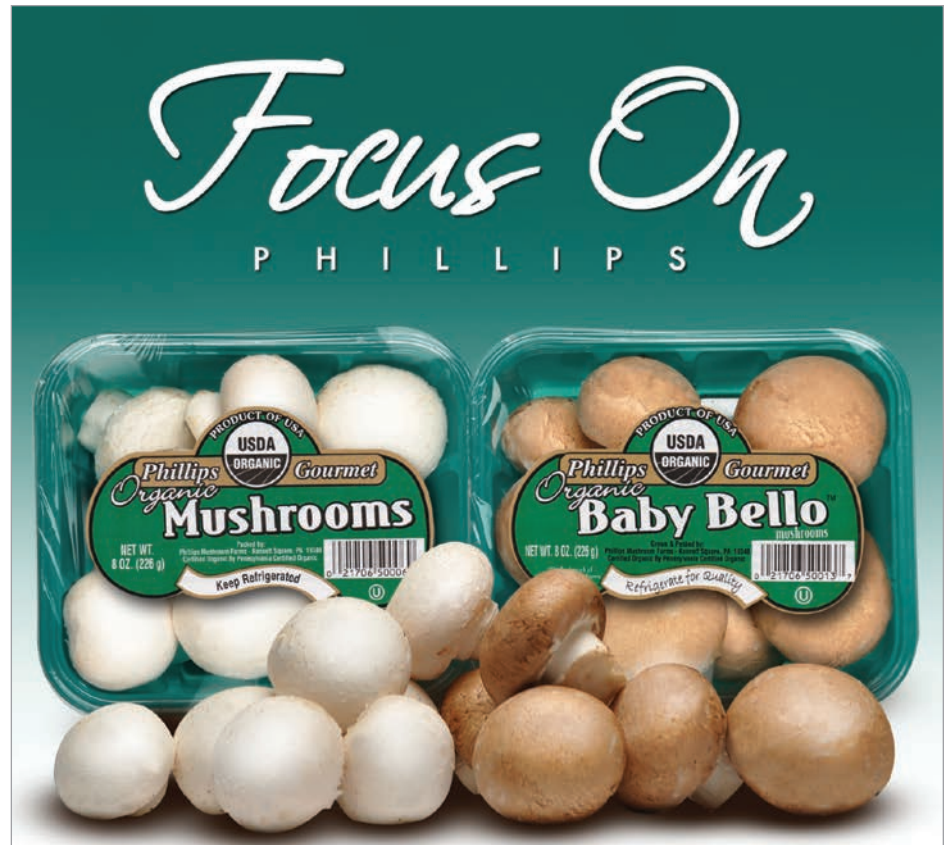
Letting shoppers know the range of ways to prepare different produce items will get their imaginations humming.

“The biggest thing for produce managers is to offer ideas and suggestions that are timely to activities that are going on,” says DeLyser. Mashed-up avocados can replace the unhealthy

fat from mayonnaise in potato salad or deviled eggs, two picnic favorites. Serving things on top of toast is a huge trend right now, and mashed avocado mixed with a variety of add-ins will be a big hit at parties.

“Watermelons lend themselves to many flavors and cuisines,” says Rosado, and can be used in ways consumers may never consider. The rind can be grated for slaw. The flesh can be juiced and used in cocktails or smoothies. The entire thing can be carved into a fruit basket or other sculpture.

“When people think about cooking with blueberries, they often limit themselves to putting them in sweet items,” says Emily Valentine, an account supervisor for the Folsom, CA-based U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council. “What’s really exciting is that we’re seeing an expansion outside of that baked goods mindset. Adding frozen blueberries to turkey burgers is a great way to add flavor to a Fourth of July staple. Using blueberries in savory foods like spreads to go on cheeses is another. Put them in a dipping sauce for meatballs. Encourage



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consumers to think outside the box.”

Donovan with Phillips Mushroom Farms suggests finely chopping mushrooms and mixing them with ground beef or turkey. It is possible to do up to a 50/50 ratio of meat to mushrooms. “You get a great juicy burger, and most people won’t even know there are mushrooms in it,” he says. Sliced mushrooms are also good in fresh salads.

Grilled peaches and other stone fruits can be cooked and served plain with great results. They’re also delicious basted with a sauce, such

as a balsamic vinegar syrup, and served on vanilla ice cream.

All these items, plus berries and cherries, can be marketed alongside bagged salads. Adding chunks of fruit to a spinach or mixed green salad shouts summer. Topping a salad with leftover grilled meat makes a great light lunch following a night of heavy party foods.

Simply providing recipes or cooking ideas is a great way to promote produce. Doing in-store demonstrations takes things a step further. Giant Eagle does frequent in-store



cooking demonstrations at their Market District-branded stores to highlight locally grown produce. They make a variety of recipes available on their website. (Stores looking for more recipe ideas can access free resources on the websites of various commodity promotion boards, including those listed in this article.)

Demos can also increase sales of other products. “Demos and promotions that involve more than one commodity always have great success,” says Rosado. “They not only drive the sales of more than one product, but they also have the potential to showcase those products’ versatility if shown in a recipe.”

When doing recipe demos, have everything the consumer needs to make the dish available. “The customer gets the opportunity to taste something and the convenience of having the items at their fingertips to buy,” says National Watermelon Promotion Board’s Rosado.

Another way to draw people to fresh fruits is to emphasize their health benefits, says Valentine with the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council. “Consumers respond really well to the health halo surrounding blueberries.” As more people are interested in “shopping the rainbow” – eating fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors – blueberries are one of a few ways to add extremely nutrient-dense purple foods to their diet.

Demoing produce in ways that will jog people’s imaginations is another great idea. “We suggest having demos or samples that take advantage of those more unusual uses,” says Valentine. “Try serving those turkey burgers with blueberries, or add blueberries to a savory dish like a quinoa salad with feta and butternut squash. Also, work nutrition and healthy living tips into demos so people are reminded of that side of a blueberry’s profile.”

Carel from Tom’s Supermarket offers these last tips for produce managers looking to boost sales around the Fourth of July: “Engage in some good, old-fashioned selling. I don’t let a single customer pass me without greeting them. When you greet everyone, you have the opportunity to emphasize something you want to move more product on.” **pb**

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Produce Is Fruitful In The Garden State

How New Jersey chooses to support its produce community.

BY KEITH LORIA



(TOP TO BOTTOM) PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALLEGIANCE RETAIL SERVICES AND NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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For New Jersey blueberries in 2015, Murray says a rough winter has the season running a

little behind, and the soil isn't warming up as quickly. Greens began being harvested in April, but heavy rain kept farmers from getting their tractors in the field. Still, the forecast for the season as a whole remains positive. "In May and June, all of this will translate into some nice fruit. We're very optimistic right now," he says.

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"The relationship we, as retailers, have with the local growers in the state is very strong," he says. "I know, I myself have many solid relationships that allow me to be aggressive without being afraid of not being able to be sourced. We know each other so well, we know what each other is thinking and take care of each other."

Savanello says that in addition to corn, watermelon and peaches, the newer items gaining popularity are cauliflower and anise.

MEETING DEMAND

For East Coast supermarkets, foodservice operators and distributors, New Jersey produce growers can supply most of the produce needs for the summer months. According to many wholesalers and retailers, lots of the produce companies in New Jersey have talented farmers who can get the most quality product out of small acreage and short production periods.

Jonathan Consalo, a partner with Vivid Fruit and Produce, LLC, located in Vineland, NJ, says the company began operations just two

summers ago with a focus on a complete Jersey Fresh line to offer its retail customers higher quality produce at a faster rate to market.

"Within a 150-mile radius of the southern New Jersey growing area, there are nearly 40 million people who desire farm fresh produce. Vivid can ensure locally grown, farm fresh produce is available to retail outlets within 48 hours," he says. "Compared to California grown product, Vivid's New Jersey products can be on your table a week sooner."

According to data by the Glassboro-based

New Jersey Peach Promotion Council, the Garden State currently ranks fourth nationally for peach production, following California, South Carolina and Georgia, but it has been growing in market share over the past decade.

"Studies prove that consumers will pay for quality, and they choose Jersey-grown peaches in season over peaches from out of state, because of their superior quality," says Pegi Adam, marketing and promotions manager for the Council. "With closeness to major markets, our peaches are picked by hand at optimum maturity, when color, flavor and sugars are high."

Jerry Frecon, professor emeritus, Rutgers University (New Brunswick, NJ) and horticultural consultant for the New Jersey Peach Promotion Council, says when customers buy New Jersey peaches, they help preserve farmers and farmland.

Bob Von Rohr, director of customer relations for Sunny Valley International, based in Glassboro, NJ, says during the summer months, the company is the exclusive marketing agent for "Jersey Fruit" blueberries, "Little Buck" organic blueberries, "Jersey Fruit" peaches/nectarines and "Just Picked" stone fruit.

"To date all our New Jersey blueberry and peach crops look to be on course for an excellent season," he says.

"One of the major reasons for the high quality and flavor of New Jersey peaches is the practice of hydrocooling on every farm that harvests peaches," says Von Rohr. "Because most peach orchards are close to major markets in the U.S., peaches can be picked when their color, flavor and sugar are high. New Jersey peaches do not have to be pre-conditioned, because they are well matured at harvest. This high flavor and quality is maintained throughout the harvest handling and storage."

WHAT'S NEW?

Consalo of Vivid Fruit notes growers in southern New Jersey are very reactive to eating trends and are more flexible in planning acreage than the large corporate farming businesses.

"The most recent focus has been on healthy greens, such as kale, kohlrabi and beet tops," he says. "It's important to stay on top of consumers' interests so we can offer the proper product mix to our customers."

Von Rohr says every year New Jersey peach growers plant newer varieties with the guidance of Rutgers' New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station Cooperative Extension to ensure high quality flavorful peaches.

"New Jersey nectarines are known for their excellent flavor and high color and have a very

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high demand from retailers,” he says. “New Jersey also has some outstanding white-flesh variety peaches during the months of August and September.”

SUSTAINABILITY AND ORGANIC MATTERS

All of Sunny Valley’s “Jersey Fruit” and “Just Picked” growers are Primuslabs GFS Food Safety audit-certified.

“All our growers’ product is fully traceable, and we have PTI case level labeling capabili-

ties,” says Von Rohr. “We are putting a lot of focus on sustainability this season. Growers use drip irrigation to help ensure water conservation. Clamshells are made from recycled materials. Integrated pest solution programs at all farms ensure effective pest control and responsible use of pesticides.”

The company’s Little Buck organic blueberries are certified by the Northeast Organic Farming Association. Big Buck Farms, which packs under the Little Buck label, is the largest certified organic grower in the state, and this

year it will offer organic cranberries.

Murray of the NJDA says some New Jersey growers are slowly getting into organics, but it’s going to take time for farmers to get their fields ready and really make a go at it.

AT STORE-LEVEL

While the Department of Agriculture does a great deal to help, those in the retail environments need to do their part as well to better market the New Jersey produced product.

“Stores should promote the sales of locally grown product, when available, as a healthier and eco-friendly choice since product is in your basket quickly and transportation distances are much shorter thereby conserving energy,” says Consalo.

Murray has been working for the state for 33 years and notes that promoting locally grown was once a big challenge; but now it’s white hot, consumers are demanding it, and retailers are supporting the movement.

“Farmers are big right now. People really want to connect to the farmers. There’s such a big interest in agriculture as a whole right now,” he says. “Supermarkets no longer just promote locally grown for two weeks at the start of the season. They market it from when the season starts to when the season ends. Jersey Fresh just explodes all over our state.”

Today, Murray says, consumers are demanding to see the Jersey Fresh logos on the packaging.

The produce business is always looking for ways to increase sales, and Savanello says that just hearing the words “locally grown” is a key selling point to customers.

“It’s magic,” he says. “The consumer loves the entire concept. They trust local, they feel like they are supporting neighbors, and people feel the produce is the freshest they could possibly get. They are right on the mark in all three cases.”

Jay Schneider, produce director with ACME Markets, based in Philadelphia, PA, says Jersey Peaches are a big seller at the stores, and he does a great deal to let customers know they are available.

“The idea of getting something that tastes so good locally from the Garden State is a big draw to our customers,” he says. “Jersey peaches help bring more awareness to local grown and are very popular with our customers.”

Steven Dandrea, owner of Dandrea Produce, headquartered in Vineland, NJ, would like to see the blueberry industry as a whole do more to reach out to new customers in the New Jersey market.

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Produce Is Fruitful In The Garden State

How New Jersey chooses to support its produce community.

BY KEITH LORIA



(TOP TO BOTTOM) PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALLEGIANCE RETAIL SERVICES AND NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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RIPE FRUIT DOES THE SELLING

A consistently strong program can distinguish any produce department.

BY BOB JOHNSON

As you walk through the produce department nothing delivers a message as quickly as the color of the bananas. Green says too hard and not ready to eat, blackish connotes overdone and past its prime, but the sweet yellow in the 5 to 6 range on the color chart promises an enjoyable eating experience.

“People buy with their eyes,” says Gary Campisi, senior director of quality control at Wal-Mart Stores, Bentonville, AR. “Green bananas don’t sell. Customers want bananas they can eat today, tomorrow or the next day. You want to have fruit that looks ready to eat.”

Detecting readiness of other fruits, like avocados, may take a closer look, or even a soft squeeze, but the retail reward for displaying fruit you can eat today or tomorrow is just as substantial.

“We experienced up to a 70 percent increase in unit sales,” says Dan Acevedo, director of business development at West Pak Avocado, Murrieta, CA. “Retailers are very pleased with the results when they made the switch. When consumers can take ripe avocados home, they tend to purchase them more frequently.”

Because there can be a learning curve with ripening fruit, produce retailers face a decision of whether to invest in the equipment and facilities to do it themselves or pay the pros. Communication between stores’ produce managers and ripeners, in house or not, is also essential, because what you see is not always exactly what you get. But a good

program is well worth the trouble, because it distinguishes the entire produce department.

THE REWARDS CAN BE GREAT

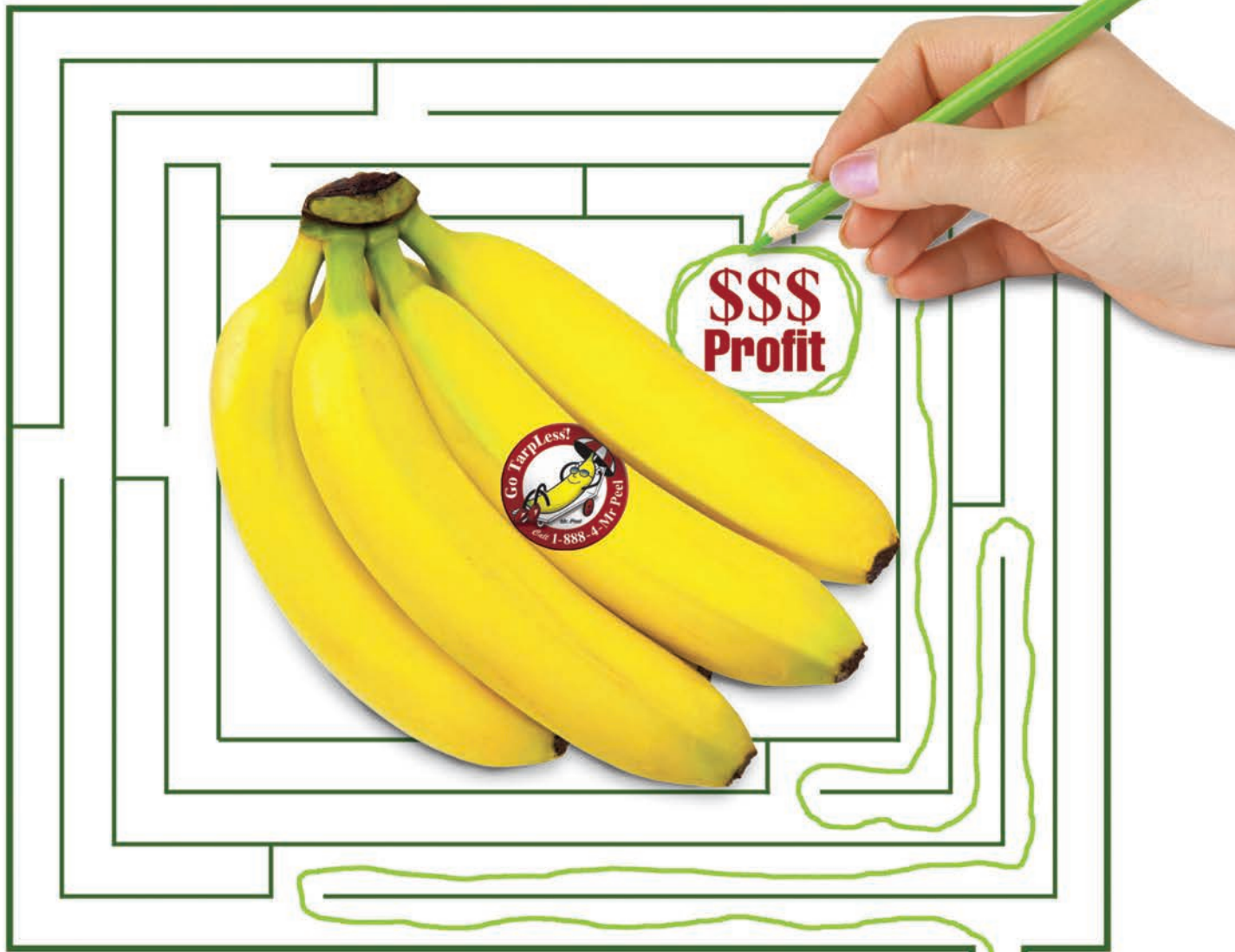
The rewards for a ripe fruit program done consistently well can be nothing short of staggering. “It will double your sales on papayas and avocados,” says Mike Maxwell, president of Procacci Brothers, Philadelphia, PA. “It gives customers a better experience. If you ripen papayas to start to turn the color, they sell faster. If you want avocados to make guacamole, you don’t want to take them home and wait a couple of weeks.”

Fewer than 50 North American retailers manage conditioned pear programs, according to Kevin Moffitt, president and chief executive of Pear Bureau Northwest, Milwaukie, OR, but a recent survey showed they reap lasting rewards.

“In a 2012 test conducted by Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables group, retail sales of green Anjou pears increased 19.5 percent in stores with conditioned pears versus the control stores over the test period,” says Moffitt. “Sales continued to increase after the test as reported by the West Coast retailer. Selling ripened fruit increases sales.”

Ripe fruit even attracts consumers who had no intention of purchasing the item when they entered the store.

“Avocados are an impulse buy unless there is some event or social



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gathering,” says Ross Wileman, senior vice president for sales and marketing at Mission Produce, Oxnard, CA. “The first thing the customer does when they visit the avocados is see if they are ripe. The supermarket wants them at different stages. A consumer who visits the market one-and-a-half times a week wants some for today, and some for two days from now.”

Signage can help customers find the ripened product, and sort out whether the fruit is ready to eat today or two days from now.

“We have point of sale material, but execution is up to the retailer,” says Wileman. “Placement of the signage is up to the retailer; we have to rely on them.”

Fruit ready to eat may sell itself well enough that extensive point of sale material is not necessary.

“We let the customers look, and people see when they are ripe,” says Campisi from Wal-Mart. “Hopefully most people kind of know when fruit is ripe. Most people know when you can eat a banana.”

Some customers expect a quality produce department to display fruit at different stages of ripeness. “Selling ripe fruit is crucial to sales as most of today’s customers want their fruit

ripe and ready to eat, but for the rest it is also helpful to display fruit that will be ready in the next few days so that customers can have a choice of ripeness stage,” says Karen-Ann Christenbery, manager at American Ripener, Charlotte, NC.

For some customers, a strong and reliable ripe fruit program can make a store the go-to place.

“Having a good pear department can differentiate a retailer from their competition,” says Moffitt. “Consumers don’t want to wait — 90 percent of consumers want to eat their pears in one to four days after purchase, with half wanting to eat them within two days. Conditioned pears can have a better flavor profile including more juice and aromas than non-conditioned pears. When consumers know that a store carries sweet and juicy pears, they will return to that store for pears.”

CONSISTENCY YOU CAN COUNT ON

Fruit ripe and ready to eat invites purchase and brings consumers coming back for more, but the program must deliver a consistency customers can count on. “Consistency is the key,” says Campisi. “I’ve had people tell me ‘you guys are so consistent.’”

In the case of some fruits, ripeners endure a learning curve before they can count on consistent results. When Dick Spezzano, who offers consulting services under Spezzano Consulting Service, Monrovia, CA, was vice president for produce at Vons Supermarkets in Southern California, he grew enthusiastic about ripe fruit.

“On bananas, mangos and avocados, if you hit the right firmness — and hit it consistently — you’ll maximize your sales,” says Spezzano.

He came to learn, however, that ripening some fruit is not easy to condition, and your failures can be costly. “If you don’t hit it, you’ll be at 80 percent or less, and then there’s the shrink factor,” says Spezzano. “Customers have a lot of choices at the supermarket. When I was at Vons, we thought we could do papayas, and we failed miserably. There is a learning curve.”

Mango is another fruit that demands great care or they can become too ripe for the customers. “We warm up a mango; typically they are in a state of ripening and we speed up the process,” says Campisi. “You want a firm piece of fruit, so you don’t want it too soft. People can tell when they touch the fruit.”

Even some professionals approach mangos



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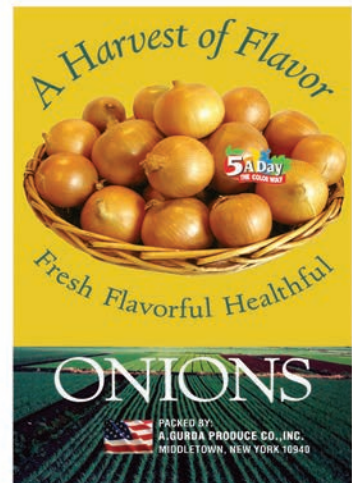
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with care, or avoid approaching them at all. "Once you trigger a mango, it goes pretty fast," says Maxwell from Procacci Brothers. "Besides bananas, we ripen avocados, stone fruit and papaya. Mangos we don't ripen as much."

Produce retailers will find that the ripening process continues even after the fruit leaves the conditioning room. "Once you trigger it [the ripening process], you can't go back," says Maxwell. "We need to be dealing with customers that we are working with 52 weeks a year. The produce managers need to understand what they're getting. It's not tree ripening; we start the process of ripening."

Even a straightforward fruit like bananas can spring surprises, because the speed with which they continue to ripen depends on how they were conditioned before they reached the store.

"Regarding bananas, experience has shown

that the rate of ripening correlates to the rate of color progression at retail," says David J. Byrne, vice president for sales at Thermal Technologies, Blythewood, SC. "Using a true five-day cycle means bananas will stay at the highly desirable 5 and 6 color stages longer while on display. This means more sales and less shrink. Consumers will notice that bananas last longer on their kitchen counters too, which means more repeat business."

Avocados, too, can surprise you after they have been conditioned and put on the produce department floor. "It can be a very painstaking transition to a ripe program if not executed correctly," says Acevedo of West Pak. "We work closely with our customers that transitioned to a preconditioned program. To minimize shrink, we start with avocados that have a slight break, and give information to the produce departments with handling practices and shelf

life expectation. In all cases, we see significant sales increases."

Consistency requires that store-level produce managers know what they are receiving, and how the fruit will change over time. "Great communication with our customers on their ripe specification, order lead times, volume forecasts, and handling and merchandising practices are the keys to success," says Acevedo.

There are certain occasions when the store must get this right, because customers absolutely have to know they will find fruit ready to take home and eat. "Nothing is worse than to have a weekend roll around with avocados that are not ready to eat or are over ripe avocado and unattractive," says Acevedo. "One of the cons would be that retailers and foodservice customers received preconditioned avocados with an inconsistent stage of ripeness." **pb**

■ DECIDING ON IN HOUSE OR NOT

The question of whether or not to ripen fruit in house at the distribution center largely comes down to whether the capital investment, risk and trouble are worth the savings.

"There is a dollar or two charge for a 40-pound box, and we would do it for 50-cents a box," says Dick Spezzano, who offers consulting services under Spezzano Consulting Service, Monrovia, CA. "If you're happy with the ripening you're getting, you're not going to increase your sales by doing it yourself, but you can improve your costs and reduce handling and bruising of the fruit."

Many retailers find that savings makes ripening their own fruit well worth the effort. "We do most of our ripening ourselves," says Gary Campisi, senior director of quality control at Wal-Mart Stores, Bentonville, AR. "Bananas, pears, avocados, mangos and tomatoes are the main ones."

There may be a trend toward setting up facilities to ripen fruit at the distribution center. "We are seeing more supermarket distribution centers establishing ripening programs," says Karen-Ann Christenbery, manager at American Ripener, Charlotte, NC.

"They do not ripen at the actual supermarket, but at their distribution centers."

Once a retailer sets up a room, the store can use it to ripen many different fruits, in some cases, even at the same time. "If you have your own room for bananas, you can also do honeydew, pineapple, papaya and

mangos," says Spezzano. "Some people will also do kiwis and avocados. If you're good at managing it, you can have more than one item at the same time, but sequential is a little easier."

While you can ripen more than one kind of fruit in the same room, some items ripen well together while some others just don't. "As to what other items you can process in banana ripening rooms, items such as tomatoes and mangos are a good fit since their ripening temperature ranges are more closely aligned with those of bananas," says David J. Byrne, vice president for sales at Thermal Technologies, Blythewood, SC. "Both items require an operating range of approximately 55 to 75 degrees, with mangos sometimes being stored after ripening at temperatures as low as 50 degrees."

Avocados and some other fruits, however, require more than just the right temperature and ethylene concentration to ripen properly. "While it is possible to ripen items like avocados and pears in a banana room, it's important to understand the operating limitations, be prepared to wait significantly longer for the warming and cooling to occur, and have a separate cooler that can finish the required temperature pull-down below 56 degrees," says Byrne. "Since any cooler will lack forced air, understand that the final pull-down will also take significantly longer than in a pressurized avocado, pear or multi-fruit room."

Some retailers do not find it worth the

cost of building a ripening room, and learning the complexities of using it properly. "Not everybody believes in ripening at their own warehouse, because it's a significant capital investment," says Spezzano. "In today's environment it costs \$60,000 to \$70,000 — those figures do not count the room. Some people go outside to a Dole or Del Monte."

The process for ripening avocados, in particular, is complex and the specifications even change depending on when the fruit was harvested. "The technology to ripen avocados has become very advanced," says Dan Acevedo, director of business development at West Pak Avocado, Murrieta, CA. "An avocado is a very dense fruit. To ripen avocados, you introduce humidity and ethylene gas at a specific temperature. The ripening process can take up to several days. Once this procedure is completed, it takes several hours of forced air cooling to bring the pulp temperature back down to preferred storage and shipment levels and evacuate the ethylene gas. Early season fruit reacts different than late season fruit, and ripening time frames can vary by several days," says Acevedo.

There are also differences in the best way to ripen avocados depending on where they were grown. "There are subtle nuances involved with ripening avocados from all of the countries supplying the U.S. market," says Acevedo, who adds, "most of the ripening is done by the avocado companies." **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF SPARTANNAH

PURE Michigan

Fruit and vegetable bounty contributes \$96 billion toward state's bottomline.

BY CHRIS AUMUN

Michigan may not be in the Top 10 of the biggest agricultural states in the United States, but the range of crops the state produces places it second in the nation for agricultural diversity according to the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Whether it is apples, asparagus, blueberries, beets, cherries and chestnuts, it's a varied list for a state that is perhaps better known for its contributions to the automotive indus-

try than to supermarket aisles. As the state produces these crops, it feeds more than just Michiganders. Indeed, Michigan puts produce on tables east to the Atlantic, west of the Mississippi, and well beyond those borders.

According to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistic Service, in 2014, Michigan had more than 50,000 farms in operation on more than 9 million acres. Corn makes up the majority of the state's harvest, but sweet beets are also produced in large numbers. The state

is nationally known for its cherries, especially tarts cherries for pies, as well as apples.

It's little wonder then that the summer months are a busy time for Michigan's produce industry. From farmers and growers to cartage companies, receivers and retailers, there are plenty of commodities to pick, pack, transport, promote and sell to waiting consumers.

The advantages of selling Michigan produce are obvious. A fresher product at a lower price has consumer appeal, of course, but it also supports the state and local economies for

a win-win situation across the production chain. Buying Michigan commodities also serves current consumer trends toward locally sourced food products. Retailers especially can use the summer months to take advantage by using signage, in-store demos, social media and websites to promote fresh Michigan produce while helping boost local economies and benefiting the fiscal outlook of the entire state.

MICHIGAN PRODUCE: APPLES TO ZUCCHINI

Michigan ranks in the Top 10 for a variety of commodities, 63 in fact, and the state's agriculture contributes an annual \$96 billion toward the state economy. As of 2014, there was an estimated 9.2 million apple trees growing in the Mitten State, according to the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural. Apples comprise Michigan's largest fruit crop, which puts it only behind Washington and New York as the country's leading apple producer. Forty percent of apples grown in Michigan are sold ready to eat with the rest going to processing.

While apple picking is usually associated with the fall season, there are varieties available in the summer, and Michigan apples can be purchased nearly year round thanks to controlled-atmosphere storage. For Diane Smith, executive director for the Lansing, MI-based Michigan Apple Committee,

■ DEMAND FOR LOCAL AND ORGANIC

Organic produce is a continuing trend that impacted the industry. Nicco Pandolfi, produce buyer at Traverse City, MI-based of Cherry Capital Food says, "Organic certification reframed the discussion about best agricultural practices in venues ranging from the feed store to the halls of government. The organic sector is certainly growing appreciably each year, and we have seen the demand for organic produce steadily increase over the past decade."

On the retail side, supermarkets are quick to capitalize. For Martin's Supermarkets, which is headquartered in South Bend, IN, but operates three stores in Michigan, selling Michigan produce is a matter of convenience that also meets consumer demand for locally grown commodities. Ed Osowski, director of produce and floral for Martin's, sees the value in local produce on the retail level, because the company can source a fresher product from growers that may already be known to their customers. "That's what the consumer is looking for," says Osowski. "That connection they get when they drive by that farm everyday and then go into the supermarket and see the farmer's product on display, they get that association."

While advertising produce as being locally grown is nothing new for Martin's, there has

been more of an effort made to identify individual farms through a combination of signage, displays and social media.

Grand Rapids, MI-based distributor and retailer, SpartanNash has a long history of working with local growers. "Our roots go deep — we have a diverse group of grower partners, many of them second and third generation family-owned farms. Some delivered to our stores for more than 40 years," according to Meredith Gremel, vice president of corporate affairs and communications.

The company also incorporates a marketing plan focused on Michigan produce. "We support our local farmers with in-store marketing materials. We recognize consumers want to know where their food comes from and our campaign provides background on our grower partners. We also use social media to tell their story and share pictures," she says.

Fresh, local and healthy, Michigan is a one-stop shop for many produce needs. The availability of Michigan produce throughout the Midwest and beyond gives retailers the opportunity to promote commodities and spread the word about Michigan and its diverse agricultural output.

pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF TODD GREINER FARMS

summer is no time to be idle. Not when there's so much work to do. "This year, we will be finishing up our supply of apples in the June/July timeframe," says Smith. "In August, early varieties begin harvest, and we are off to the races. So, our staff is constantly communicating with retailers in a number of different ways to keep them apprised of what's going on with Michigan apples."

Even for the short time that Michigan apples are absent from supermarket aisles, the public is still consuming products made

with them. As Smith notes, "more than half of Michigan's apple crop goes to processed products like applesauce, baby food, pie filling and of course, juice." Which isn't to suggest that apples aren't naturally in season during the summer. It just requires a little patience until August with the arrival of the late summer varieties. For Smith, her favorite late summer Michigan apple is the Ginger Gold. "It's sweet and crunchy with just a little tartness. Another late summer variety is Paula Red, a tart variety that was actually discovered in Sparta, MI."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHERRY CAPITAL FOODS



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According to the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board, Michigan ranks second in the U.S. for production of asparagus. In Western Michigan, the moderate climate of Oceana County along the shores of Lake Michigan contributes roughly 10,000 acres every year to the overall production of 20 million pounds produced by 120 family farms. More than 40 percent of the asparagus harvested in the state is sold fresh in produce aisles with the rest going to processors who freeze or can the tips and spears. The USDA's National Agricultural Statistic Service reports the total crop value for this vegetable in 2014 was more than \$20 million.

Reminding consumers of the availability of fresh asparagus is key. John Bakker, executive director of the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board in DeWitt, says seasonal radio spots are a good way to promote asparagus at the start of the season. Social media in combination with in-store demos are also effective in getting the product in front of customers. The payoff? Michigan asparagus to in-state retailers, as well as those throughout the Midwest, is a fresher, better tasting product delivered in less time.

For growers like Todd Greiner Farms in Hart, the season gets off to an early start in May with asparagus. Cherries become available in June; zucchini in July; corn in August and peaches in September. Greiner Farms' produce gets distributed far beyond the state's borders.

According to Todd Greiner, chief operating



“Advances in both season extension and soilless growing methods are improving availability of Michigan produce during what was formerly the off-season.”

— Nicco Pandolfi, Cherry Capital Foods

to learn more about the processes involved in producing their food.”

The benefits in promoting and selling Michigan produce may be obvious, but there are challenges as well. According to Smith of the Michigan Apple Committee, “One of the biggest challenges we found is consumers can’t always discern where the apples they select come from.”

After the Committee conducted a proprietary study from 2008 to 2013, the consumer panel showed they wanted to buy Michigan Apples, but were often purchasing apples grown elsewhere. “There’s a disconnect at the point of sale,” says Smith. In an effort to better help consumers find the local produce they seek, the Michigan Apple Committee works with retailers to ensure custom signage programs make consumers aware of which apples are Michigan grown.

CHALLENGES FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Other challenges are labor and trucking shortages. These issues present obstacles even as business has boomed. For Todd DeWaard, sales manager at Hudsonville, MI-based Superior Sales, “Finding people to pick the product in the field has been a real challenge.

“We’re trying to lock in with more carriers and reach out to more people, but it’s just a nationwide shortage. All the transportation companies we know are looking for drivers.” This obstacle may actually provide a silver lining for consumers in Michigan in terms of price. From a transportation standpoint, the shortage can mean a better-priced product, which also serves consumer demand for locally grown commodities. This sentiment is echoed by Greiner of Todd Greiner Farms, “It is a struggle for most farmers to find an adequate labor supply to get the crops harvested in a timely manner. The volatility of the trucking industry is always a struggle for seasonal shippers such as ourselves, but we have been able to develop relationships with dependable transportation companies to alleviate that issue.”

The ongoing drought in California, which hasn’t impacted Michigan much at this point,

may in the future. This could give Michigan an opportunity as an alternative growing area for produce if it can no longer be sourced from California. Of course, this could also put a further strain of the demand for labor and transport. Gene Talsma, owner of Crisphearth Produce in Hudsonville, has a pragmatic outlook on these challenges, which are nothing new for him. “We’re just like anybody else,” says Talsma. “It’s been like that for years. Sometimes it’s harder than other times. We try to do the safest job we can with all the vegetables we have.”

Seasonality can also be a challenge, as Pandolfi of Cherry Capital Food points out. “Seasonality is the No. 1 challenge in exclusively selling produce grown in-state.” It is certainly possible to find produce year-round that may only be available in Michigan during the summer, but fortunately for Michigan consumers, says Pandolfi, “Advances in both season extension and soilless growing methods are improving availability of Michigan produce during what was formerly the off-season.”

Also helping is the locally grown movement, which stresses the importance of eating foods in season. “Part of eating local is changing our culinary culture to embrace seasonality and foster the attitude each food has its time and is best enjoyed during that brief, glorious window.”

Michigan apples have overcome obstacles of seasonality through controlled atmosphere storage, which helps keep fresh apples available for 11 months of the year.” As Smith explains, “Controlled atmosphere storage is a non-chemical process that slows down ripening in order to keep Michigan Apples crisp and fresh. Oxygen levels, which are at 21 in the air we breathe, are reduced to 1 or 2 percent in the controlled atmosphere storage rooms. Temperatures are kept at a constant 32 to 36 degrees Fahrenheit, but exact conditions in the rooms are set according to the fruit variety. Researchers develop specific instructions for each variety to achieve the best quality and computers also help keep conditions constant.”

pb

officer and chairman, “We can ship across the United States, from the East Coast, to the southern states, to the Midwest with the capability to ship to the West Coast if needed.” Todd Greiner Farms sees the state of Michigan as a “one-stop shop” where retailers can source almost all of their fresh produce needs. The state’s geographic location also positions well for retail and makes it “centrally located to many of the nation’s largest retailers, which reduces the freight costs of getting the products delivered to the retailers,” he says.

Of course, location isn’t the only selling point, as Greiner notes, “The quality of Michigan’s fresh produce is second to none. The state’s mild climate and ideal growing conditions for commodities like asparagus, zucchini, sweet corn, hard squash, pumpkin, and apples allows for the outstanding level of quality that is associated with fresh Michigan produce.”

Cherry Capital Foods in Traverse City is a food distributor that works exclusively with growers and producers within the state. “During the growing season, we sell almost anything that can be grown in the Michigan climate, but our biggest sellers are probably asparagus, blueberries, tomatoes and greens,” says Nicco Pandolfi, produce buyer at Traverse City, MI-based Cherry Capital.

This focus ensures consumers have access to the freshest produce available. For Cherry Capital, it’s about more than investment in a good product. According to Pandolfi, “Buying local is an investment in community, generating economic and infrastructural benefits that ripple out through the region. It also guarantees access to the freshest possible products and allows eaters to connect with local growers

Avocados From Peru Are Taking Root In The U.S.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PERUVIAN AVOCADO COMMISSION

The 2015 marketing campaigns engage retailers and consumers more than ever before.

BY KEITH LORIA



Following a year in which Peru's avocado industry exported a record 140 million pounds to the U.S. market in a three-month window, industry insiders expect 2015 to be slightly more — though not as big as originally predicted, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Peruvian Avocado Commission (PAC). Peruvian avocado exporters expect to ship 170 million pounds to the U.S. during the summer months — an increase of 30 million pounds over last year.

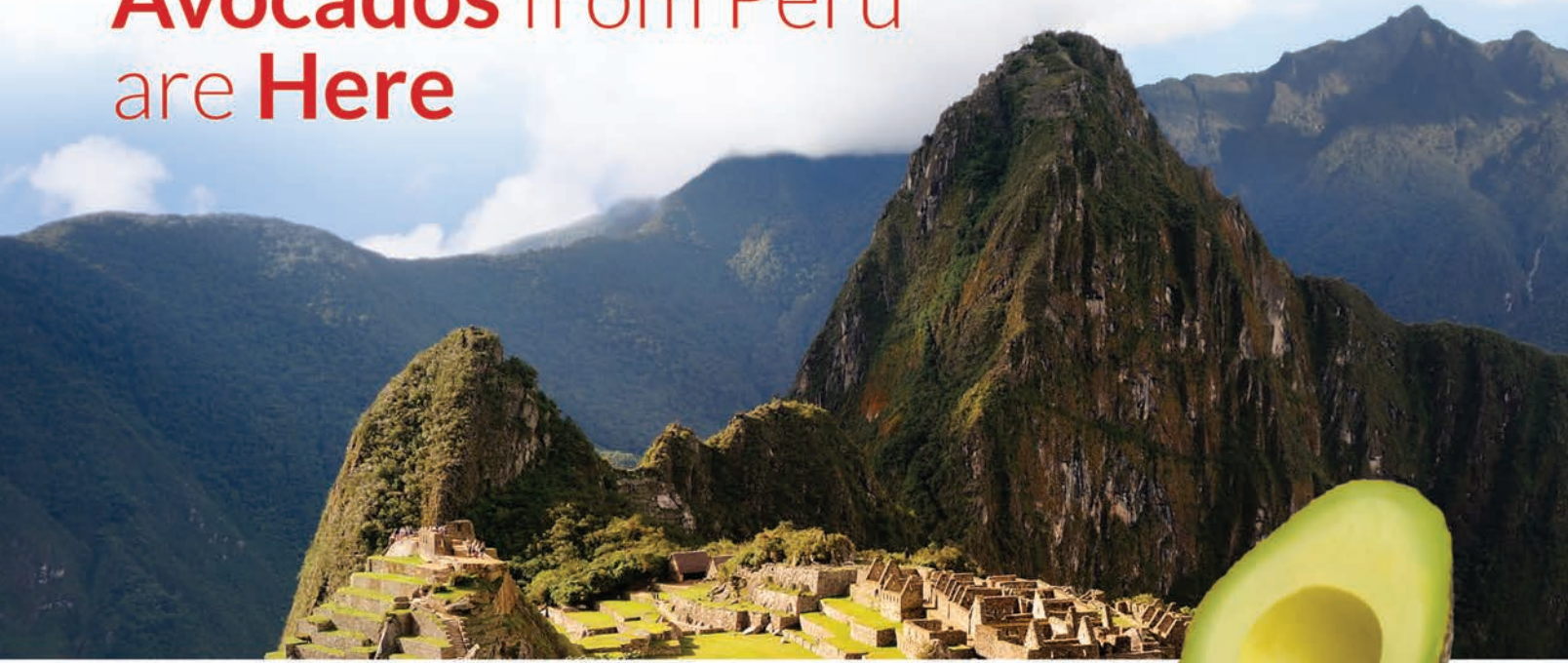
Xavier Equihua, president and chief executive of the PAC, cites weather conditions as the reason for the change in the original projec-

tions. However, with 30 million more pounds of avocados entering the U.S. in 2015 versus 2014, last year's 60/40 ratio of Europe/U.S. imports will be reversed.

While Peru has been exporting to the EU for many years and has been the largest supplier of Hass avocados to the market, it has only been a major summer player in the U.S. for the past year.

"The U.S. is going to become a larger market because of a stronger dollar," he says. "Nevertheless, even with the stronger dollar vis-à-vis the Euro, Peru will gradually become a key summer Hass avocado supplier to the U.S. The season is typically May though the

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The **Summer** Avocado

end of September, but this year we will see strong promotable volumes by June.”

MAKING AN ENTRANCE

Unlike other foreign origins, avocados from Peru are at their peak season during the summer months, which is why Peru is expected to have a solid presence in the states east of the Mississippi.

“It’s the second full year and after a good season last year, there’s a lot more confidence with the customers,” says Luke Sears, president of LGS Specialty Sales LTD., headquartered in New Rochelle, NY. “Retailers can promote more and they know there will be good volume, so there’s a lot of interest.”

Robb Bertels, vice president of marketing for Mission Produce, based in Oxnard, CA, notes Peru is looking to have another strong season this summer. “The overall volume is expected to be higher than 2014, but not as high as some of the pre-season projections,” he says. “We expect more volume to come to the North American market, but a large portion of the volume from Peru will also go into the European market.”

Mission Produce offers fully vertically integrated services from Peru. “We have our own growing operations in Peru, as well as our own state-of-the-art packing facility there. We think this gives us much more control in terms of product quality as well as arrival volume throughout the season,” says Bertels. “We’re taking a planned, managed approach with our volume this season, and expect we’ll have good supplies during the summer.”

The first shipment of Peruvian avocados is expected to hit U.S. stores in early May and Equihua expects there to be avocados on the shelves in October due to the late start of the season.

UPCOMING PROMOTIONS

The PAC is offering modular marketing programs to retailers to reach consumers, including in-store merchandising opportunities, radio support, IRC programs, and social media promotions.

In May, to kick off the Peruvian avocado season, PAC served a breakfast featuring Avocados from Peru on the U.S.S. Cole, during Fleet Week in Fort Lauderdale, FL, as a way to honor the servicemen and women on board — a first in the category to launch its season.

“We have a very long series of marketing tactics and a very robust PR program,” says Equihua. “We’re always looking for interesting ways to promote not just Avocados from Peru, but the category as a whole.”

■ A HEALTHY CHOICE

According to a new report by the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board (HAB), the new Dietary Guidelines may boost avocado consumption for Americans.

“Avocados are one of the only fruits that contain good unsaturated fats, are sodium-free and provide nearly 20 essential vitamins and minerals,” says Nikki Ford, HAB’s director of nutrition. “Now we just need to support research that will demonstrate that fresh avocado, specifically, can provide health and wellness benefits to consumers.” **pb**

Another highlight of the year ahead is the organization will team with noted Peruvian chef, Martin Morales (restaurant and author of *Ceviche: Peruvian Kitchen*). Morales, who lives in England, will come to the U.S. at the end of June to attend the Fancy Food Show in New York City.

“He is the top Peruvian cuisine chef in Europe, and joining forces with him helps to highlight the international brand of Avocados from Peru and the increasingly popular Peruvian cuisine,” says Equihua. “We will use Avocados from Peru to promote cultural diplomacy by hosting a series of events including one at the United Nations, a dinner for top food editors at the residence of the ambassador of Peru to the United Nations, as well as a dinner at the prestigious James Beard Foundation in New York City.”

PAC also has two brand ambassadors located here in the U.S. — the Peruvian Brothers. Born and raised in Lima, Peru, the Brothers operate a popular food truck in Washington, D.C. and are the official food suppliers

of the two-week long Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which this year is celebrating the rich culture of Peru. During the Festival, the food truck will be wrapped with beautiful images of Peru and fresh, ripe avocados. Recipes, including ceviche and traditional Peruvian fare, will feature Avocados from Peru and be available to the estimated 500,000 to 1.1 million event attendees. The Festival culminates with a spectacular fireworks display on the National Mall and marks the first time avocados of any origin are featured at this national landmark. The event allows Avocados from Peru to honor its homeland at one of the largest events in the U.S.

IN-STORE OPPORTUNITIES

The PAC works to give the retailers as much flexibility as possible; for example, cherry picking from a variety of helpful options including radio spots with the supermarket’s name attached, in-store bins, and retail ads, to name a few.

The organization also teamed up with the Produce Marketing Association and its partnership with Sesame Street to encourage families and children to eat more vegetables. Bins featuring the iconic Sesame Street characters are available to retailers.

Additionally, it is doing in-store demos to further promote the consumption of Hass avocados and will run spots on Pandora to target younger consumers.

“The idea is to provide retailers with flexible and modular marketing options customized to their needs and not the other way around,” says Equihua. “Avocados and their health story keep growing, and we want to continue getting that message out.”

Last year, PAC displayed a bus wrapped in Avocados from Peru regalia at the Aspen Food



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PERUVIAN AVOCADO COMMISSION

and Wine Classic. It was a huge success, and the organization plans to do the same again this year. Additionally, PAC is using the concept to wrap buses in major markets for Avocados from Peru this summer.

A successful 24-market radio campaign from 2014 will be expanded into new markets, with 30-second spots that will promote Peru's fertile farmland and its nutritional profile. The PAC also has a lively social media program as well.

On Twitter, it is hosting "parties" where people will Tweet each other about avocados, and have the opportunity to win prizes. There's also a recipe contest, and the organization is using its social media channels to hold a sweepstakes where a lucky person can win a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Peru.

PAC is also launching "Avo Mag," a lifestyle online magazine devoted to the world of avocados — a first for the avocado category. This summer, PAC will reach out to foodservice community for the first time by working with Restaurant Associates, a New York City-based company that operates foodservice venues in more than 150 locations nationwide. The partnership will encourage chefs to create innovative avocado recipes at Restaurant Associates' outlets.

Sears of LGS says in-store demos for the company are sometimes "shared between us and the Peruvian agency. We don't look to market Peruvian avocados any differently than we would Chile or California. Quite honestly, one of the problems is there's a mixed message with everyone wanting to deliver their own message, when it should be about promoting and consuming Hass avocados regardless of where they are from."

CREATING GREEN FOR RETAILERS

"Good quality and aggressive pricing are the key to get people interested," says Sears. "Historically, until Peruvian avocados came on the scene, you had some pretty high prices on avocados in the summer when you only had Mexico and California. It gives the opportunity to reset the pricing in the summer, and that will give you some more interest in promotions."

Equihua says PAC works closely with its retail partners to get the word out by offering display bins and helping with in-store demos, which attract new customers.

"Retailers love demos," he says. "Location is everything, so having the bins in high-traffic areas will help showcase the fruit and get people to try and buy it."

Understanding the specifics and educating consumers is key to maintaining momentum

for the category. Bertels, of Mission Produce, says the best thing retailers can do is communicate with their consumers.

"In the trade, we are working closely with retailers to help [address] any potential product differences that they may need to explain to consumers," he says. "For example, the skin on Peruvian avocados at certain times is thicker and more pebbly than other origins. That's neither good nor bad, just different; so consumers may have questions on how to select ripe avocados that may 'feel

different than at other times of the year."

Looking ahead, avocados from Peru are accepted with open arms from the industry. "We feel like it will be a strong summer for Peru, based on a lot of factors — the biggest of which is that overall consumer demand continues to be strong," says Bertels. "Avocados have gotten a lot of consumer media attention lately, and consumption continues to increase. Any promotion in the market is good for the category and helps to increase the momentum behind avocados." **pb**

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THE POWERFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR Fresh Produce In Deli

With hybrid offerings and the popularity of convenience shopping, produce brings its benefits to the deli section.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

The power of produce is huge. It's far-reaching too. Beyond the beautifully displayed array of fruits and vegetables that pull shoppers into the supermarket produce department first, these fresh foods have the dynamic ability to increase sales in other departments too. This is especially true of the deli.

"Consumers are looking to add more nutrient dense foods into their diet," says Janis

Paoli, vice president of business development for Tracy, CA-headquartered Taylor Farm's deli division. "By adjusting the product mix in the service deli from all mayonnaise-based salads such as potato and macaroni to include more vegetable-based options, not only is the operator offering more healthful choices and helping shoppers to increase their consumption, but they can improve the visual appeal of their case with more natural color. Fresh fruits and vegetables have a 'health halo,' which can

improve the image of the entire deli department."

Freshness is the No. 1 driver of satisfaction in the deli, according to the September 12, 2014-released research, *Engaging the Evolving Shopper: Serving the New American Appetite*, by the Madison, WI-based International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association. More specifically, 37 percent of Millennials (ages 18 to 35) and 49 percent Boomers (ages 50 to 74) gave excellent ratings to the freshness of the deli offerings in their preferred store. Factors such as environment, menu, nutrition information, unique items, wide variety, value and healthy foods ranked after freshness in descending order.

"Use fresh herbs in a pasta salad, and you instantly communicate freshness without



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAYLOR FARMS

“We have good communication with our produce department, especially in terms of the distribution channels already established for locally-grown and specialty produce.”

— John Stueland, Lund Food Holdings

vice marketing for Mann Packing Co. Inc., in Salinas, CA. “We sell to the deli in retailers that have a kitchen or prep area, to a commissary if the store has a pre-made sandwich program, or to foodservice distributors that cater to the deli if the department wants to consolidate its orders. It all depends on the needs of the retailer,” says Gina Nucci, director of foodservice marketing for Mann Packing Co. Inc., in Salinas, CA.

Delis can upsell sandwiches by offering more unique produce. “Shoppers at the sandwich counter should be able to custom order their condiments like they do their meats and cheeses. For example, charge extra by offering add-ons like arugula,” suggests Tiffany Gate’s Zarovinsky.

Innovative foodservice companies offer delis a way to expand its palette of produce. For example, Mann Packing offers bulk packs of sugar snap peas, which are washed and ready to put on the salad bar. In addition, the company introduced a new line of washed, peeled and ready-to-roast vegetables such as golden beets. Once roasted, they can be added to salads or risottos or used as a pizza topping.

There are two advantages of sourcing deli produce from foodservice distributors, according to Lund’s Stueland. “First, we have such a high volume that we often need 20 and 40 pounds of produce. Trying to source this from the produce department, where products are packaged in household sizes, means extra packaging, which we don’t want to have to pay for — plus throwing out all the packaging isn’t good for the environment. Secondly, there are some items that don’t have a retail counterpart. For example, matchstick-cut beets. This is only a foodservice item.”

Beets, hard squash, mushrooms, baby potatoes, corn and fennel are some of the selections on Lunds’ salad bars in the fall and winter while summer garden veggies like zucchini

brought them into deli to use on our salad bar. The same with heirloom tomatoes. We feature a ‘wow’ item of the month on the salad bar, and recently we featured kallettes.”

The deli can help prevent shrink or returns in produce. “There may be red bell peppers that come in that aren’t cosmetically perfect and won’t sell well in produce. The deli doesn’t care. The chefs over there are just going to chop them up,” explains New Season’s Fairchild.

Supermarket chains, such as Publix, once sourced fresh ingredients such as lettuce and tomatoes from its produce departments. “Today, our delis source directly from suppliers to aid in quality specifications and reduced

labor impacts,” says Brous.

High-volume produce used by the deli has traditionally targeted sandwich-making and salad bars. “The big five are tomatoes, lettuce, onions, kale and green leaf lettuce,” says Kelly Jacob, vice president of retail and emerging channels for PRO*ACT, LLC, a fresh produce distributor based in Monterey, CA.

Produce suppliers, such as Mann Packing, found a home in the retail deli for its Simply Singles, a line of washed ready-to-eat single leaves of lettuce in romaine, green leaf, red leaf and iceberg varieties.

“These leaves come in 5- or 10-pound bulk,” says Gina Nucci, director of foodser-



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES

Deli operators who don't have the services of an in-store chef look to produce suppliers to provide component kits for salad and/or food bars and upscale behind-the-glass offerings.

and summer squash predominant in the summer. In this way, the deli like the produce department reflects seasonality. Additionally, Lund's chefs will take fresh produce and create inspired salads. These include a 'power greens' slaw, roasted Brussels sprouts with pancetta and a Vietnamese salad made with all the

veggies found in spring rolls cut fine and tossed together with an Asian dressing.

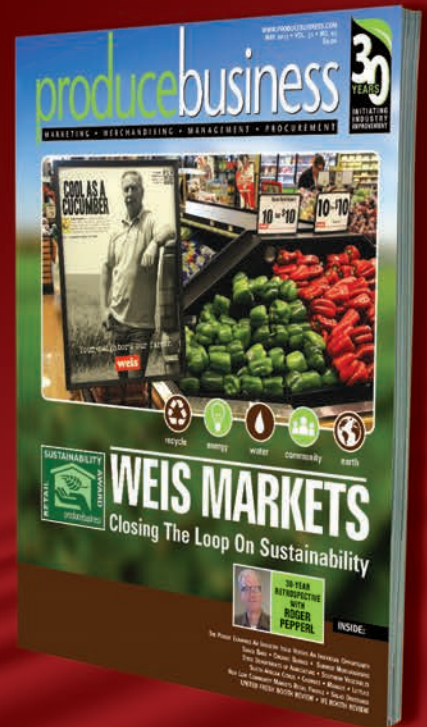
USE KITS TO COMPETE WITH OTHER FOODSERVICE CHANNELS

Deli operators who don't have the services of an in-store chef look to produce suppliers to

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“Fresh produce makes the deli even more of an eye candy department that drives shoppers in store.”

— Adolph Zarovinsky, Tiffany Gate Foods

provide component kits for salad and/or food bars and upscale behind-the-glass offerings.

“We have hundreds behind-the-glass kits developed and in production with many that are regionally focused to meet a retailers. Broccoli Crunch has been a favorite for years and started out as a store-made recipe. This was a labor intensive process and was often inconsistent between batches and between stores. Our Broccoli Crunch kit offers fresh broccoli crowns, shredded broccoli, dressing, precooked bacon, diced red onions and sunflower seeds all with an easy mix bag. What once took employees an hour to make can easily be mixed in minutes and with no dishes. Our product list includes many varieties of coleslaw, chicken salad as well as kits with vegetables and grains, beans, cooked pasta, to name a few,” explains Taylor Farms’ Paoli.

Fresh produce component manufacturers such as Taylor Farms and Tiffany Gate see in this area are a greater use of grains such as quinoa and spelt, beans and pasta combined with vegetables such as butternut squash, beets, kale and edamame; greater requests for organic fruit and vegetable ingredients; and interest in vegetable replacements for carb conscious customers such as the use of cauliflower in deli staples like mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese.

Beyond salads, roasted vegetables are an emerging trend in the deli. “We offer both pre roasted vegetables or kits that include ready-to-roast vegetables with various seasoned oils. Options such as Brussels sprouts, tri colored carrots and cauliflower to name a few. Rotisserie chickens are usually one of the top selling items in the service deli and being able to quickly complete a meal with a healthy vegetable option meets the needs of time pressed consumers,” says Taylor Farm’s Paoli.

The real benefit of incorporating more fresh fruits and vegetables into deli offerings isn’t just about increasing one department’s ring, says Tiffany Gate’s Zarovinsky. “Fresh produce makes the deli even more of an eye candy department that drives shoppers in store.” **pb**

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Making The Cut



Four retailers weigh pros and cons of in-house processing for fresh-cut produce.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Food safety, product variety and freshness, labor costs, and space considerations all come into play when retailers are deciding whether to process their own fresh-cut and value-added fruits and vegetables inside the store.

Some supermarket operators found they are able to provide a greater variety of fresh-cut product and enhance their own reputations for freshness by cutting their own produce, and others say suppliers can deliver product that's almost as fresh as if it had been cut in-store, as well as offer more selections of value-added items.

Still, others — such as Kings Food Markets, a 25-store, upscale chain based in Parsippany, NJ — found a happy medium, cutting some of its produce in the stores and ordering other processed products from vendors.

“We have a hybrid program where we order some from our processor, which comes in retail-ready, so all we have to do is put it on the shelf,” says Paul Kneeland, vice president

of produce and floral at Kings.

In addition to cutting many items in-store, Kings buys some fresh-cut produce in bulk from its supplier, the FreshPro division of RLB Food Distributors, West Caldwell, NJ, and then repackages the bulk fresh-cut product in-store.

Kings also buys some produce from FreshPro in retail-ready packages. “The retail-ready pack helps if you have a labor-crunch issue,” says Kneeland.

Kings cuts watermelon, cantaloupe and honeydew chunks in-house, and also processes pineapple spears and mixed berries. On the vegetable side, the chain does stir-fry mixes, squash coins and planks, asparagus tips, and sliced tomatoes and sliced onions.

The fresh-cut program evolved through the years at Kings. It began as a 100-percent in-house operation, and then transitioned to be out-sourced because of concerns over labor and other issues. About six years ago, Kings took some of the processing back in-house.

“There are certain commodities that are more expensive for the processor, and difficult to ship properly,” says Kneeland. “Watermelon is one example, and mixed berries are another.”

FOOD SAFETY CONCERNS

New Seasons Market, a 15-store operator based in Portland, OR, also has a hybrid program, but has recently brought much of

its fresh-cut produce processing into the individual stores, according to Jeff Fairchild, produce director.

“We basically made the stores compliant with food-safety regulations so we could do it in house,” says Fairchild.

The chain invested about \$3,000 to \$5,000 per store to make the necessary modifications to meet food safety requirements, he says. Changes included the addition of drop ceilings, sinks and dishwashers.

Fairchild says sales of fresh-cut produce at New Seasons have been growing 15 to 20 percent per year.

Kneeland of Kings says since his stores had already been prepping the items for its salad bars in-house, the stores were already compliant with food safety requirements for fresh-cut. Having the salad bars in every store also provides labor synergies, he says. Generally, the same associates who prep the salad bars also take care of the stores' fresh-cut needs once the salad bar has been established, he says.

Each Kings store has dedicated labor hours for fresh-cut processing, which vary based on the needs of the store. Some stores have full-time workers, and others employ part-time employees.

For some operators, food safety concerns turned out to be a deciding factor in the choice to outsource fresh-cut produce.

Rick Hogan, produce education director, Hugo's Family Marketplace, a 10-store operator based in Grand Forks, ND, says his company decided about a year ago to begin ordering fresh-cut product from its produce supplier to alleviate some of the concerns he had about food safety in the stores.

"We did it for many years in house, then decided to outsource to one of our wholesalers, and that's been working very well," he says. "It also takes the issue of food safety out of our hands and ensures that things will be okay once our customers buy the products."

Hogan notes Hugo's never had any problems with food safety when it had the program in-house.

"We follow very strict rules about washing and sanitizing our surfaces, and cleaning and rinsing before cutting, but even with doing that, you just never know," he says. "We want to be ahead of the problems."

"We just said, 'we have been doing a great job, and we are now going to make it even better,'" he says.

INCREASING VARIETY

Hogan says Hugo's was able to increase the variety of product it offers by outsourcing produce because its supplier, the Crazy Fresh division of Wadena, MN-based Russ Davis Wholesale, offers additional value-added product such as salsas and kebobs.

"When you take all that labor out of your cost of doing business, it helps," he adds.

"We follow very strict rules about washing and sanitizing our surfaces, and cleaning and rinsing before cutting ... we just said, 'we have been doing a great job, and we are now going to make it even better.'"

— Rick Hogan, Hugo's Family Marketplace

"Of course you have a higher ring, but that's okay too."

Hugo's offers about 45 SKUs of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables, including a line of microwavable vegetables and packaged "soup starter" veggie mixes. For the summer season, Hugo's will offer a line of processed vegetables for the grill.

Randy Bohaty, produce director at B&R Stores, an 18-unit chain based in Lincoln, NE, went just the opposite direction of Hugo's and took the company's fresh-cut operations in-house about five years ago after outsourcing the business for many years before that.

"We decided we could provide our customers with fresher, better product by offering

it in-house," he says. "We were able to get product the next day after ordering, but we still felt we were able to give customers a fresher product by doing it ourselves."

Bohaty says the fresh-cut program helps B&R stand out from its rival food retailers in a competitive market.

He agrees that food safety is a major issue to consider when operators are determining whether or not to process their own fresh-cut produce in-house.

"We had to make sure the proper equipment was used and had separate knives and cutting boards that we only use for fresh-cut," he explains. "We also had to make sure the space was compliant with what we needed to do for food safety."

B&R Stores developed an extensive training program for its associates in those positions. Workers who go through the program become certified as "fresh-cut specialists."

The chain has multiple fresh-cut specialists per store. Each store has a minimum number of labor hours they are supposed to dedicate to fresh-cut, but the actual number varies based on store volume.

SELECTING FRESH ITEMS

As is the case with many operators cutting their own produce in-house, B&R Stores selects only pristine product for its fresh-cut offerings, rather than making use of distressed produce items.

"We are not utilizing our fresh-cut to minimize our shrink," says Bohaty. "We pull everything we cut off the racks, so we are ensuring maximum freshness, and we get better turns on our rack."

Fairchild of New Seasons Market notes occasionally a damaged piece of fruit can be used in the fresh-cut offering, but otherwise he avoids using culled product in the fresh-cut operations.

"Sometimes you can find a melon that's solid but has a little ding on it, and you can use that," he says. "But we found over time that trying to use culls doesn't create a quality product, or a product that will last that long in the case."

He says New Seasons usually has between three and five days of sell time for fresh-cut product.

Like B&R Stores, New Seasons also dedicated associates to its fresh-cut operations.

"You can't just expect a regular produce staff member to come in and do that kind of project," says Fairchild. "It's a very different type of person than the person who is working on your sales floor."





PHOTO COURTESY OF KINGS FOOD MARKETS

He says New Seasons seeks workers who have what he describes as more of a “deli/foodservice mentality” who like to work behind the scenes. Good knife skills are also a plus, he says.

Each New Seasons location dedicates between 40 and 80 hours of labor per week to the fresh-cut operation, depending on the

size of the store.

While New Seasons cuts all of its fruit in-house, it does outsource its fresh-cut vegetables and party platters to a local vendor. The chain also began testing other value-added, fresh-cut products, such as stuffed mushrooms and kebobs.

Bringing the fresh-cut operation in-house

actually expanded the variety of fresh-cut items that B&R Stores is able to offer, says Bohaty.

“We had just the minimum before,” he says. “Because we are doing it ourselves, we can try something new in one store, and if it is successful, we can roll it out to all the stores.”

B&R Stores merchandise fresh-cut fruit and vegetable items in multi-deck cases in the produce department to present a powerful display to customers.

Using the multi-deck cases “creates a strong visual,” says Bohaty. “Plus, you can control the temperature a little better, rather than putting it on ice or in a sealed-up unit.”

At Kings, the stores cross-merchandise some of the value-added fresh-cut produce items on 2-foot by 2-foot bins of ice.

During the holiday season, Kings put Brussels sprout halves on ice near the rib roasts and other meats, for example. The chain will also place vegetable kebobs near the seafood case for grilling inspiration.

Most of the Kings locations have at least two of the 2-by-2 bins.

Ordinarily, Kings merchandises the fresh-cut vegetables on their own, or sometimes adjacent to packaged salads. Fresh-cut fruits, which include melons, berries, and pineapple, are merchandised with fruit juices and smoothies.

“People looking for refreshment will have that fresh-cut fruit; and then, maybe, pick up a fresh juice,” says Kneeland. “That’s the idea behind our merchandising in this way.”

At Hugo’s, Hogan says he’s been impressed with the freshness of the product he gets, despite switching to outsourcing.

“We order it one day, and it arrives the next day,” he says of Russ Davis’s delivery. “They do an awesome job of getting it here.” **pb**

DEMOS AND SAMPLING DRIVE VALUE-ADDED ITEMS

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Retailers say product demonstrations, sampling and other communications with customers help reinforce the freshness and value of fresh-cut produce items.

At Kings Food Markets, Parsippany, NJ, four of the chain’s 25 locations have a processing area on the sales floor where customers can see produce being cut fresh daily.

“It lends a little theater to it [the shopping experience],” says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral at Kings. “I think it is also helpful for people who have questions, and it also helps when people want something special, or something custom cut.”

He says Kings does frequent sampling of produce items; for example, the store will sometimes have fresh-cut cantaloupe chunks for sampling near the cantaloupe display.

Rick Hogan, produce education director at Hugo’s Family Marketplace, Grand Forks, ND — which outsources its fresh-cut produce items to Eagan, MN-based Russ Davis Wholesale’s Crazy Fresh division — agrees

sampling helps convey the freshness of the product.

Sampling is a significant effort in the produce departments at Hugo’s, where all 10 stores offer samples from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Each store samples two, three or four produce items each day.

Included in that effort are weekly fresh-cut sampling initiatives in which Hugo’s will sample various processed foods from Crazy Fresh. Those include salsas, taco dip, cut fruit, and microwaveable vegetables.

“We have done sampling of a lot of their items, and we plan on doing a lot more to be honest,” says Hogan.

At B&R Stores, Lincoln, NE, the chain also believes in weekly sampling of processed produce items, which includes items such as pico de gallo, guacamole, bruschetta, and pineapple salsa.

“We try to do that on a regular basis to make customers realize we have it, and get them to try it,” says Hogan. “We try to do one fresh-cut item in the ads every week, and then we try to do a demo on one fresh-cut item.” **pb**



City Of Broad Shoulders

“HOG Butcher for the World, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and the Nation’s Freight Handler; Stormy, husky, brawling, City of the Big Shoulders:”

BY CHRIS AUMUN

Three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and author, Carl Sandburg may have well added “Provider of Produce” to his list of Chicago’s contributions to the world, and maybe “Innovator of Molecular Gastronomy” as well. Apart from those updates, even as industries change over time, the city that was the subject of Sandburg’s ode (entitled *Chicago*) in 1914 is alive and well in the 21st century. Chicago may still be the city of “broad shoulders,” but it no longer plays second fiddle to anyone. In recent decades, Chicago achieved its well-earned status as a world-class metropolis in its own right with a wealth of cultural and culinary attractions to prove it.

As the *de facto* capital of the Midwest, Chicago is also located in an important agricultural state, which is itself the center of a major farming region that shares borders with Iowa, Wisconsin and Indiana and lies in close proximity to Minnesota and Michigan. The Windy City also remains an important transportation hub that is an essential piece of a distribution system that gets commodities flowing in and out, coast-to-coast and across North America, even as it serves its



homegrown restaurants and retailers through distribution centers such as the Chicago International Produce Market.

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL PRODUCE MARKET

Many hours before the sun goes up, the men and women who work on the wholesale side of the produce industry begin their day much like the generations before them. It’s a side that few retail consumers

will ever see. The origins of Chicago's produce wholesale division trace back to a time when newly arrived immigrants used determination and a little business savvy to sell fruits and vegetables to a hungry public. Many started at the South Water Street Market in the "North Loop," where produce purveyors once lined the south bank of the Chicago River. Commodities were unloaded from riverboats into warehouses on one side and into horse drawn wagons on the other.

In the early decades of the 20th century,

city planners decided to relieve the congestion of the market, relocating it from Water Street and what is present day Wacker Drive. The South Water Street Market kept its name but found a new home at South Racine and 14th Place in the city's Pilsen neighborhood. In the decades that followed, this market too proved to be increasingly behind the times as wagons gave way to trucks and its location next to rail tracks became less important.

In 2003, a new building opened to house the facilities of today's Chicago International



Nick Gaglione of Dietz & Kolodenko

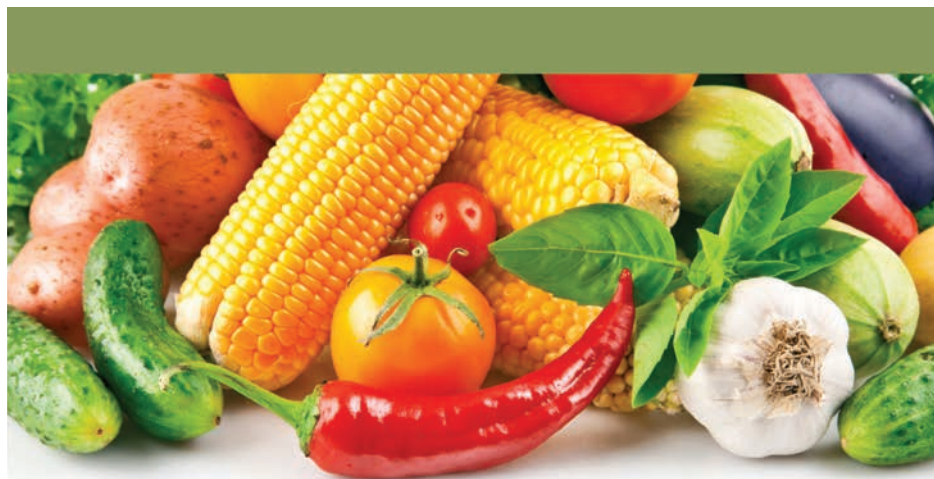
Produce Market (CIPM), which is now home to more than 20 wholesale merchants. Twelve years in, the building is undergoing upgrades that will help make loading and unloading more efficient. Doors are being added to all stalls to help regulate the building's internal temperature, which will further reduce interruptions to the cold chain as commodities remain in transit. It will also make for happier, warmer workers as the temperature in Chicago can drop well below zero during the winter months.

MEET THE WHOLESALERS

"Some of the people around here call me Pops." At 58 years old — you can argue whether that's old or not — but for Wayne Passoff, self-described "tomato veteran" at La Galera Produce, a life in produce can age you fast. Passoff grew up in the business when his father started a tomato packing enterprise in New Jersey in the 1950s. "My father started his business in 1956, and everything I learned about tomatoes as a business — the growing, the soil, the diseases, the technical grades — I learned from my father. It's the kind of stuff you learn through experience. They don't teach you about tomatoes in college."

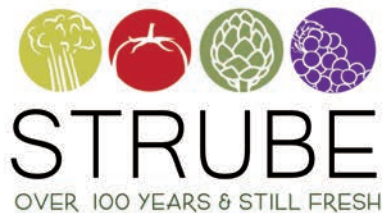
That's exactly how the knowledge of the industry has been passed down from one generation to the next. It created family legacies, but has also formed a sense of family among the merchants as well. As with any marketplace, being in close proximity to competitors fosters both a feeling of community as well as competition. Nick Florek, sales manager at Panama Banana, understands the need for a certain level of competition between merchants. "We have to be friendly," says Florek. "We're neighbors, but we're also in competition. I'd like to believe that we'd still help each other out — like if I needed help unloading a truck, or if I needed to borrow equipment — but competition is still first and foremost."

Competition is good for consumers, of course. It can ensure the best product at the



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lowest price, but behind the scenes, out of sight and out of the minds of the everyday consumers, there are many factors at play and challenges that must be met. For Florek, “it’s always a struggle to continue good customer service, to get orders out properly, to take care of customers, to gain trust, to keep trust. You see the same people every day. It’s the same stores buying the same products. We all sell the same merchandise, so it’s just a competition thing, trying to keep a good relationship with people and keep it going.”

Providing good customer service is one thing, but not all challenges are within a merchant’s control. “There’s one thing that we all deal with here in this business and that’s a little old lady called Mother Nature,” says Passoff.

“There’s no way you can beat her.” The effects of Mother Nature are nothing new to produce wholesalers. Frosts in Florida or droughts in California, the produce industry is forever at the mercy of the elements. However, in a global marketplace, alternatives exist that will ensure the receipt and delivery of commodities.

With water scarcity becoming an increasing concern in California, hydroponic farming offers a viable solution. Growing produce in greenhouses requires the use of less water as runoff and evaporation are precisely controlled and minimized. For a wholesaler like La

Galera, who uses a mix of U.S. and Mexican farmers, alternatives such as hot houses need to be available to ensure continuous availability of all commodities.

If the California drought has an even bigger impact, La Galera can turn to growers in other regions, such as Georgia and the Carolinas, to source commodities. While the company may occasionally procure avocados from California, La Galera mostly sources its tomatoes and peppers from Mexico. The company is primarily in the import business, so California

has not had much impact yet. According to Jose Vega, Sr., president of the company, when asked where the market will turn if California produce becomes scarce, “There’s no doubt that it’s either going to be Canada or Mexico,” he says. “Geographically, they are close to the market. You can’t bring tomatoes from Chile, Argentina or Spain.” Cuba may even provide an opportunity as a source for commodities like tomatoes. While the future may be uncertain, alternatives do exist to ensure consumers feel little if any of the effects.

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“Supply and demand make this business, no matter where you are,” says Passoff. “For tomatoes, you can turn to Michigan, Ohio, your backyard in New Jersey. For foodservice people that must have tomatoes on a consistent basis at a consistent size and color, this is where a [problem] in a growing area effects business.”

“Weather is king,” says Adolfo Vega, Jr., owner of the broadline distributor, La Hacienda Brands, Inc. Changes in weather, as well as political events thousands of miles from the market, affects fuel prices, which affects

produce prices. “Right now, limes are very high again,” says Vega. At the time of this interview, a box of limes was in the \$40 range. A few years ago, that price was more than \$100. That’s a pretty drastic price fluctuation. According to Vega, with low fuel prices a box of limes could cost as little as \$9 or \$10 per box.

Vega also recognizes other challenges to the business, noting that, “Independents have a lot of power nowadays; they buy a lot of stuff direct. The big chains are very powerful.” This is not a new trend, but it is increasing and it

changed the landscape somewhat. While direct buying can and does play out, retailers assume some risk when not buying from a trusted wholesale company. As Vega says, “There’s risk in buying direct, because a lot of times there’s no guarantee the product is going to be good.” Buying direct is an option that is increasing but retailers who go this route also forego a higher level of customer service, which is not so when buying from an established wholesale company. “We’re going to take care of you,” says Vega.

La Galera’s buyer/seller, Tommy Novilio, also sees a trend toward direct buying. “Nowadays, more so than ever, the customers with nine or 12 stores — when they get the warehouse, they go direct,” he says. With independents employing their own brokers and hiring their own trucks, this has an impact on business for wholesalers.

Passoff at La Galera doesn’t see buying direct as a suitable substitute for going through the CIPM. “There’s one big concern in the Chicago area that sometimes the customers and the product get lost,” he says. “Over here at the market, we’re small, we’re tailored to our customers, we physically look at every box and show them what they’re getting, and everything is taken care of like family.” This is important in the age of instant communication where everyone expects a quick response and fast delivery.

“One thing I’ve seen as a change,” says Passoff, “is [customers] want an email, they want a text, and they want a picture of the product, and we provide all of that. What you see is what you get, and it will be on shelves within 24 hours.”

Selling a good product and taking care of the customer is essential, but for La Hacienda, which operates a warehouse separate from the market and has been in the business for more than four decades, there is another way to keep old customers and attract new ones. Diversification has become essential to economic survival. La Hacienda has grown into a one-stop, cash-and-carry shop that sells produce and dry goods to the large Hispanic market in Chicago, but they also cater to Greek, Italian and Asian markets as well.

As Vega, Jr. acknowledges, “You have to diversify your products, because if you have a big building,” which the company has, “You have to fill it up with product that’s going to sell or you’re just wasting space. Nowadays, here in Chicago, when you go to any house, everyone has everyone’s stuff. You don’t have tomato people anymore, everyone has tomatoes. You have to find your niche, stick out a little, and give the customer a reason to come by.”



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THE FUTURE OF THE CIPM

As the merchants of the CIPM deal with these challenges, they're getting some help. Improvements to the facility have been ongoing and include upgrades to the docks that will accommodate both lightweight and heavy-duty trucks. Doors are being added to all stalls to help control the internal temperature of the building and protect produce and people. These improvements will benefit the product by ensuring it stays fresher longer; thus reducing spoilage and making buyers happy. Enclosing the market will also make employees happy. "Who wants to ride a jack down the street when it's four degrees outside?" asks Passoff.

"You're gonna see a lot of happy faces and a lot of vests instead of heavy coats, and less frozen fruit." Rob Strube III, president of Strube Celery & Vegetable Company, echoes this sentiment. "The improvements at CIPM being made are to help customers during the winter months of protecting product near their trucks when inclement weather strikes. It will also help our dockworkers during those really cold months and windy conditions." The improvements were expected to be complete by the end of May and provide a way for the market to stay viable in a new century that may see changes no one can predict.

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Ramen Noodles — Fast And Furious

Chicago is home to more than 7,000 restaurants, according to the city's own website. From hot dog and Italian beef stands to Michelin-rated temples of gastronomy, almost every type, style, ethnic and regional variety of food can be found in the "Windy City." Chicago also sits at the leading edge of culinary trends. With a high value placed on locally sourced produce by customers, many Chicago restaurants and chefs accommodate by sourcing from urban growers who are sometimes located within blocks of the city's best restaurants. Chicago's location in the important agricultural state of Illinois (in the heart of the Midwest) means its restaurants are poised to serve the freshest herbs, greens and other in-demand commodities to residents of its 77 community areas and more than 100 neighborhoods.

With a population that approaches 3 million, and with more than 40 million visitors annually, that's a lot of mouths to feed. Furious Spoon is certainly doing its part to feed as many of them as fast as possible. Located in the trendy and active Wicker Park neighborhood on Chicago's northwest side, this fast-paced Tokyo-style ramen noodle shop opened its doors in February, but business is already booming.

Executive chef and owner, Shin Thompson, is not new to Chicago's restaurant scene — having deployed his creative vision and considerable

culinary talents at past Chicago ventures, Bonsoiree and Kabocha.

Thompson has had a love for noodles since childhood, and he is inspired by the stories of his grandfather's ramen shop in Tokyo, which closed in the 1960s. He recently spent time in Japan studying noodles and broth and eating in many of Tokyo's ubiquitous ramen shops to which Furious Spoon pays homage.

Occupying a space in Wicker Park's Flat Iron Building, the Furious Spoon space is long and narrow with high wooden tables and a counter where patrons can watch noodles being made from scratch. There's no waitstaff here. Customers order at the counter while loud hip hop blasts over speakers.

At Furious Spoon, you get in, slurp noodles and get out. This rapid style of ramen eating may not be everyone's cup of tea, or cup of noodles for that matter, but the point is, ramen noodles were not meant to be enjoyed slowly over a glass of wine and good conversation, they were meant to be eaten within minutes of preparation. The reason behind this is simple; the noodles get soggy quickly, so the dining pace is intentionally fast and furious. That's why the Furious Spoon sells Kentucky Bourbon by the shot and not the snifter. They also sell a few select Japanese beers. This get-it-down-before-the-noodles-get-soggy style also precludes the need for to-go orders. While this no-to-go rule

frustrated a few customers, it is keeping with the Tokyo tradition.

The Furious Spoon's ramen noodle concept makes it a good fit with a neighborhood that gets a lot of foot traffic and a late-night drinking crowd. (Furious Ramen stays open until 2 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights.)

"Customers have responded incredibly to it," says Anshul Mangal, who along with Mario Ponce is a managing partner in the restaurant. "We serve about 300 to 500 bowls of ramen per day." Finding customers has not been a problem and neither has sourcing good produce in the Chicago market. "We source our products from many Japanese retail suppliers and other vendors such as MT Food Service and Fortune Fish," says Mangal. According to Mangal, the Furious Ramen Bowl is the biggest seller on a menu that is limited to just four noodle offerings priced at around \$10.

The Furious bowl is thick and heavy and delivers a spicy blow along with chashu pork belly, white pepper chicken, marinated mushrooms, poached egg and the house-made Fury sauce. Also on the menu is a Vegetable Ramen served with roasted garlic, cabbage, bamboo and pickled shimeji mushrooms. Additional choices for ramen toppings include cabbage,



garlic and bean sprouts to name just a few of the dozen available.

While success has come as fast as a steaming hot bowl of ramen noodles, there have been a few bumps in the road. "Early challenges included being consistent in each bowl," says Mangal, also "meeting customer demand, making sure we have the right amount of inventory, and getting used to the space we were in."

Furious Spoon is not the only ramen shop in Chicago, or even in the neighborhood, but they intend to stay, which brings up another

possible challenge, which is, according to Mangal, "Making sure we don't saturate the market with too many ramen shops." **pb**

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Angelo Caputo's Fresh Markets Take Advantage Of Opportunities

The Chicagoland area has always provided a home to a mix of grocers; from ethnic and specialty shops to suburban supermarkets; from big chains and medium-sized independents down to the small corner shops and bodegas that dot Chicago's many neighborhoods. There has always been room for everyone and this helped Chicago's retail grocery market space stay competitive. Even with the exit of a major player like Dominick's, which shuttered its last location at the end of 2013, other retailers entered to fill the void.

Independents like Cermak Fresh Market, which expanded to include nearly a dozen Chicago area stores, as well as a location in Milwaukee, WI, are strong. A Chicago institution like Treasure Island, which has been in business since 1963, has seen a slow but steady expansion to seven locations. Relative newcomer, Mariano's Fresh Market has seen rapid growth as it positions itself as the possible heir to the Dominick's kingdom by moving into nearly a dozen spaces once occupied by the former grocer. Mariano's now operates more than 30 stores, which is still nowhere near the number run by supermarket and pharmacy giant Jewel-Osco (operating nearly 200 stores throughout Illinois, Iowa and Indiana). Of course, national chain stores like Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe's are also a part of the retail landscape.

For Carol Stream, IL-based Angelo Caputo's Fresh Markets, the closing of Dominick's by parent company Safeway, Inc. provided the chance for expansion. According to Sam Fantauzzo, vice president of operations for Caputo's, that was just one in a long line of everyday opportunities for the company.

"We were able to acquire one of their locations, other than that, as far as opportunities, we are still presented with the same: take care of our consumers as we have for more than 57 years," he says.

It may be business as usual for Caputo's, but everyone had to adjust to changes in consumer tastes. Those who adapt are rewarded with a loyal customer base and small independent grocers had the opportunity to flourish in this environment. Caputo's has been able to expand from a foothold gained almost 60 years ago. That's when founder Angelo Caputo opened his first produce store in suburban Elmwood Park.

A second store followed in the village of Addison Park in 1991 and a third location in Hanover Park opened just five years later. According to "Currently, we have eight stores, two of which are our new generation formats with fresh emphasis and food stations," says Fantauzzo. "Certainly our focus is with those as well as our core stores. Our belief continues to be that we prefer to have great stores as opposed to more

mediocre stores."

Quality over quantity proves to be a winning formula for Caputo's Markets so far. This commitment to quality helps set the retailer apart from its competitors, but the formula required Caputo's to stay fresh in the eyes of its customers. According to Fantauzzo, the stores are "Fresh with impressive, seasonal, eye-appealing and well-merchandised displays," that provide value for their customers. "We believe in continuing to be that original neighborhood fresh market that most are eager to duplicate."

As consumer tastes changed and trends come and go, this required a shift of focus from time to time. For Caputo's Markets that means a focus on specialty items as well as organics and healthy products. Fantauzzo says consumers want to "know more about products and experiment with obscure fresh produce" they may have previously been unwilling to purchase. He also sees trends toward consumers wanting to understand the origin, seasonality, health benefits and the culinary possibilities of the produce they buy.

Caputo's sources its produce from local farmers. "We have for more than 57 years, when season permits, but certainly from every corner of the globe. We buy Italian Moscato grapes and apples, tropical fruits and vegetables direct from growers and shippers from all over. We are also very active daily in the Chicago terminal market before sunrise."

Supermarkets do more than simply sell products; they anchor communities, which means they have to offer more to their customers. Caputo's locations feature traditional bakery and deli offerings, but some also include more contemporary facets like juice and yogurt bars. Of course, even with these enticements, retailers are still subject to the same forces of nature that effect growers and wholesalers.

"Inclement weather is always posing challenges, from floods, to droughts and even freeze," notes Fantauzzo. "Sourcing alternatives is a day-to-day task in most cases. At times when alternatives do not exist, we do what we can to at least keep our consumers informed, so they know what to expect and how it translates to their shopping baskets." **pb**

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PLANET OF THE GRAPES

Despite challenges including severe drought, global merchandising opportunities are growing with new varieties, packaging and display concepts.

BY JOHN LEHNDORFF

Ask Nick Dulcich about the “challenges” his family’s table grape business faced last year, and he’s happy to oblige. “First there was the drought. As a result, we had to use a lot more well water, which is higher in nitrogen. Thirdly, it was an incredibly hot year with a lot of stress on the grapes,” says Nick Dulcich, co-owner and president of Delano, CA-based Sunlight International Sales.

“You name it; we had challenges,” he says, enumerating an inch of rain near Halloween, lack of color in the Crimsons, blizzards in the Northeast, and a slowdown at Pacific ports that had grapes sitting for 10 days or more on container ships.

“At the end of the season, things worked out — thanks to a lot of hard work on the farm and by the shippers,” says Dulcich.

In fact, the 2014 crop was the second best on record, according to

the Fresno, CA-based California Table Grape Commission (CTGC). More than 110 million, 19-pound boxes of table grapes were made available to global consumers in 2014, down only from the record 116.2 million boxes in in the 2013 harvest.

Looking toward the current 2015 season, table grape experts from across the country — growers, shippers, marketers and retailers, talked with *PRODUCE BUSINESS* about the challenges facing the industry and the opportunities ahead.

Supermarkets face a changing retail environment and competing with non-traditional venues including dollar and convenience stores as well as online grocery delivery companies.

With domestic and imported seasons dovetailing, the table grape “season” is now year-round. Table grapes are fighting for premium square footage in produce departments with everything from kale



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHILEAN FRESH FRUIT ASSOC.

and multiple melon varieties to a growing organics segment.

Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for the Reading, PA-based Redner's Markets, has been working in produce since 1977. "We promote grapes many more weeks of the year now, because the growers are getting us a consistent product," says Stiles, adding that supermarkets are getting a lot of practical assistance.

"Different grape companies are doing good seasonal promotions like the Hobgoblin at Halloween. We didn't have that a decade ago," says Stiles, adding a nod to the California Table Grape Commission. "Just one example: the bins they provide are really sharp-looking and allow us to put grape displays up by the registers and at salad bars — they definitely increase sales."

At New Season Market, a Portland-based chain with 17 stores throughout Oregon, Washington and Northern California, grapes are cross-merchandised with displays near the grab-and-go case or warm breakfast bar.

"We increase the size of the grape display in the summer but the grape displays are getting bigger anyway to showcase all the varieties," says Jeff Fairchild, produce director at New Seasons Market.

CONSUMERS DEVELOP COTTON CANDY CRAVINGS

One of the long-term changes for retailers — and a new sales opportunity — is the increasing introduction of branded table grape varieties.

Atomic Torosian, managing partner at Fresno, CA-based Crown Jewels Marketing & Distribution compares this development to

apples. Not so long ago, Red and Golden Delicious and Granny Smiths were the major name "national" varieties. "Now there are Honeycrisp, Jazz, Ambrosia, Pinata and other new variations fighting for space. Thompson was once the top grape. Now there are new varieties taking over, such as the Cotton Candy grape," he says.

John Pandol, director of special projects for Delano, CA-based Pandol Bros. Inc. says the change has been significant. "As late as seven years ago the Top 4 varieties represented about 70 percent of all the table grapes. Now the Top 4 equal less than 50 percent," says Pandol. "There are two sets of thinking in the grape world. Do we become like apples and constantly introduce new named varieties, or do we be like other commodities and stick to red, green and black?"

■ CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPES BY THE NUMBERS IN 2014

110 million: Number of 19-pound boxes of table grapes made available to global consumers (down from 116.2 million in record 2013 crop)

121,000: Number of acres devoted to table grapes (110,000 bearing, 11,000 non-bearing)

\$857 million: Value of 44.5 million boxes exported in 2014

40: Percentage of 2014 harvest exported from the U.S. Top volume markets: Canada (11.4 million boxes), Mexico (5.7 million boxes), China/Hong Kong (5.5 million boxes)

Sources: California Table Grape Commission; National Agricultural Statistics Service

From the retailer's perspective, it's mostly good news. "There really are a lot of great varieties out there now, like the Cotton Candy," says Stiles of Redner's Markets. "Our customers now look for them by name and buy them as soon as they are available."

Not everyone is convinced that core table grape purchasers are focused on table grape variety names versus colors. "I hear buyers say that this is true, but when I talk to customers in retail stores or club stores, that's not how they answer. They just want them to taste good," says Ron Wikum, table grape category manager of Reedley, CA-based Bravante Produce. He admits there are exceptions. "Cotton Candy grapes are so different and marketed so well that consumers do recognize that variety, so it proves it can be done," he says.

There are many varieties that aren't over-the-top popular. "The catch is that there may be too many varieties that taste about the same," says Pandol, noting the time and investment new table grape varieties entail.

"With new varieties, you don't know how they are going to taste, grow and produce for three years or more. If you are developing your own variety, it can take more than a decade," said Rob Spinelli, a sales representative for Bakersfield, CA-based Anthony Vineyards.

For instance, it took eight years for J.P. Dulcich & Sons to develop and patent the family's proprietary Green Emerald, an extra large super sweet grape with crunch that "has hints of melon and sugarcane in the flavor," says Dulcich who distributes the grapes through Sunlight International Sales.

Besides flavor, new varieties are notable for helping extend the California grape season well into the fall and early winter.

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to sample grapes anyway.

One reason for urgency in sampling and advertising is new varieties' limited window of availability. Just as consumers are starting to recognize it by name, the variety may be unavailable for another year.

Karen Brux, managing director of the Santiago, Chile-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), pointed to the Muscat grape from Chile. "It has a higher price point than the average

grape, but retailers that engaged in promotions as simple as self-sampling stations noted that they're one of the top rings in the produce department," she says.

When it comes to deciding how to stock retail displays, the California Table Grape Commission recommends a mix of red, green and black grapes in both conventional and organic varieties. "We know that the majority of primary shoppers are shopping for more than one person in the household. Offering more options in selection can lead to more

■ TABLES GRAPES TODAY: \$2.6 BILLION IN 52 WEEKS

During the latest 52 weeks ending February 28, 2015, grapes were the fourth-highest selling fruit category in the produce department, selling \$2.6 billion, which is an increase of 2.6% compared to the previous year. Volume sales decreased 5.3% during this time largely as a result of an 8.4% average retail price increase.

Source: Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts®

sales," says Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing at the Commission. "Research shows that if you promote more varieties in the ad, more varieties are likely to be purchased," she says.

Spinelli of Anthony Vineyards says that it's important to always look at the bigger picture of table grape consumers. "For a lot of consumers, grapes are a commodity and they are going to buy whatever is on sale for 99 cents, but I think that's slowly changing," he says.

TIME-TESTED, NEW MERCHANDISING APPROACHES COME TOGETHER

New varieties are wonderful, says Stiles of Redner's Markets, but they don't sell themselves. "Newer varieties generate sales, but with grapes you have to put them out there for people to try. The more we sample, the more sales we get," says Stiles.

The consensus of opinion among the experts is that retailers should do grape sampling to control spillage and because consumers tend

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Another effective way to increase grape sales is to put two or three types in one “rainbow” bag or clamshell, growers and retailers report. “The way retailers need to do it is to feature all three colors together whether they are in clamshells or bags. That’s what works,” says Torosian of Crown Jewels.

Pandol encourages retailers to mix it up in displays. “They should ‘seasonalize it’ and not go with the same setup all year. July and August have the biggest availability of black grapes. Retailers could stock more blacks during those months, or different black varieties for a month to catch shoppers’ eyes on weekly visits,” he says.

The California Table Grape Commission also recommends cross-marketing multiple display locations including non-traditional spots such as the cheese and deli department.

“Grapes are immensely popular, but if we want to further expand consumption, it’s important to communicate alternative usages,” says Brux of the CFFA. “I’ve seen displays of fresh blueberries and yogurt next to the checkout stand. Why not grapes and yogurt?

■ GRAPE SUB-CATEGORY CONTRIBUTION TO GRAPE SALES

Red	52.4%
White/Green	39.8%
Black/Blue	7%
Other	7%
Mixed	3%

Source: Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts

You could also display grapes on or next to a salad bar.”

Whether in the produce department or at alternate locations, retailers might consider refrigerated displays. Commission research shows that if grapes are displayed under refrigeration, they stay looking good for about 48 hours; on a non-refrigerated display, visible shrink starts to appear on grapes within 24 hours.

THE POUCH AND THE CLAMSHELL

Fairchild of New Seasons Market says that the biggest change in table grape merchandising has been the introduction of the standup bag. “A couple of years ago, the standup bags

for table grapes took the industry by storm with the good graphics. They’ve been highly successful for us, and it has been a great way to differentiate the product,” he says.

From the grower’s perspective “the high-graphic standup bags are better for the fruit and show off the fruit well,” says Spinelli.

Dulcich of Sunlight International says he helped develop standup bags with handles for table grapes in 2011. They were based on bags that had been used for mini gourmet cucumbers and sweet peppers. He designs seasonal table grape bags each year starting in the summer, followed by the Hobgoblin bag for Halloween and a holiday bag.

Merchandisers should never underestimate the impulse buying power of a grab-and-go gift bag with a handle, even if they cost a few cents more to manufacture. “Growers do a great job with the bags in terms of branding and graphics. I was shopping the other day without a basket and bought some grapes. The handle makes them easy to carry,” says Stiles of Redner’s Markets.

RIGHT-SIZING TABLE GRAPE PACKAGES

Pouches are becoming dominant in supermarkets, but clamshells are still a fixture at club,



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warehouse and discount stores. “While there are some pouch bags sold as fixed weight, the bulk of pouch bags are sold as random weight; clamshells are all sold as fixed weight,” says Plummer of the Commission. “There will always be a need for fixed-weight packaging — especially as produce items, including grapes, continue to be sold in stores without produce scales and in non-traditional food retailers.”

Some retailers began repackaging table grapes into smaller lunch and snack sizes after requests from consumers, but don’t assume they

were all seniors and aging Baby Boomers, says Wikum of Bravante Produce. “There is no room for a 4-pound clamshell in my house. In my neighbor’s house, the situation is different. I think it’s the younger consumer buying just as much product in smaller packages as the older consumer. It’s more about lifestyle and the size of the pantry and refrigerator,” he says.

Most Redner’s Markets are now selling table grapes in smaller packages of various types, according to Stiles. “We break some of the larger bags into smaller bags for snacks

■ RESEARCH: PROMOTING VARIETIES PROVIDES VOLUME LIFT

Category research shows that promoting two or more varieties in the spring and summer can bring greater volume lift to the grape category than single variety ads. If you include in-store price reduction to the multiple variety ads, the lift goes up even further.

Source: California Table Grape Commission

and lunches, about a half pound,” he says. “I’ve never been able to talk a grower into supplying us with smaller bags. I know we would sell them.”

Lauren Olcott, marketing representative for Delano, CA-based Columbine Vineyards says smaller packaging sizes will likely be common sooner rather than later. “Last year, our company experimented with what we call a petite bag,” she says. “The bag holds approximately 1 to 1.25 pounds of grapes and comes 16 to 18 bags per 19-pound box. The results from this experiment were positive, and we will now have this pouch available in more PLU’s throughout the upcoming season.”

Fairchild of New Seasons Market says the store hasn’t done a lot of re-packing of grapes into smaller packages. “Of course, consumers can take some grapes out of a bag, but you hope people will buy the whole thing even though they don’t have to,” he says.

ORGANIC IS NO LONGER A FAD

Pouches provide an additional service on the organic side. “Organic consumers want to know who the grower is and where their food is coming from,” says Spinelli of Anthony Vineyards. Besides aiding promotion, the bags brought grape nutritional data directly to consumers that wasn’t readily available, except on in-store displays.

Table grapes occupy a unique position as a gateway organic food for many families. “Grapes are one of the few things in the produce department that are snack foods or desserts. Organic grapes are neat, clean and simple, and there’s enough volume now to sell them fresher,” says Fairchild. “I’m seeing more of my comrades in the business adding more organic grapes, shippers are starting to offer more choices, and the organic season is now longer,” he says.

To Stiles of Redner’s Markets, there are good reasons why organic grapes are a growing percentage. “We have seen an improvement in quality in the past few years in terms of size

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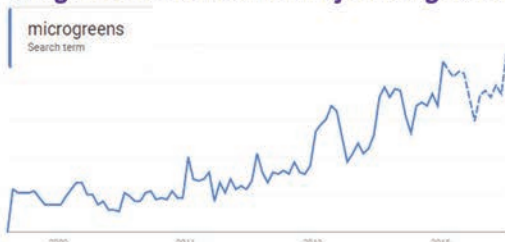
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and taste, and the cost has come down quite a bit — much closer to conventional,” he says.

The demand for organic grapes rose steadily during the past two or three years, says Spinelli. “It’s not a fad anymore. In two years, Anthony Vineyards will be 50 percent organic,” he says. The company’s new vineyards are mainly organic and some conventional vineyards are being dug up and converted to organic.

The premium price organic consumers willingly pay for grapes sometimes means they get to choose from varieties conventional shoppers aren’t offered, says Spinelli. “We have Sweet Scarlet grapes in organic, which is a mid-season red seedless table grape with Muscat flavor, and it’s one of the best eating varieties. Most conventional growers don’t like it, because it has to be slow picked — but that works well for organic. The grapes stay on the vine longer, so they have a better flavor. We’re picking three or four times, and it gives us fresh organic grapes to ship over an extended period.”

Torosian of Crown Jewels Marketing & Distribution agrees that organics are becoming as essential to the produce section as potatoes. “Now every retailer is looking to carry at least some organic grapes along with the conventional. The organic grape category is still in a growth mode,” he says.

PRODUCE CLERKS AND SELLING TO THE MILLENIALS

For supermarkets and other grocery retailers, the challenge remains to bring consumers in and convince them to be regulars. Marketers agree that consumers typically tell surveys that they really don’t know how to pick produce, we may start seeing a familiar face tending the table grape display: a produce clerk.

“The question is always: ‘How do we keep consumers in the store longer?’” says Pandol. “We’re seeing stores make more effort toward service in produce departments again as they seek to differentiate themselves from online grocers. That’s part of what Whole Foods Market does,” he says.

There is also a challenge in expanding the core group of regular grape buyers to the next generation. “Grapes are consumed the most in the older population and in the Top 25 percent income group,” says Pandol.

The California Table Grape Commission is actively reaching out on multiple platforms such as website, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram in addition to traditional marketing, advertising and promotions.

Brux of the CFFA has success reaching out to food bloggers. “Last year, we worked with a chain in Southern California that not only built

large displays, but also sent a box of Muscats to each of the bloggers in their network. We reached thousands of consumers through the resulting blog posts,” she says.

GOING FORWARD

Table grape growers say they are cautiously optimistic about 2015 — except for the great unknown: water. “The severe drought in California means that irrigation water gets cut, and we have to use more ground water. We don’t know whether the well will run dry because the

next farm has already used it. There’s a year to 16 month wait to get a new well dug. What it comes down to is that the grape industry is now all about water conservation and management,” says Spinelli of Anthony Vineyards.

Wikum of Bravante Produce offered some practical merchandising advice: “There are no tricks, it’s all hard work, and it is mostly done by the store personnel. If we give them good fresh fruit, the good retailers will sell it. Sometimes I think the producers just need to listen to the merchandisers,” he says. **pb**



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Selling Stone Fruit Year-Round



PHOTO COURTESY OF GERAWAN FARMING

Summer says local while Chilean stretch the season.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD

What would summer be without peaches, nectarines, plums and pluots? While they have the potential to sell themselves, retailers can boost sales and profits with strategic marketing efforts.

GIVE SUPERSTARS TOP BILLING

In summer, the yellow-flesh peaches reign supreme, so positioning them as produce celebrities can boost sales. “Eastern yellow peaches are the biggest volume item,” says Lonnie Kelley, a local produce buyer for Bi-Lo Holdings, Jacksonville, FL. “For Southern shoppers, yellow nectarines take second place and plums of all varieties take third.”

“Yellow peaches and nectarines are our most popular stone fruit sellers,” says Randy Scott, fresh category manager for Food Lion, Salisbury, NC. “White-flesh peaches and white-flesh nectarines gained popularity in recent years, and plums are popular with our customers as well.”

Shoppers are particularly fond of freestone peaches. “Our freestone varieties are the biggest sellers, typically ripening up from mid-June to mid-August,” notes Will McGehee, marketing

director for the Fort Valley, GA-based Georgia Peach Council and Macon, GA-based Pearson Farm’s Genuine Georgia Group. Georgia’s “Prince” varieties tend to steal the show, according to McGehee, and ripen in perfect succession over an eight-week period.

Grocers can expect to see new varieties of yellow peaches that deliver on qualities shoppers care about most. The Genuine Georgia Group converted most orchards into new varieties over the past 10 years while taking care not to sacrifice flavor. “Our first priority is fruit that “eats good,” says McGehee. “Then we look for pest/disease resistance, size and beauty.”

Trends are similar in California. George Papangellin, sales manager, Gerawan Farming, Sanger, CA, points out that yellow-flesh peaches are top sellers. Gerawan Farming continues to step up its efforts to select and propagate popular varieties and is also working to extend the peach season into fall, giving retailers the opportunity to extend promotions into the back-to-school months. “Our late peach deal extends the season from mid-August through October and is the star of the show — providing our customers with the opportunity to stretch the summer fruit program well into fall. The late peach deal also boosts profits.”

FEATURE NEW ‘KIDS’ ON THE BLOCK

Although yellow-flesh peaches overwhelmingly occupy the top spot in shopping carts, consumers enjoy trying new varieties. At Bi-

Lo, white peaches and nectarines are growing in popularity, along with a recent trend toward green (unripe) plums. Kelley acknowledges, however, that “this trend may be regional, and not all retailers are reacting quickly to it.”

Pluots continue to gain popularity, displacing plums in many parts of the country. “A type of fruit like the [dinosaur egg-shaped] pluot gained customer attention,” observes Food Lion’s Scott. “We believe pluots have tremendous growth opportunity and varieties are increasing every year.”

The landscape changes, however, during the winter months when Chilean plums arrive in the marketplace. “Top Chilean plum varieties include the Angeleno, Larry Ann and Black Amber,” says Karen Brux, North America managing director, Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), Santiago, Chile. “But perhaps our most unique variety with promotable volumes is the lemon plum. New to most consumers, it is heart-shaped and has a yellow color that blushes as the fruit ripens.” The fruit’s February availability ties in with Valentine’s Day and American Heart Month promotions.

OFFER SWEET DEALS

Grocers can promote sweetness, along with other stone fruit features that appeal to shoppers. In a national eating trend survey, conducted by Boulder, CO-based research firm, Sterling-Rice Group discovered that



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while about half of consumers describe their ideal peach, plum, or nectarine as sweet and flavorful, significant numbers prefer their fruit either sweeter or tarter, and juicier or just moist.

“While sweetness and brix are flavor profile components, we also consider shape, size, color, aroma, shelf life, and yield when developing new varieties,” says Papangellin. “Ultimately, if consumers enjoy the fruit and repeat buy, then we most likely have a winner.” He cautions that although consumer tastes vary — some prefer low-acid, white-flesh varieties over regular — all want a good eating experience.

PAY ATTENTION TO RIPENESS

Retailers can play a crucial role in the consumers’ quest for ripeness. Trained produce associates can assist and educate shoppers on purchasing stone fruit that is ready to eat or needs to ripen at home.

“Most consumers want fruit with a full aroma and soft to the touch,” says Bi-Lo’s Kelly, who recently initiated a trial with a South Carolina grower for tree-ripened peaches delivered directly to the stores from the packing house.

The Georgia Peach Commission offers an educational poster to help shoppers and store employees determine ripeness by feel and color.

“While sweetness and brix are flavor profile components, we also consider shape, size, color, aroma, shelf life, and yield when developing new varieties. Ultimately, if consumers enjoy the fruit and repeat buy, then we most likely have a winner.”

— George Papangellin, Gerawan Farming

It also warns against refrigerating fruit that is not yet ripe.

Gerawan’s Papangellin cautions grocers to avoid the “kill zone” of 36 - 50° F when storing stone fruit. “Fruits held in the kill zone don’t ripen properly and become dry and mealy.”

Ripeness can be a greater challenge with

winter stone fruit, but CFFA’s Brux says that a growing number of retailers are bringing in their peaches and nectarines by air. The fruit is fresher and juicier, and better produce means higher sales that more than offset the extra transportation cost.

SUPPORT LOCAL LOYALTY

Shoppers respond to local and the quality they associate with peaches from particular states. “Bi-Lo sees a significant lift in volume when we promote local produce in print ads and at point of purchase,” says Kelley. “Shoppers may wait for South Carolina peaches, but they also are loyal to peaches from their own state.”

“South Carolina peaches are popular, because our hot, humid nights and slightly acidic soils make for a perfect naturally ripened peach,” notes Matt Cornwell, agricultural marketing specialist for Columbia, SC-based South Carolina Department of Agriculture. “Also, our state’s largest farm recently upgraded its equipment to increase overall productivity and stand out in quality, traceability, food safety, and sustainability, all of which will better meet the needs of the consumer.”

“We feel that it’s critical to promote Geor-



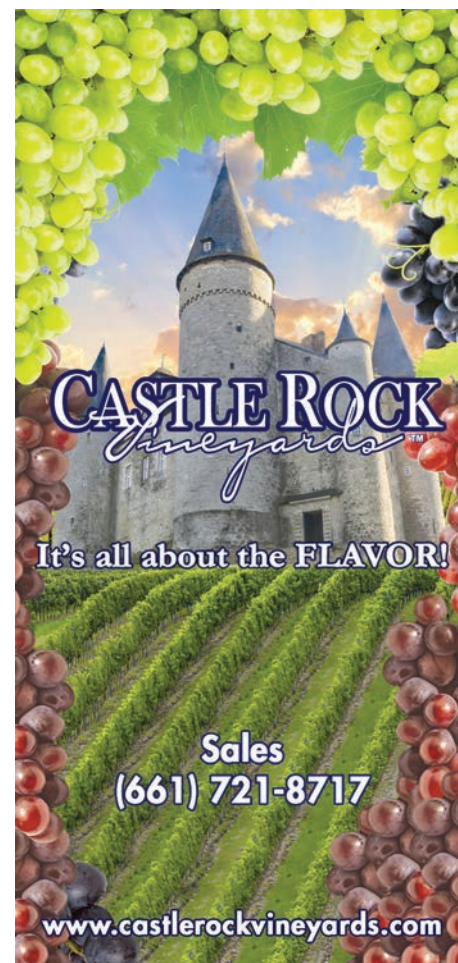
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“We feel that it’s critical to promote Georgia peaches ... The Fort Valley Plateau has the right soil and seasonal temperatures to make it the perfect location for flavorful sweet Georgia peaches.”

— Will McGehee, Genuine Georgia Group

gia peaches — the peaches gave the ‘Peach State’ its name,” says Genuine Georgia Group’s McGehee. “The Fort Valley Plateau has the right soil and seasonal temperatures to make it the perfect location for flavorful sweet Georgia peaches.” Georgia peaches are sold in North America east of a line drawn from west Texas to Denver to North Dakota.

Gerawan Farming promotes California’s Prima brand. “We are well regarded, and we enjoy demand that exceeds supply,” says Pangellin. “We encourage retailers to display our fruit in branded cartons and consider in-store signage and ads with the Prima logo.”

Brux believes that Chilean fruit could benefit from promotion of both Chile and its fruit. “Most consumers don’t know much about Chile, so hanging up a sign that says “Grown in Chile” won’t add to a retailer’s sales. Bringing Chile to life will definitely strengthen the image of Chilean fruit, and the Chilean origin will start to mean something to people,” says Brux, who provides retailers with short video clips showcasing orchards and country images and encourages them to post the videos on the company’s Facebook pages.

CULTIVATE SMART SHOPPERS

Education of retailers and customers can boost their satisfaction with stone fruit. Gerawan provides handling guidelines to retailers and invites consumers to visit the company website for information about the company and its products. Bi-Lo’s print ads highlight growers, and stores utilize point-of-purchase materials from produce trade associations. The South Carolina Department of Agriculture tailors merchandising programs to the client, often partnering with retailers for in-store signage and point-of-purchase materials.

Georgia peach growers offer a compre-

hensive retail marketing partner program that includes a dietitian toolkit, colorful POP bin wraps and posters, and a robust social media program for retail partners. CFFA creates Facebook posts, videos, ripeness charts, and POP cards on lemon plums ripeness.

THE 2015 SEASON

The 2014-15 winter in the Southeast bodes well for the 2015 crop. South Carolina’s Cornwell notes that “we had an almost perfect winter and got all the chill hours we needed. Our

2015 crop is looking very good!”

Chile anticipates a full recovery from the devastating frost of 2013 and healthy growth of many of the major plum, nectarine and peach varieties, leading to ample supply during the winter months.

“For customers, it’s all about the eating experience,” says Food Lion’s Scott. “Customers choose not only on taste and appearance but also on the appeal of the display. We have to deliver the full experience from store to table.”

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Dried Plums Pack A Healthful Punch



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CALIFORNIA DRIED PLUM BOARD

Retailers tout benefits of the fruit formerly known as dried plums.

BY KRISTEN POPE

In mid-August each year, plum growers in California's Central Valley start harvesting the ripe fruit, which will be transformed into dried plums. According to the California Dried Plum Board, more than 99 percent of the U.S. dried plum supply comes from California, which also supplies 48 percent of the world's dried plums. After workers pick the fruit, the plums are washed and spread out on wooden trays in order to begin the dehydration process.

Dried plums pack a healthful punch; they are full of both soluble and insoluble fiber as well as potassium, iron, Vitamin A, and phytochemicals (antioxidants). Retailers and marketers agree these healthful components are key components to driving sales.

SUCCESSFUL MARKETING TACTICS

Focusing on the healthful benefits of dried plums is key to marketing success, according

to some industry experts. "There's no question that the nutrient benefits of California dried plums are paramount to successful marketing," says Donn Zea, executive director, California Dried Plum Board, Sacramento, CA.

"There's so much competition within the category and outside the category in terms of snack foods that we have to compete on the basis of both quality, which includes things like food safety, but also from the standpoint of providing healthy alternatives for what historically was unhealthy snacking."

Dried plum supplier Sunsweet focuses on television advertising, and the company has been able to reach 40 percent household penetration with this tactic. "The response has been overwhelming and very beneficial to the entire dried fruit category," says Jeff McLemore, vice president of North America marketing, Sunsweet, Kingsburg, CA.

Mariani Packing Company likes to focus on providing recipes, instant coupons, and signage, along with seasonal promotions. "We like to tie in to key holiday periods, like New Years, when consumers are focused on returning to healthy eating," says Miranda Ackerman, director of innovation and business development, Mariani Packing Company, Vacaville, CA.

Making sure the fruits are displayed in a color-balanced and aesthetically appealing way

also helps boost sales. "We try to line them up with the other dried fruits that we sell," says Vince Mastromauro, director of produce for Highland Park, IL-based Sunset Foods (an independent supermarket with five stores in Illinois). "Like anything in produce, you want to break color and mix them between dried nectarines and apricots."

Having multiple displays and cross-merchandising in different locations also helps boost sales. "We had very good success in increasing our sales on the dried plums when we place alternate displays around the stores," says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Reading, PA-based Redner's Markets, an independent market with nearly 60 stores throughout Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania.

However, a shortage in organic dried plums led to scaling back on marketing efforts for some. "In organics, we had major shortages," says Peter Meehan, president, Newman's Own Organics, Aptos, CA. "They're short crops, and unbelievably short in organic. We haven't really been pushing any buttons, because we've been on allocation with dried plums."

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS CRUCIAL HEALTH BENEFITS

Dried plums are well known for their

effects on digestive health, and researchers are now learning they have many other healthful benefits, including bone health and weight maintenance.

The digestive health benefits of dried plums go beyond the benefits of fiber, according to Zea. "Dried plums have always had a relationship with digestive health," says Zea. "They help not just with regularity, but what goes on in the gut influences so much more in terms of overall health. Some research evidence finds dried plums have a direct correlation with gut microbiota [microorganisms that inhabit a bodily organ or part] and there's evidence they have a very probiotic effect."

Clinical trials are also revealing a relationship between dried plums and bone health. The potassium in the fruits contributes to their bone-related benefits, according to McLemore. "Studies show that eating dried plums supports bone health, especially in postmenopausal women. Dried plums are a source of potassium (a mineral associated with a decreased risk of bone loss and osteoporosis), which helps to increase bone mineral density while reducing bone breakdown," says McLemore.

Spreading the word about these important health benefits is crucial in dried plum promo-

tions. Many consumers may not be aware of these healthful properties. "We speak on it mostly when we have demos and sometimes in printed ads," says Mastromauro.

The California Dried Plum Board is also reaching out to professionals in the nutrition industry, including supermarket dietitians, to help spread the word. "We have a strategy that includes telling as many in the profession of nutrition as possible, including practitioners and registered dietitians," says Zea.

SUPPORTING RETAILERS WITH SALES MATERIALS

Shippers are one way Mariani Packing Company helps promote dried plum sales on the retail level. "The most productive vehicles are shippers as this helps provide a destination for the product and a vehicle to communicate promotions," says Ackerman. "These displays can be combined with recipe tear pads, instant rebate coupons, or utilized to help cross-promote with other produce items."

McLemore says retailers should notice the greatest benefit from shippers during peak periods, including the fall and holiday season, as well as following New Year's Eve when consumers are looking to make healthy food

choices. "As with many categories throughout the store, shippers are impactful to performance during peak selling periods," says McLemore.

The California Dried Plum Board works to promote a wide variety of recipes so consumers know that dried plums are good for more than snacking. "We have so many recipes that you literally could try them for the next year and never experience the same one twice," says Zea. "They're all divided on the website by breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacking, and dessert, as well as by different ethnicities."

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME IN DRIED PLUM SALES

With a shelf life of 18 months, dried plums are one produce item that rarely spoils. "They're not truly perishable," says Sunset Foods' Mastromauro.

Stiles of Redner's also finds very little waste with the product. "We have very little shrink with dried plums, especially since more publicity about their health benefits has circulated during the past couple of years," says Stiles.

However, finding adequate desirable space is often an issue when trying to merchandise the fruit, according to Ackerman. "As retailers

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dried fruits & nuts ► dried plums

are moving toward more 'clean-floor' policies, this limits the racks and secondary display vehicles that are available to merchandise plums. Often times, the product gets placed on low shelves, or in cubbies, which make it difficult for shoppers to see or purchase on impulse."

Having dried plums in a highly visible location helps promote impulse purchases. "Having them in a variety of different places within the store environment is important," says Zea.

In-store sampling activities can also help familiarize consumers with the fruit as well

as give them recipe ideas. Zea says sampling helps by allowing people to know what dried plums taste like, and it introduces people to recipe ideas beyond basic snacking.

TRENDS IN DRIED PLUMS

As consumers are looking for healthy snacking choices, dried plums are an item that many enjoy, not just for snacking, but also to add to a number of recipes, according to Ackerman. "Snacking continues to be the main reason why consumers purchase dried fruit, but

we are seeing an increase in recipe inclusion as particular diets call for more fiber, to use fruit as natural sweeteners or fat replacers, and as more people are looking for simple ways to increase their fruit intake," says Mariani Packing Company's Ackerman.

Mastrotauro says organic dried plum sales are growing as well. "Trends are geared toward the organic side with no preservatives and no additives," says Mastrotauro. "It's a natural product and that's where the success and the future of dried fruit is going."

The convenience factor inherent in dried plums is another reason consumers snap up packages of the treats. "The trends all direct to the positives in the dried fruit category for a variety of reasons," says Zea. "First of all, it's a very convenient item. You don't have the spoilage factor. They package well. There's a lot of work and opportunity in our industry to come up with innovative packaging, which some of our brands have done and will continue to do." He adds that one-serving size and larger portions can be resealed, put in a gym bag, purse, or car to enjoy on-the-go. "They don't have to be refrigerated to enjoy," he says.

While organic dried plums are in short supply this year, Meehan of Newman's Own believes that tide will turn. "It's a crop, and crops have good years, bad years, mediocre years. I don't think it's a long-term trend."

PACKAGING AND GRAPHICS TO BOOST SALES

The packaging of dried plums helps entice consumers, and to broaden sales even further, packers now are looking to create a visually appealing product that catches the eye of a younger demographic. "Over the years, dried plums have had the connotation of a food that older people eat," says California Dried Plum Board's Zea. "It's important for us to pay attention to what attracts younger consumers. From design color, to an ability to reseat, to size of package, and how it coordinates with the advertising strategy, it's critical."

Stiles finds that it's eye-catching packaging that spurs consumers to pick up a package of dried plums while shopping. "The new packaging, with graphics and health information, has been huge in helping with impulse sales in this category," says he says.

However dried plums are packaged, a lot of sales appeal comes down to the health factors of dried plums. "There's a lot of energy in the nutrition world right now looking at gut health and its relationship with complete body health," says Zea. "We are sort of the original digestive health food."

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True Strategic Planning II

BY DON HARRIS

Due to reader requests, we are going to revisit the strategic planning topic that we discussed in February. During strategic planning sessions, if one dared to challenge management that their proposal was no more than tactical action, one was often challenged as to why this planning was not strategic. Once again management displayed the same old problem: “they just don’t get it!”

In the earlier column, “True Strategic Planning,” many of the basic principles were discussed. After the article published, several questions and comments were submitted about what specific activities would be called truly strategic. As previously mentioned in February, this type of planning requires a great deal of thinking and rethinking of present selling methods as well as the best way to sell the entire stores’ products to the consumer. There have been earlier sessions at various conventions about this topic and theories proposed of ways to fundamentally change how we go to market. Over the years, I was fortunate enough to hear many of these theories and will concentrate on three of them as they fall within this discussion of strategic planning.

One theory is a reworking of the present aspect of many departments under one roof. While the traditional scenario of many departments under one roof is an old axiom, this new theory took the concept one step farther and proposed that there be departments within those departments in the store. These mini departments would incorporate products from other parts of the store (including perishables and grocery) to provide themes and/or promotional opportunities to encourage buying fresh produce items as well as value-added items. This concept has been utilized in varying degrees by nearly every retailer in the U.S. with various levels of success and can still be found in stores across the country.

Another theory that is receiving more attention recently is one of reorganizing the entire store from its present department setup to one of a series of solution centers. In this concept, areas of the store are designated as “solution centers” relating to mealtime needs. For example, there would be a breakfast area, a lunch area, a dinner area, a “stock up” area, a wellness area, etc. Each area would include items from all of the traditional departments in the store to make a complete meal solution or provide the necessary items for a “stock-up” trip and so on. This concept is radically different from

the way we presently go to market and has yet to be fully embraced by any one retail operation. Many retailers experimented with this concept in individual stores with varying degrees of success. This concept deserves a more thorough evaluation and wider testing to verify its validity.

Another concept receiving attention in the industry is one that combines various new concepts including online ordering, local fresh produce and perishables, as well as consumers’ desires and preferences. It consists of utilizing a fulfillment center to take online orders for groceries and other “hard goods” items and deliver them to neighborhood “fresh” stores. These stores incorporate all the perishable departments in one location and allow the consumers to make their selection all in one place. This addresses two of the concerns of consumers: how do I order my groceries for delivery; how can I get my fresh items that fit my requirements? In this concept, shoppers use the Internet, mobile technology, or the old-fashioned phone to order their groceries for delivery to the “fresh” store in their neighborhood, where they pick up their grocery order and shop for their perishables at one site. This concept is a hybrid utilizing many of the most popular technologies as well as the ability to select perishables that meet their “personal” criteria. This concept has been experimented with in limited situations both in the U.S. and in Europe. Today however, there has

not been enough experimentation or data generated to establish the potential for success and sustainability of such a strategy.

This was just a discussion of some interesting concepts from the retail side of the equation. There are certainly more new and innovative concepts from the supplier side that deserve examination and discussion. We will look at these concepts in a later installment on strategic planning. Suffice it to say that our discussion of these three retail concepts does not portend to present all the possibilities but merely provide subjects for discussion.

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.

A rethinking of present retail selling methods as well as the best way to sell the entire stores’ products to the consumer.



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Prospects For The Eurozone In 2015

BY JOHN GILES

The latest developments in the Eurozone are an eye-opener for not only the produce industry but also all trade markets. Here are some compelling stats to consider for your business, or trade, along with how it will impact consumers and their fresh produce purchase behaviour.

SLOW GROWTH

Growth in the Eurozone* in the first three quarters of 2014 faded away in Q4, and with it, confidence that the economy was on a path to sustainable growth. With concerns regarding falling consumer prices (the Consumer Price Index – CPI) which is currently -0.2 percent, high unemployment, high government debt and unresolved structural issues between Member States, most economists recently cut their forecast for 2015 and are now predicting GDP growth of between 0.8 percent to 1.1 percent.

Comparative Eurozone forecasts for GDP growth in 2015 (annual % change)

WHO	FORECAST	DATE
IMF	+0.8%	Jan 15
World Bank	+1.1%	Jan 15
OECD	+1.1%	Nov 14
European Commission	+1.1%	Nov 14
Ernst & Young	+0.8%	Jan 15
Markit	+0.8%	Jan 15
Capital Economics	+1.0%	Jan 15

Source: Respective Organizations

BUYING TIME

The European Central Bank (ECB) implemented a new monetary policy strategy (Quantitative Easing, or QE) to attempt to stimulate growth by purchasing €60 billion in asset-backed securities every month until the end of September 2016. The total QE package could be as much as €1.1 trillion and, it is hoped, that this injection of money into the Eurozone economy will encourage banks to lend more money to businesses and to private consumers. This will, in turn, increase spending and therefore encourage growth.

QE will not solve the problems of the Eurozone, but it will buy it some time to start to resolve structural and political problems between Member States (especially between Northern and Southern European nations). On the back of poor economic data and the announcement of the ECBs QE programme, the value of the Euro has fallen, particularly against the GB£ and US\$. This will have two effects. First, a weak Euro will temporarily boost the competitiveness of Eurozone exports and will therefore encourage growth. Good news for countries such as Holland, France, Italy and Spain maybe and

other EU export sources. Secondly, it will also mean imports into the Eurozone will become relatively more expensive and could dampen demand. This could affect fruit and vegetable imports from the likes of the U.S., Brazil, Argentina, Chile, South Africa, Kenya, Thailand, New Zealand and others outside the Eurozone.

A POSSIBLE WELCOME BREAK FOR CONSUMERS

Despite considerable uncertainties in the Eurozone economies, the prospects for some consumers may be improving, at least in the short-term. The prevailing rate of interest set by the ECB is 0.05 percent and, given weakness in the Eurozone, a rate rise in 2015 seems unlikely. Low interest rates will help to keep borrowing costs down, especially for mortgages — most household's biggest expenditure item. The combination of a fall in fuel, food and energy bills will ease the pressure on household budgets. This may help to stimulate consumer spending and lead to economic growth across the Eurozone.

IMPACT ON FOOD EXPENDITURE

We would anticipate the improvement on household budgets, caused by falling fuel, energy and food bills, to have a positive effect on food expenditure. This includes fresh produce. However, this effect is only likely to be moderate, as it will be constrained by the low growth felt across the Eurozone as a whole. We also expect many current behaviours will continue to play out; for example:

- Growth at the discount end of the retail market
- Growth at the premium end of the retail market
- Price sensitivity: consumers have undoubtedly become more aware and sensitive to food prices.

CONCLUSION

Despite the less than optimistic short-term economic outlook, the Eurozone still holds a major attraction for international suppliers, including the U.S. It is still the largest trading bloc in the world and is home to 335 million consumers, with an average GDP per capita of US\$ 32,152. It has always been the case that some countries within the Eurozone are better opportunities than others. This is more likely to be the case now than ever before and we recommend a strategy for U.S. exporters that targets specific countries, rather than the region as a whole.

*Eurozone countries include: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain.

John Giles is a divisional director with Promar International, the value-chain-consulting arm of Genus plc, and a specialist in international produce markets.



Treat Your Suppliers Like Customers

BY ALAN SIGER

I spent 42 years in the wholesale produce business managing a company that sold well over \$50 million of fresh fruits and vegetables a year. Adding purchases and sales together, that's more than \$4 billion in produce transactions in my career. Depending on who is looking at that number, it may or may not impress them, but what is impressive (at least to me) is this: In those 42 years, with those billions of dollars in transactions, our company never once went to court with a supplier or customer over a transaction. Considering the volume of transactions, even more amazing is we were involved in only one formal complaint with the USDA's Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act branch.

How is that possible? First and foremost, I was taught from the day I joined the company that there were two classifications of customers: The one we sell to and the one we sell for. We valued our relationships with our suppliers as much we valued our customer relationships. "Partnering" is often overused to describe a business relationship, but in many cases, we truly did partner to help move a supplier's crop. Many of our relationships were multi-generational; people who traded with my father and his partners, later traded with me. In turn, I traded with their sons and daughters, and in many cases, our working relationships turned into personal friendships.

Put simply, these relationships are not built overnight. Season after season of working together builds trust in a sometimes unpredictable business. High prices and volatile markets can change the value of a truckload of product by tens of thousands of dollars in a few days. If one gets into a situation with an impending substantial financial loss on a load of product, it sure is nice to know you're dealing with a supplier with whom you built a relationship. Good suppliers remember who helped them out when they were in trouble, and most times, will work with that receiver to mitigate its losses.

Our goal with our suppliers was to become an integral part of their distribution network. We wanted our shippers to know that we were there for them when the market was hot and when it wasn't so hot. Think how valuable it is for a supplier to have a receiver it can trust to move product in an oversupply situation. When supply exceeds demand, the supplier can send extra loads to a trusted

receiver without having to cut its FOB pricing. For example, say XYZ Berry Company has 10 loads of berries to sell today on a weak \$10 market. Rather than drop the market price on all of its shipments, the shipper can bury a few loads with a trusted receiver. Rather than dropping the price to move all 10 loads, this enables XYZ Berry Company to hold its price on the majority of sales. Even if the return on the open loads is under the market, they protected the pricing of their FOB sales and come out ahead. In addition, this creates an opportunity for the receiver to jump ahead of competitors by offering deal buys to customers at very attractive prices.

When suppliers know they can count on you to help them when they're long on product, they will be there for you in a tight market. So often on a flat market, a wholesaler may tread water on a commodity month after month. If the market jumps due to a gap in planting, a weather situation, or some other supply disruption, that's when a wholesaler can shine. In addition to being an opportunity for a wholesaler to stand out from the competition, having product when the competition is out of stock will also enable the wholesaler to pick up a bit of extra margin on a rising market. By having product available when other suppliers did not, we opened the door to doing business with new customers.

Many years ago, someone told me that in business, there is no such thing as a one-sided good deal; for a relationship to grow successfully, a good deal has to be a win for both sides. In most cases in the produce industry, the wholesalers have no contract with either their suppliers or customers. If one side of the relationship is not happy, then the relationship fails. Industry consolidation reduced the number of suppliers and customers available with whom to do business, and that makes it more important than ever to work hard to keep both types of customers satisfied.

Alan Siger is chairman of Siger Group LLC, offering consulting services in business strategy, logistics, and operations to the produce industry. Prior to selling Consumers Produce in 2014, Siger spent more than four decades growing Consumers into a major regional distributor. Active in issues affecting the produce industry throughout his career, Siger is a former president of the United Fresh Produce Association.

When suppliers know they can count on you to help them when they're long on product, they will be there for you in a tight market.



How Technology Will Help Produce Suppliers Implement Food Safety Best Practices

BY CARL IVERSEN

President Obama has proposed to reshape the Food and Drug Administration by combining the food safety responsibilities of the FDA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies under one organization. The proposal was put forward as part of Mr. Obama's 2016 budget plan.

The aim of this move is to provide focused, centralized leadership, a primary voice on food safety standards and compliance with those standards, and clear lines of responsibility and accountability that will enhance both prevention of and responses to outbreaks of food-borne illnesses.

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each year 48 million people (or 1 in 6 Americans) suffer from foodborne illness.

President Obama's key objectives in his budget proposal are: focused, centralized, compliance, accountability and prevention. In practice, these must also apply to any Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) or traceability solution deployed to enable a produce organization to meet, maintain, and monitor its adherence to such food safety standards and regulations.

Readily available information on how and where food was manufactured, where the ingredients come from, and where the finished item ended up, will be expected by retailers, consumers, and food safety agencies. Ease of access and the speed with which this information can be collated and presented will be key factors in any produce provider's relationship with its customers should a recall situation occur.

Understanding and actively monitoring the supply chain in its entirety is critical for a produce firm in order to help avoid a potentially crippling food safety crisis. At the heart of this process is comprehensive traceability information on the origins of raw materials and the journey they take through manufacture to delivery. This data must be held centrally and captured electronically.

If a business is flexible and agile, it will be able to react rapidly to changing market conditions or customer requirements. A modern produce business will eliminate time-consuming, error-prone paper-based procedures, have well practiced "what if" scenarios in the event of a supply chain failure or emergency product withdrawal, and have back up contingency plans in place to maintain a near 100 percent order fulfilment record.

Produce organizations should protect themselves and be ready and able to react efficiently in the event of a food safety crisis by investing in traceability data collection processes and procedures as well as a flexible, proactive and agile way of working.

A single, focused, centralized ERP and traceability solution pro-

vides one coherent record of the origins, movement, usage, and destination of all produce throughout the entire supply chain. This data and information can be shared to inform and drive all relevant areas of the business, from health and safety to quality assurance.

Other information vital to a safe and compliant supply chain (such as supplier accreditation information, labelling requirements, shelf life, storage or transportation conditions, etc.) also can be centrally held within the ERP solution and automatically applied as part of operational processes.

Logistics and route optimization software can be used to dynamically plan trailer loads ensuring that the transportation conditions meet the required specification for variables such as temperature and packaging. Delivery routes can be optimized to ensure the quickest and most efficient route from A to B is taken, reducing the time that food spends in transit.

Each element of a supply chain needs to work continuously, harmoniously, and efficiently. This requires regular upgrades and replacement of outdated equipment. While this can be expensive initially, the long-term benefit will outweigh the short-term expense. Investing in state-of-the-art modern information technology can give a business the edge over its competitors, improve customer service, and boost the efficiency of employees and operational processes.

Everyone involved in the provision of a supply chain needs to be aware of all of the regulatory and self-administered food safety policies and requirements, its importance, and the consequences of failure to comply. Regular staff training and performance assessment is critical to providing

a safe and efficient food supply chain and a high level of customer satisfaction.

In summary, in the future, under the watchful eye of a centralized and more focused food safety agency, produce suppliers must — more than ever before — be focused, compliant, agile, proactive, and driven by information. Smart organizations already are looking toward sophisticated, automated, electronic data capture and business management solutions to help them keep pace with and meet the growing hunger for food safety and traceability information.

Carl Iversen is vice president of product development for LINKFRESH and part of the company's U.S.-based leadership team. A leading Microsoft Dynamics senior pre-sales consultant, Iversen has experience working intimately with the LINKFresh ERP product development, pre-sales and deployment teams since its launch in 2005.

Understanding and actively monitoring the supply chain in its entirety is critical for a produce firm in order to help avoid a potentially crippling food safety crisis.



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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In February of 1985, David Posner stood in the garden at his home in Mendocino County, California, holding Nantes carrots (an old-fashioned, French garden variety). The photo was taken less than four months prior to the first day of operation for Farmers Fruit Express, which was a farming operation that distributed organic produce.

"I started Farmers Fruit Express with the simple idea that supplying organic produce was the right thing to do," says Posner, now president and chief executive of Santa Cruz, CA-based Awe Sum Organics. "At the time, I had no idea or expectations of what would come of it."

Posner started Farmers Fruit Express by growing and selling items such as: garlic (braided and bulbs), broccoli, cauliflower, Swiss chard, kale, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, squash (summer and winter varieties), cucumbers, chili peppers, parsley, cilantro, sweet corn, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, radishes and green onions.

The original label used by Farmers Fruit Express was Tri Sum Organics, which referenced the idea to "try some" organic produce, because organic items had yet to hit its stride. The Tri Sum Organics label incorporated Posner's original "triangle logo" symbolizing the three key elements necessary for farming organic produce: sun, water and earth.

In the early '90s, when Posner looked to trademark the Tri Sum Organics label, the trademark wasn't available. At that time, the word "awesome" was just starting to become popular in everyday vernacular — it was also a word that Posner's customers used to describe the "awesome" taste of his organic produce.

David decided to substitute "Awe" for "Tri," creating the new label name, "Awe Sum Organics." With this new name, he was successful in securing the Awe Sum Organics trademark, and he kept the same triangle logo. As years went by and the brand grew, the logo transformed to its current look.

As the reception to organics was growing, so too were Posner's crops. He partnered with other local farmers throughout California to expand the variety of his offerings. He began a weekly route extending from Northern California to Southern California, including the San Joaquin, Sacramento, and Coachella Valleys, as well as the Northern, Central and Southern California coastal regions.

As time progressed, Posner realized that offering organic produce grown only in California limited the year-round availability, so he looked south of the border to Mexico and Central America to expand even further. He added tropical fruit as well as off-season melons, tomatoes, peppers, squash and cucumbers.

In 2005, Posner moved his company from Mendocino County back to Santa Cruz — where his passion for organic produce began in the early '70s when he delivered and sold organic vegetables from his garden, along with organic fruit from local farms/growers to natural food stores, co-ops and distributors while advocating the benefits of growing produce without chemicals.

Posner continued to think outside the box, and looked to expand the brand's most popular organic fruit items to a year-round model. He then made connections with Southern Hemisphere fruit growers and inspired them to grow their fruit organically for the U.S. market and Canada.

Today, Awe Sum Organics provides a well-rounded off-season organic fruit supply specializing in apples, pears, grapes, kiwifruit, blueberries and other tree fruits ensuring store shelves are full year-round.

"It's gratifying now to realize how important [growing organic produce] was at the time — especially how important it is today to so many people, as well as having such an important effect in the way we harvest our food," says Posner. "Every year organic produce sales are experiencing double-digit growth — making it the fastest growing category in the produce business." **pb**



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