

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



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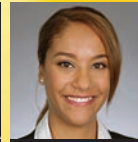
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PLUS
 The Ever-Debatable
 Dirty Dozen List

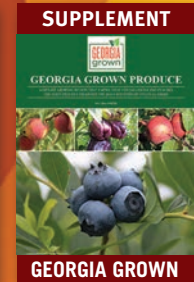
Price Chopper's Local Hub
 Model Sets Stage For
 Sourcing Safer Produce



CHICAGO



FLORAL BUSINESS



GEORGIA GROWN

MEET THE CLASS OF 2016

DAN SLEEP 30 YEARS RETROSPECTIVE
 producebusiness floralbusiness

INSIDE

UK LED ASTRAY BY 'AT LEAST 5 A DAY' MESSAGE
 GEIGER'S LONG VALLEY MARKET • UK RETAILING • RIPENED PRODUCE
 FRUIT TIE-INS • PERUVIAN AVOCADOS • NEW JERSEY PRODUCE
 PRODUCE TRACEABILITY • MICHIGAN PRODUCE • GRAPES
 STONE FRUIT • DRIED PLUMS • REGIONAL PROFILE: MILWAUKEE
 PMA FOODSERVICE BOOTH REVIEW

New!



A New Salad Tradition for the Whole Family

Introducing the DOLE Country Ranch Salad Kit

Dole answers the call for a new ranch salad tradition featuring indulgent new ingredients topped with ranch, America's #1 salad dressing.*



- Craveable toppings including savory cornbread croutons and artisan-cut white cheddar cheese
- Nutrition provided by crisp Romaine lettuce, crunchy carrots, red cabbage and roasted sunflower seeds
- A new tradition featuring Dole's Country Ranch dressing made with real buttermilk
- Simply toss and enjoy!



To add *NEW DOLE Country Ranch Salad Kit* to your stores,
contact your sales representative.

*IRI 52 Weeks Ending 3/20/16 - for shelf stable dressings

DOLE AND RELATED MARKS ARE TRADEMARKS OF DOLE FOOD COMPANY, INC.



cover story

27

40 UNDER FORTY: CLASS OF 2016

commentary

- 16 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT**
Local Food Safety Risk Not To Be Ignored
- 138 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE**
The Art Of Produce
- 140 EUROPEAN MARKET**
The Changing Face of Fresh Produce Retailing & Opportunities for US Suppliers
- 141 WHOLESALE MARKET**
360 Customer Service
- 142 VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY**
Cranberry Products Stir Up Sales In Produce
- 143 PRODUCE ON THE MENU**
Is 'Clean' Eating An Opportunity For Produce?



142



56

features

- 56 PRICE CHOPPER'S LOCAL HUB MODEL SETS STAGE FOR SOURCING SAFER PRODUCE**
Groundbreaking hub system standardizes and mitigates food safety and quality control issues, and expands local supply.
- 80 RIPE SALES**
Refined ripening, from program to display, transforms the bottomline.
- 84 THE ART TO TYING IN**
Fresh approaches to companion products for fruit often yield double rings.
- 87 PERUVIAN AVOCADOS MEET EXOTIC AND TASTY CRITERIA**
How using promotions that play off the fruit's health benefits and taste can increase sales.
- 90 NEW JERSEY PRODUCE INCREASES EXPOSURE**
From retail to foodservice, this state's fruit and vegetable bounty goes beyond its borders and traditional outlets.
- 97 TRACEABILITY REMAINS A COMPLEX CHALLENGE**
Despite tremendous progress, there is still much work to do.



80

- 100 MICHIGAN PRODUCE CATERS TO BEVY OF OUTLETS**
The state's farmers serve both national and local markets.



84

special features

14
PMA FOODSERVICE BOOTH REVIEW

22
FROM THE PAGES OF PRODUCEBUSINESSUK.COM

UK Led Astray By 'At Least 5 A Day' Message

25
ASCENDENT INDEPENDENTS: GEIGER'S LONG VALLEY MARKET

Reverence for the environment and local is the philosophy behind this homage to the vintage general store concept.

63
THE EVER-DEBATABLE DIRTY DOZEN LIST

More dirt than dirty, the list grows detractors.



66
UK'S RETAIL REVOLUTION MAY PORTEND FUTURE FOR PRODUCE

Deep discounters, the dining-out movement, convenience shopping and online retailers are just some of the factors affecting traditional retailers ... and ultimately their suppliers.

71
GEORGIA GROWN PRODUCE

A diverse growing region that's more than Vidalia onions and peaches, the state proudly promotes the many bounties of its local farms.

105
30-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

Dan Sleep, Chief of Strategic Development, Marketing for the Florida Department of Agriculture, Revels In Today's Produce And Industry Advancements

106
REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE: MILWAUKEE
MILWAUKEE'S WHOLESALERS HAVE DEEP ROOTS IN THE CITY
 Family businesses can trace origins back many generations.

109
MILWAUKEE RETAIL PROFILE: MILWAUKEE'S RETAIL LANDSCAPE

A Mix Of Small Groceries, Independents And Big Chains

110
MILWAUKEE FOODSERVICE PROFILE THE RESTAURANT SCENE

Diverse Ethnicities And Award-Winning Chefs

111
REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE: CHICAGO CHICAGO: THE HEART OF THE MIDWEST

This produce market follows growing seasons, links to faraway supply networks and does it better, faster, cheaper.

119
CHICAGO FOODSERVICE PROFILE THE CHICAGO DINER
 Classic American diner dishes go veggie.

121
CHICAGO RETAIL PROFILE TREASURE ISLAND
 Fast to market means fresh.

in this issue

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



insert FLORAL BUSINESS MAGAZINE

- Ethylene Awareness
- Holiday Planning
- Voice of the Industry
- Floral Findings



departments

MERCHANDISING REVIEW
124 TIPS ON GROWING GRAPE SALES

Clean displays of good quality in three colors still captivate.

130 BUILD STONE FRUIT SALES WITH SUMMER DELIGHT

A few focal areas in stone fruit convert summertime excitement into year-long profits.

DRIED FRUIT
134 BALANCING DRIED PLUMS IN PRODUCE

Retailers and marketers provide insights to the sales scale.

We're growing our lime business.

Wonderful Citrus welcomes
I. Kunik and **B&S Grupo** to the family.

These additions strengthen our ability to provide the
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produce quiz

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



BILL FANI
President
Food Connection II
Staten Island, NY

At the tender age of 13, Bill Fani entered the produce industry by spending his after-school hours working at a Scatturo supermarket located in New York.

As an adult, he is president of Food Connection II, where he manages and operates a number of Met Foods supermarkets in Staten Island and Queens.

When he is not opening new stores for

Met Foods, Fani loves to spend time with his family.

As this month's winner, Fani will receive a camping stove. With the weather beginning to fully embrace the summer, Fani says he will get good use out of the grill on fishing trips with his grandkids. He also notes that the seasonal changes are his favorite aspect of the produce industry.

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

WIN A TABLE TENNIS SET

Ideal for the beach, backyard, lakeside, or indoors, this lightweight table is made from a nylon mesh trampoline. Its durable, yet lightweight, plastic frame has six table legs for support with reversible stakes that, when inverted, allow the table to set up indoors without marring floors. The net erects quickly into a taut obstacle. Players can compete with the two paddles and 3-inch-diameter foam ball.



QUESTIONS FOR THE JUNE ISSUE

- 1) What type of Salad Kit is Dole showcasing in its ad? _____
- 2) What two companies are joining Wonderful Citrus' lime business? _____
- 3) How many Nourish Bowls are shown in the ad for Mann Packing? _____
- 4) What is the website for Generation Farms? _____
- 5) Who is running for president in the Thermal Technologies ad? _____
- 6) How many superfoods does Eat Smart's Asian Sesame Vegetable Salad Kit contain? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
 Company _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ Email _____

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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KEEP THE SUMMER Sizzlin'



Avocados From Mexico—the #1 selling brand of avocados in the U.S.—is teaming up with Heineken® and Tecate® for the Grills Gone Loco promotion. Avocados From Mexico is leveraging the peak season for BBQ celebrations and summertime holiday picnics to spark new ideas consumers can try on the grill, like steak and avocado kebabs. Fire up the grill and your category lift with always delicious, always in season Avocados From Mexico.



Trade.AvocadosFromMexico.com



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Laying The Groundwork For A New Farm Bill



BY JULIE MANES, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS,
UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

Usually the process to reauthorize federal agriculture and nutrition programs, known as the Farm Bill, has gone smoothly. The last time Congress passed a Farm Bill, however, the process was long and unusually messy. Ultimately, in 2014, a new Farm Bill was passed, and it expires in 2018.

Even though 2018 is still a few years away, given the massive scope of the legislation — the current version is nearly 1,000 pages long and spends slightly more than \$956 million dollars over 10 years — along with the fact that it encompasses the production of nearly every food and fiber crop imaginable, plus food stamps and nutrition programs, Congress must start the process of reauthorizing the Farm Bill well in advance.

That's why the House Agriculture Committee began the process earlier this spring by holding a series of hearings to examine the current state of a variety of agriculture sectors. On April 27, the House Agriculture Biotechnology, Horticulture and Research Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over policy affecting fruits and vegetables, held a hearing to examine factors that affect the cost of production in the specialty crop industry.

During the hearing, the Subcommittee heard from witnesses who represented an impressive diversity of geographies, commodities and experiences. Some common themes emerged and give policymakers a great deal to consider as they pursue updating America's agriculture and nutrition policies.

United Fresh member Maureen Torrey, vice president of Torrey Farms of Elba, NY, testified about some of the greatest challenges she faces as a vegetable and dairy producer. While acknowledging that the

list of issues affecting production costs is nearly endless, Torrey focused on included labor challenges.

Torrey Farms participates in the federal agriculture guestworker program known as H-2A. Torrey shared the frustration and vulnerability that growers must deal with in using the only federal program that provides agriculture guestworkers but is nonetheless frequently slow, inefficient, and too often fails to provide workers in a timely manner.

Torrey urged the members of the subcommittee to work with their colleagues in Congress to make improvements to the H-2A program, if not to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Torrey also talked about the negative direction that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) seems to be taking with respect to restricting or removing needed crop protection chemicals for which there is ample evidence of their safety when used properly.

Because produce providers, such as Torrey Farms, sell commodities that go straight to consumers, Torrey also spoke of the tremendous importance and challenges of food safety regulations, particularly ensuring that the Food and Drug Administration provides clarity about how each segment of the fruit and vegetable industry is affected by Food Safety Modernization Act regulations.

On the positive side of the ledger, Torrey also spoke to the benefits of specialty crop programs included in the last Farm Bill that reflected the recommendations of the specialty crop industry.

These programs, which provide trade opportunities, promote research to combat pest and plant diseases, diversify plant breeding, promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables, as well as help ensure fruit

and vegetable providers have the tools they need to be competitive in the marketplace and provide Americans with a steady supply of nutritious produce.

Other witnesses such as Dale Murden, president of Texas Citrus Mutual (also a member of United Fresh), talked about the importance of Farm Bill programs and their importance to combatting serious plant diseases like citrus greening, which is a non-curable bacterial disease that destroys citrus trees and threatens the citrus industry in the United States.

Like Torrey, Murden also spoke to the increasing concerns about EPA's regulatory stance on a variety of crop protection products such as neonicotinoids, which have been wrongly blamed for being responsible for increased death rates in recent years to the bee population, which is an important pollinator for many crops.

Like other witnesses on the panel, Murden urged the Subcommittee to be vigilant against scientifically unwarranted punitive actions against crop protection tools and to work with growers to ensure they have the right crop protection tools available.

Kate Woods, who is vice president of United Fresh member Northwest Horticulture Council, presented on the subject of food safety. She echoed and elaborated on Torrey's points about food safety regulations and the need for clarity about what members of the fruit and vegetable industry must do to comply.

Woods also emphasized the challenges relevant to crop protection products and labor.

There is still much more that needs to be done, but this hearing and others give policymakers good ideas about where to start.

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Deliciously Fresh Citrus

*Start your day with a fruit
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vitality and taste in your life!*



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**D'ARRIGO BROS.
SALINAS, CA**

D'Arrigo Bros. Co., hires two additions to its team. **Cody Hontalas** began working for D'Arrigo Bros. in the spring of 2016 as a business assistant. In his new role, Hontalas will assist with developing customer relationships, providing assistance with accounts and commodity managing responsibilities. Hontalas has a bachelor's degree in Agricul-



tural Business from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

As a marketing and business development assistant, **Chelsea Williams** will work on the broccoli rabe marketing campaign, create marketing assets for customers, conduct market research, launch new products, travel to interface with customers and manage tradeshow logistics.

TRANSITIONS



TRANSITION

**MARKET FRESH PRODUCE
NIXA, MO**

Market Fresh Produce announces the addition of industry veteran, **Craig Fields** as senior director of sales to the Market Fresh team. Fields will be based at the Market Fresh Tampa facility where he will play a lead role in Market Fresh's national sales efforts. His responsibilities will include expanding existing business, while pursuing additional growth opportunities nationwide.



Grown in sunny Southern California, the ideal climate to produce top quality and consistency.

- * Robust Leaves
- * Chefs' Choice
- * Foodies' Favorite
- * Thicker / Shorter Stems
- * More Intense Flavor
- * Highest Food Safety



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Honestly Grown™ in Bright Natural Sunshine.

TRANSITION

**MISSION PRODUCE
OXNARD, CA**



Megan Rood is promoted to organic category manager. In this role, she will be responsible for managing key account relationships, working with emerging sources of organic supply, and developing new organic customers. Rood has been with Mission Produce for seven years, most recently as account manager handling key retail accounts, as well as being the lead director on organic sourcing and sales.

TRANSITION

**SUN WORLD INTERNATIONAL
BAKERSFIELD, CA**

Sun World International, LLC appoints **Garth Swinburn** as vice president of licensing and **Terry Bacon** as vice president of variety development. Swinburn, who since 2011 has managed Sun World's Australia and New Zealand fruit licensing business, assumes responsibility for directing the company's worldwide licensing staff and activities, including offices located in South America, Europe, South Africa, Australia and California.



Bacon is the company's director of variety development and he joined Sun World as a fruit breeder in 2000. He has managed the company's fruit research program since 2008 and will continue to oversee all table grape and stone fruit breeding as well as variety development.

TRANSITION

**PRIMEX FARMS
WASCO, CA**



Primex Farms announces the appointment of **Dan Bissett** as grower relations representative. In his new role at the pistachio grower, Bissett will serve as the chief liaison with growers throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Foremost in his responsibilities will be maintaining two-way communication: advising growers on harvest timing and reporting, best ag practices, as well as monitoring area-wide annual crop development to keep plant managers informed about crop size, quality and delivery.



CONGRATULATIONS

• to the winners of the •

2016 UNITED FRESH RETAIL PRODUCE MANAGER AWARDS!



- **Amy Allman**
The Kroger Company
- **Jeffery Bonacquisti**
Market 32/Price Chopper
- **Mark Garcia**
The Common Market
- **Jimbo Howard**
Food City/K-VA-T Food Stores
- **Brice Mollohan**
Harris Teeter Supermarkets
- **Henry Porter**
Vashon Thriftway
- **Ronnie Showers**
Roundy's Supermarkets
- **Amy Lincoln**
Coborn's
- **Tricia Arceneaux**
Frank's Supermarkets
- **James Corcoran**
ShopRite
- **Michael Giberson**
Niemann Foods, Inc.
- **Denise Kelly**
Sobeys
- **Jason Norviel**
Schnucks Markets
- **Jennifer Ratkiewicz**
Big Y Foods, Inc.
- **Skyler Smith**
Marc's Stores
- **Lucilo Torres**
Northgate González Markets
- **Ryan Blancas**
Beale AFB Commissary
- **Ted Elliott**
Tops Friendly Markets
- **Dan Hanson**
Hy-Vee, Inc.
- **Ken Miller**
Save Mart
- **Steve Parker**
Raley's Family of Fine Stores
- **Lely Reyes**
Albertsons Companies
- **Gary Standing**
Loblaws Supermarkets
- **Brett Walker**
Brookshire Grocery Company
- **Keith Zielonka**
Food Lion



Contact your Dole sales representative to see how we support produce managers all year long.
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE UNITED FRESH RETAIL PRODUCE MANAGER AWARDS PROGRAM,
PLEASE VISIT WWW.UNITEDFRESH.ORG/RMA

VISIT

Stop by our Booth at the show, Booth 1800.

TRY

Our new Dole Chef's Choice Caesar Salad Kit, Best New Vegetable Product finalist.

VOTE

Cast your vote for the 2016 Produce Innovation Award.

WILSON PRODUCE

Congratulates



JAMES

On his graduation from the
United Fresh
Produce Industry
Leadership Program



TRANSITION



ECO FARMS TEMECULA, CA

Avocado grower-shipper Eco Farms hires Gahl Crane as sales director. He will report to Eco Farms' co-founder and president Steve Taft. Crane will also be responsible for driving sales and growing these programs for Eco Farms. Crane

previously worked as managing director of Green Earth Produce, and he currently serves as a Hass Avocado Board member.

ANNOUNCEMENT

BLOOM FRESH PRODUCE SUPPORTS LOCAL COMMUNITY

Bloom Fresh, the consumer brand from domestic and international produce sourcing specialist, S. Katzman Produce and Katzman Berry Corp. has been making a difference in New York City by teaming up with both Easter Seals of New York and #HashtagLunchbag to provide fresh produce and monetary support benefiting the local community.



ANNOUNCEMENT



DOLE INTRODUCES FRUITOCRACY SQUEEZABLE FRUIT POUCHES

DOLE, Westlake Village, CA, now offers a convenient, grab-and-go snack for kids, tweens and teens or an easy, healthy fruit snack for adults. DOLE Fruitocracy is ready to enjoy: no refrigeration, no mess, no prep, no utensils needed. The 4.8-ounce and 3.2-ounce snacks deliver natural squeezable fruit in easy-serve pouches. Each 4.8-ounce pouch provides a half-cup serving of fruit for USDA Child Nutrition Programs. Each 3.2-ounce DOLE Fruitocracy supplies a quarter cup of fruit and meets Smart Snacks in School requirements.



a cooperative of family farms since 1893™

Congratulates



JULIE DEWOLF

ON HER GRADUATION FROM THE UNITED FRESH
PRODUCE INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

ANNOUNCEMENT

BLACK GOLD FARMS FIRES UP RED



POTATO SALES WITH TWIST ON GRILLING

Black Gold Farms (Grand Forks, ND) joins the celebration of Father's Day on the third Sunday in June. The "Salute Your Smokin' Dad" program from Black Gold Farms is both a promotion to drive incremental sales of red potatoes and an invitation for families to brag about their own fabulous fathers.

The promotion aims to encourage cross-merchandising of red potatoes in retailers. Attractive iron man posters grab attention with a call to "Salute Your Smokin' Dad with Smokin' Red Spuds," while urging shoppers to serve up a man-sized meal featuring a recipe inspired by the National Pork Board. The posters also provide step-by-step directions for a "grill hack" that turns a standard grill into a smoker, making it easy for every family to be smokin' for Father's Day. Other elements include shelf signs and eye-catching Kwik Lok tags on Black Gold Farms as well as private label bags that create awareness to drive added sales during the first half of June.

ANNOUNCEMENT

J&J FAMILY OF FARMS AND MOORE FARMS FORM STRATEGIC ALLIANCE



J&J Family of Farms (Loxahatchee, FL) and Moore Farms (Manor, GA) entered into a strategic relationship that will leverage and grow Moore Farms Georgia production and enhance

J&J's sales and marketing capabilities. As part of the transaction, Moore Farms will also become a shareholder in J&J Holdings, resulting in a complete alignment and partnership in all aspects of J&J's business.

ANNOUNCEMENT

EARL'S ORGANIC PRODUCE FORMS EXCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH CRESPO ORGANIC MANGOS

Earl's Organic Produce, a certified organic distributor in the San Francisco Bay area, joins forces with more than 100 growers to bring diversity, flavor and superior quality to the marketplace. On the cusp of the company's 30th anniversary, there is a lot to celebrate — including the enormous success Earl's has achieved in creating lasting strategies that benefit organic farmers, the environment and consumers.



ANNOUNCEMENT

COAST TO COAST GROWERS CO-OP ANNOUNCES ARRIVAL AND SHIPMENTS OF KORU BRAND APPLES

Coast to Coast Growers Cooperative (Cheshire, CT) announces container shipments of KORU apples, grown in New Zealand, are entering U.S. ports. The KORU variety is also now produced in the States, but the bulk of the current available crop is harvested annually in New Zealand, where the apple was discovered and brought to market initially. About 85 percent of this year's New Zealand KORU crop is being shipped to the U.S. for distribution and sales through three suppliers that represent the Coast to Coast Growers Cooperative: Borton Fruit and Oneonta Starr Ranch Growers of Washington State; and New York Apple Sales of New York State.



ANNOUNCEMENT



VAN SOLKEMA FAMILY FARM LAUNCHES PACKAGED TOMATILLOS

Van Solkema Family Farm, LLC, Byron Center, MI, introduces its new line of packaged Tomatillos. Van Solkema Produce grows, packages, and/or distributes quality fruits and vegetables across North America. From Peruvian sweet onions to Michigan grown zucchini, Van Solkema Produce has the ability to meet demands of retailers, foodservice distributors and their consumers. Van Solkema Produce offers a wide range of items packed in the "Oh Boy" brand from a variety of locations for convenience and product freshness.

ANNOUNCEMENT

D'ARRIGO BROTHERS INVESTS IN HYDE LEADERSHIP CHARTER SCHOOL



Calculus teacher Mark Fusco looks on as Matthew D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo Brothers speaks to students, during a visit to Hyde Leadership Charter School in the South Bronx, NY.

New York City Council Member Rafael Salamanca, Jr. and representatives of D'Arrigo Brothers (one of the nation's largest distributors of fresh fruits and vegetables) toured Hyde Leadership Charter School, to view up close the incredible accomplishments that the students have achieved, made possible in large part due to the ongoing support provided by D'Arrigo. More than 90 percent of the students who attend Hyde Leadership Charter School graduate each year compared to just 47 percent of the high school students attending other schools in the South Bronx.

ANNOUNCEMENT

FRESH SOLUTIONS NETWORK'S SIDE DELIGHTS SUMMER PROMOTION

Fresh Solutions Network (San Francisco) announces its celebration of summer promotions for each month of the season, with Side Delights in June's "Meet Your New Flame," July's "Star Spangled Steamables" and August's "Grill ✓ Potatoes ✓." The in-store merchandiser display and coordinating point-of-purchase signage will get shoppers excited about outdoor party plans and healthy, colorful, easy to prepare & cook, grilled potato recipes delivered via labeled QR code.



ANNOUNCEMENT

ethylenecontrol™

ETHYLENE CONTROL INC. CELEBRATES 30-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Dave Biswell started his own business 30 years ago. Today, Selma, CA-based Ethylene Control Inc, has nine employees, a 9,000-square-foot facility and worldwide sales in the produce and floral industry. All Ethylene Control Inc. products are made in Selma, CA.

ANNOUNCEMENT

INTERGROW GREENHOUSES INC. BUILDS GREENHOUSE FACILITY IN WEBSTER, NY



The three-phase expansion could encompass about 75 acres under glass, bringing Intergrow's total acreage in the state to 150, according to a news release. Like Intergrow's existing greenhouses in Albion and Fillmore, NY, the new facility will include grow lights for winter production and a packing-house. The new expansion will allow Intergrow to provide more locally grown produce to the Northeast.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MANN PACKING ROLLS OUT SUMMER VEGETABLE TRAYS

Mann Packing (Salinas, CA) introduces new seasonal graphics for its vegetable trays. The new "Summer Fun" graphics are featured on its 18-ounce and 40-ounce trays for the U.S. and Canada. The company ships the new-graphic trays Memorial Day through the end of August and will showcase them at the United Fresh Convention.



PMA FOODSERVICE BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #238
CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY FARMS
Watsonville, CA



As a new exhibitor we are excited to share our complete line of fresh berries and our new recipes developed just for attendees at the foodservice conference. We will be distributing recipe cards featuring our newest creations for strawberries, blueberries and blackberries and will be sampling one of our favorite recipes, so be sure to stop by our booth for a taste before they are all gone.

BOOTH # 413
CHRISTOPHER RANCH
Gilroy, CA



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Local Food Safety Risk Not To Be Ignored

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Retailers and the retail supply chain experienced a break on food safety lately with the highest profile case being Chipotle, and thus the foodservice sector. Yet the prospect of food safety outbreaks is never far away.

We are a decade out from the Great Spinach Outbreak that disrupted the entire industry, and it is easy to see ways in which the production side of the industry has responded, most notably the California Leafy Green Handler Marketing Board, which represents a transformational commitment by the industry to raise and make ubiquitous food safety standards.

The industry at large has also made substantial commitments to advance the science behind food safety efforts, notably with the development of The Center for Produce Safety.

Indeed, the Government dramatically changed the laws surrounding food safety and adopted much more aggressive policies.

In this issue, the article “Price Chopper’s Local Hub Model Sets Stage for Sourcing Safer Produce,” starting on page 56, points to the innovative efforts of one retailer, Price Chopper/Market 32, to develop and utilize a hub system to make locally grown produce both more efficient to handle and, also, to enable the better imposition of consistent food safety standards.

The hub system is still evolving, with Price Chopper’s Rick Reed, vice president of produce and floral merchandising, heading up a program to have all local growers supplying the retailer with Good Agricultural Standards (GAP) and passing their products through a series of hubs that will be subjected to Safe Quality Food (SQF) audits, thus complying with Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) standards. It is obviously a better-controlled system than those that allow local farmers to deliver directly to each store or distribution center.

It is an innovative system quite likely to be duplicated by other retailers, though we would expect some pushback from local advocacy groups. For every action there is a reaction, and many who are passionate about local specifically want to avoid food miles entirely. So, to them, trucking fresh produce to a hub, then to a distribution center, then on to the stores, defeats the purpose. They want a farm that is 3 miles from a store to deliver directly.

Still, the effort to deal with the shortcomings of traditional local procurement is a serious one, and the Price Chopper team deserves kudos for trying to work its way through these issues.

Having known people in the produce industry my entire life, there is simply no question that the issues around food safety are taken

more seriously than ever before on the production side. Yet on the buy side (e.g. supermarkets and restaurants), it is fair to say that the commitment to food safety has not evolved as rapidly — post-Spinach Crisis — as it has on the production side.

To a not insignificant extent, the Chipotle story was about a chain’s desire to do things at the restaurant, where food safety standards are difficult to enforce, rather than in more easily controlled central processing facilities. Yet retailers all over the country make the same decision when they decide to process produce at an in-store operation. Both Chipotle and these retailers have their reasons: freshness, taste, shrink reduction, theater, consumer value perception, etc. Yet, in the end, these executives are making the conscious decision to put consumers at greater risk.

Despite the incessant demands by buyers on the production sector for audits and transparency, few retailers, if any, have been willing to step up and publish audit results on things like cold case temperatures.

Store-level and restaurant-level employee training on food safety remains sparse. Even with Chipotle, the world waited in vain for an announcement that all Chipotle employees would be required to have ServSafe certification. Many retailers speak with pride of moving salad bars from produce to deli because the “women” in the delis are thought to be better at this type of work, rather than the “men” in produce. But nobody wants to constrain

their employee supply by requiring ServSafe certification before an employee can handle ready-to-eat food.

Local and organic have been all the rage, but to secure local supplies, many buyers have been willing to accept lower standards. They will demand GFSI and other certifications from some vendors and only GAP audits or even minimum assurances from others. Some buyers who demand the most rigorous food safety programs will buy produce blindly at a local Amish auction or buy from farmers who pull up at the door with a truck.

All these decisions have pros and cons, and all are done for a reason. The key obstacle that has not been resolved is to incentivize individual buyers to bias their procurement practices toward food safety and to incentivize other executives to design systems that bias toward food safety.

Few, if any, key performance indicators on the buy-side have been altered to reflect top management’s claims that food safety is top priority. That means the systemic bias is toward what will produce higher sales and profits — even if it increases food safety risk. Ten years post-Spinach Crisis, this is the fact that most startles. **pb**

Ten years after the Spinach Crisis, are buyers fully committed to food safety?

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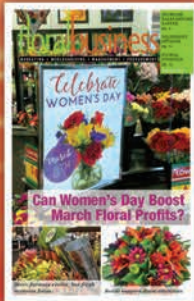
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Email: iddba@iddba.org • **Website:** iddba.org

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Website: londonproduceshow.co.uk

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Email: jtoner@unitedfresh.org

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Website: fancyfoodshows.com

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Email: carissa@fpfc.org • **Website:** fpfc.org

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CELEBRATING
FRESH

Produce Fresh Trends 2016

BY HALEY HASTINGS, ASSOCIATE MARKETING MANAGER, NIELSEN PERISHABLES GROUP

In recent years, retailers have used fresh departments to differentiate their stores and boost perceptions of freshness, indulgence and quality with consumers, and the produce department can be a key element in this type of strategy. In a retail environment where consumers are increasingly looking for healthier, fresher meal and snack options, the inherently healthy produce department is well positioned for future success and growth.

The State Of The Department

Fresh produce accounts for 32% of total fresh sales, the second-largest fresh department behind fresh meat. In the U.S., produce is a \$39.2 billion department, with a compound annual dollar growth rate of 3.7% from 2011 to 2015. It's no surprise that produce is a widely purchased department with 99.7% of U.S. households purchasing annually, but the department is also tied to higher overall basket rings than baskets that don't include produce, \$62.40 for baskets that include produce versus \$33.55 for those that do not. And though nearly everyone buys produce, what they're buying and the values driving their purchases are evolving. We'll review two of the key trends — consumer demand for health, wellness and convenience as well as “trendy” products — affecting the department today.

The Health Halo

The produce department is benefiting from a nation that is aspiring to better health, or more specifically, to losing weight. Fifty percent of Americans are trying to lose weight, and one of the top methods is incorporating more fresh foods into their diets. Produce obviously fits the bill for the significant portion of consumers seeking foods that are less processed (45%), with less fat (59%), and less sugar (57%). Twenty-first century health and wellness devotees also want to know where their food comes from and what it's doing for them. In this

sense, produce has a deep well of opportunity to draw from.

Take for example, the “local” movement — demand is linked not only to perceptions of superior freshness and quality, but also ideas that go beyond individual health — locally sourced food is good for the local economy, more sustainable, etc. A recent survey from the Harris Poll revealed that 67% of respondents consider it important to buy locally sourced produce. Retailers can and are taking advantage of this trend by carrying “local” fare, which presents fewer logistical challenges than in a fresh department like meat or seafood.

And we can't discuss health and wellness claims without touching on organic, which accounted for 8% of total produce sales in 2015 (up from 5% in 2010). Organic produce has connotations of healthier, more sustainable product, and these factors are driving the sales of organic produce at more than four times the rate of conventional produce. In 2015, organic fruits and vegetables increased dollar sales 16% and 14%, respectively; while dollar sales for conventional fruit and vegetables increased 3%, respectively.

A final, critical component to capitalizing on the health and wellness trend in produce is consumer education. Retailers and suppliers can do the work for consumers by citing specific health benefits of produce products via in-store merchandising and advertising, while retailers and suppliers alike can tackle branding in traditionally unbranded categories and use packaging to tout health benefits.

The Convenience Factor

However, success in the produce department requires more than relying on the health benefits of produce, clearly communicated or otherwise. In fact, traditional staple categories (such as whole apples and bananas) had flat or declining sales in 2015; while products offering additional benefit for consumers (think convenience,

bold flavor, snack-ability) or those gaining in popularity thanks to restaurant and social media trends are driving growth.

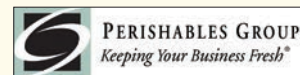
In 2015, consumers spent less annually on whole staples like whole apples, bananas and carrots (down 4%, 1% and 3% in dollar sales, respectively). They spent more on products that offer more convenient meal prep, like packaged salad and pre-cut vegetables (which increased dollar sales 9% and 8% respectively), along with more convenient snacking like berries (up 6% in dollar sales in 2015) and citrus (which increased dollar sales 8% — driven by the growth of mandarins, the “single serve” citrus option).

Shareable online recipe ideas and inspiration from restaurants are also pushing the boundaries of usage occasions for certain produce products. For example, cauliflower is becoming popular not only as a side, but as a base for pizza crust (cauliflower sales increased 9% in 2015, and increased volume sales slightly despite a 7% increase in average retail price).

Dates are becoming a popular snack and alternative to processed sugar, and historical trends reflect growing consumer interest, with a compound annual dollar growth rate of 15% from 2011 to 2015.

Popular flavor trends across the store are also trickling down to the fresh source and increasing sales for whole/cut commodities (such as coconuts), which increased dollar sales 12% and 15% during the latest 52 weeks.

Whether you're a retailer or supplier, successfully navigating these trends for a winning produce strategy begins and ends with the consumer.



Nielsen Perishables Group consults with clients in the fresh food space. Based in Chicago, IL, the company specializes in consumer research, advanced analytics, marketing communications, category development, supply chain management, promotional best practices and shopper insights.

Nutritional Info Is A Moving Target

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

If the proverbial Martian came to Earth and simply read press reports on consumer desires — more fresh, more healthy, more local, more organic, etc. — our other-worldly friend would surely predict that Whole Foods Market is many times larger than Wal-Mart, and McDonald's must sell but a small fraction of what Shake Shack does. Yet, of course, our Martian would have it exactly and precisely wrong, Whole Foods Market's total sales are a rounding error on Wal-Mart's financials, and Shake Shack is nothing compared to the sales of McDonald's.

As we evaluate produce sales, it is worth keeping in mind that many treat the subject as some kind of moral arc bending inevitably toward goodness, so produce — healthful and fresh — must inevitably triumph. This is a beautiful thought, but there is not much evidence that it is true.

Indeed, sometimes the evidence seems to be shifting the other way. Certainly many people want to lose weight. Recently, though, there are indications that much of what we thought we knew about nutrition is wrong. The latest version of *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* abandoned an upper limit on total fat intake and dropped cholesterol as a "nutrient of concern."

Although some of these changes make it easier to consume produce — no need to skimp on the guacamole because you are worried about total fat intake — the latest research indicates that one can eat poly-and mono-unsaturated fats (such as in nuts, avocados and fish) without concern. On the whole, though, the redirection poses some challenges for produce.

Dr. Walter Willett, the Fredrick John Stare Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition and Chair, Department of Nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, is widely recognized as the leading authority on nutrition and public health. At a recent talk, he explained that the old advice to avoid French fries because of the oil was now moot, especially since trans-fats have

been basically eliminated from the food supply. He still urged people to avoid French fries, but now the professor said the oil was the best part of the French fry; it was the potato itself, with a high glycemic load, that gave the Professor concerns.

Even saturated fat, the avoidance of which has been a religion among nutritionists, is clearly more complicated than once understood. Today, we know there are many types of saturated fats and that some may even be beneficial. Basically saturated fats are strings of carbon atoms chained together at different lengths. But recent studies indicate that those strands associated with dairy, for example, have a positive effect on heart disease risk and reduce the likelihood of Type 2 diabetes.

None of this, of course, means the health halo of produce isn't real — only that, as an industry, we have to be careful where we hang our hats, lest the hat stand be pulled out from under us as nutritional information evolves.

There is also a challenge with embracing causes that are trendy, but for which there is little evidence. Many are intensely opposed to GMOs, but we have no evidence that eating GMOs has any impact on human health. Organic does have connotations of a healthier, more sustainable product, but, again, there is miniscule evidence that this is so. Which brings into the spotlight the consumer education piece. It is, of course, wonderful, that retailers and producers help educate consumers, but the science

has to be there.

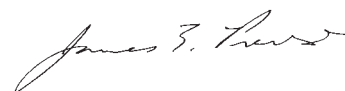
The need to stay relevant with the lives of consumers cannot be doubted, and this research points to the importance of convenience with today's consumer. Still, we have to be careful in assessing causality on some of these statistics.

Maybe consumers are rejecting whole items as less convenient, but it is also possible that higher margin convenience items are given a more prominent place in the department, more advertisement, etc., and that this marketing effort is what may drive consumption. Banana margins have been kept low, as most chains want to be competitive with Wal-Mart on this high-volume item, but low margins also discourage large placements, prime placements and advertising. It is a chicken-and-the-egg situation.

Staying on trend is important as it allows producers and retailers to ride the changes in consumer demand and come out winners. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that all these changes in demand for particular products (kale being the top example) actually result in overall change in consumer consumption of produce. It is heartening that consumers might love a kale salad with salmon and a peanut vinaigrette; but, for the most part, this just means a switch from a spinach salad. So navigating these trends can boost any firm's business, but to move total consumption, we need to find something more.

We have to be careful where we hang our hats, lest the hat stand be pulled out from under us as nutritional information evolves.

UK Led Astray By 'At Least 5 A Day' Message



JIM PREVOR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The U.K. has a new logo urging (or maybe admonishing?) people to eat "At least 5 a day." It actually comes across more like pleading, as one wonders why health officials don't give a specific number. After all, in Australia the programme is called "Go for 2 & 5," which specifically urges five vegetable servings a day and two fruits a day. Across the pond, North Americans abandoned numerical certainty all together. The Canadians call their programme "Fruits and Veggies – Mix it up!" while the Yanks go with "Fruits & Veggies – More Matters."

There is an assortment of varied names — and numbers — across the globe. There are many different kinds of programmes, some under public management (as in the U.K.) and some under private management (as in the U.S.). What all these programmes share, though, is a lack of evidence that they caused produce consumption to increase.

Certainly, it is true that the message, even after all these years, is a bit unclear. Why should people eat these fruits and vegetables? In the U.K. there is the Fresh Produce Consortium's eat in colour drive and in the U.S., in between the original 5 a Day programme and Fruits & Veggies – More Matters, we had 5-A-Day – The Color Way. The idea behind both being to urge consumers to eat a wide variety of colours in their choice of fruits and vegetables — as there are benefits in phytochemicals and micronutrients in various produce items, so diversity is important.

Eat In Colours Advert

This may be true; but in the U.S., it

was felt the slogan was ahead of the science. Talking points claimed things (such as eating produce of various colours) "Cuts the risk of cancer." The National Cancer Institute, which was the original governmental sponsor of the 5 a Day message, ultimately found the evidence too skimpy to want to be associated in that manner and passed the sponsorship baton onto the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has a more general interest in health.

Alternatively, the message sometimes seems to be one related to obesity; if one consumes more produce, that consumption will somehow crowd out other less healthy foods, and thus one will be thinner. But that is an uncertain effect as well. If consumers maintain their current diets and, like taking medicine, simply vow to eat their five produce items before bed, they might actually increase total calories consumed and become more obese.

Why have these efforts failed to move the needle on consumption? Well some argue that the problem is scale. The budgets of these efforts simply pale before the massive marketing budgets of Coca-Cola and McDonald's and other food companies.

Handling The Truth

There is, of course, truth to this. It is also true, though, that the finger-wagging nannyisms, telling people what they ought to do, rarely prove effective in marketing. Besides, thinking this way is a convenient crutch for the industry. We can lament the difficulties we face in having small commodity-based budgets without having to do very much about

our products.

It is not clear that extensive consumer advertising would actually boost produce consumption. There are prerequisites to brand-building, and consistency of product is one of them. Those massive ad budgets for Coca-Cola are backed up by a beverage that tastes the same everywhere and always. Advertising that draws consumers to trial products and services can simply accelerate the rate at which people are turned off by those products or services if the experience is inconsistent. Getting people to eat a wooden-tasting peach, a mealy apple or a dry piece of citrus, is not a route likely to increase consumption.

Besides all this, efforts to incite people to change dietary habits are very difficult because produce consumption is not something that occurs as an independent variable. There have been many studies on this subject, and what most find is similar to what this study in Canada found: "In particular, individual educational attainment is positively and significantly associated with F&V consumption frequency across different parts of the

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In other words, the world sends out information to people, saying things such as "If you want to be a success, you ought to go to school." Those capable of absorbing these messages do go to school, and they receive other messages, such as "Eat your fresh fruit and vegetables," and they follow that public advice as well.

Receiving The Message

Other people are not as good at receiving these messages. They don't go to school, they do drugs, smoke cigarettes, have unprotected sex, and don't eat very well. To think we can pull out one sliver of this counter-productive behaviour and allow them not to absorb these other messages, but singularly latch onto the benefits of eating produce, that is wishing for something unlikely to happen.

Retailers have always liked these generic industrywide programmes. But that is because if a brand or even a single commodity offers a promotional oppor-

tunity, it comes with strings attached — the retailers have to promote that particular brand or commodity. These broad-based generic programmes come with no strings and leave retailers free to operate as they wish.

Yet these programmes are unlikely to be the future, because the industry is not moving this way. (The future is not standardised commodities but, rather, distinct genetics sold under brand.) When the mighty Tesco came to America to open its Fresh & Easy concept, it held a vendor meeting in which it explained its private label, re-packed concept to its

U.S. suppliers. Driscoll's, selling proprietary genetics under its own brand, didn't see an alignment with Fresh & Easy and politely left the meeting.

It is this new approach that creates the possibility of extraordinary and consistent flavour to justify consumer marketing and higher branded margins to pay for it. Then free from government restrictions, these products can be cross-promoted in recipes with cognac and ice cream, selling the sensuous side of produce. This is a side far more likely to actually boost consumption than a plaintive plea to eat at least five fruits and vegetables a day.

It is this new approach that creates the possibility of extraordinary and consistent flavour to justify consumer marketing and higher branded margins to pay for it.



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Geiger's Long Valley Market

Reverence for the environment and local is the philosophy behind this homage to the vintage general store concept.

BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN



With the closest shopping option at least 30 minutes away, this small-town store serves a diverse customer base with an inspiring produce department featuring locally grown products as well as fruits and vegetables purchased through a wholesale grocery distributor.

Nostalgic Eccentricity

From ammunition to zucchini and wheelbarrows to kiwi, Geiger's Long Valley Market in the heart of California's Redwood country offers genuine one-stop shopping. Located along Highway 101, about 160 miles north of San Francisco, and roughly 30 miles east of the Pacific Ocean, this grocer with old time, general store ambience attentively serves Laytonville's population of about 3,000, according to community's website. Residents live in and around little unincorporated communities, on farms and ranches and nestled back into the woods in the Long Valley region.

Geiger's combines a grocery store featuring fresh produce, local meats and seafood with all the traditional inventory of an ACE Hardware. Customers buy fishing gear and house paint, gardening tools and children's toys right along with dry goods, local wine, and organic spaghetti squash. The up-front deli section known for its made-to-order sandwiches and hot specials (such as soups, tamales and fritters) brings in the grab-and-go lunch crowd. Truly, every thing is under one roof in this 17,000 square foot store — a measurement that includes the back room and the front office.

Once the hub of the former timber industry, the area is now a rainbow mix of all walks of life. "One of the nicest things about Laytonville is it embraces diversity," says co-owner Shanna Geiger Braught. "This area has hippies, cowboys, Indians, loggers, cattle ranchers and blue-collar workers. We also have Rastafarians, Ph.D. social drop-outs and entrepreneurs."

While serving the diverse demographics of today's customers, Geiger's was once a

small general goods store, which opened in 1945, where locals would meet and greet by the wood burning stove. Today's store, which was built in 2005, is owned and operated by husband-and-wife team, Michael and Shanna Braught. Shanna is part of Geiger family's third generation.

The store's décor pays homage to the area's logging days with old saw blades and equipment displayed on the upper walls. Other exhibited tools and historic photos remind customers the tree-laden area was once grand and bustling. This store is a destination point not only because you can shop for anything, but also because the closest shopping alternative is a 25-mile drive to a Safeway store.

Reverence for the environment and local is a philosophy shared by the owners and customers. The store sells its own locally raised beef, lamb and goats. Nearly everyone raves about the goat chorizo made on site. The two Braught daughters grew up participating in 4-H and were recognized for their many goat entries and prize winners in the Redwood Em-



pire Fair, held every year starting in late July.

Retaining loyal in-store help is not a challenge because at Geiger's, longevity seems to be the model. With a total of 35 employees, nine have worked at the store for 20-plus years. At least five employees have hit the 15-year mark, and three employees have put in 10 or more years.

Community Efforts

Geiger's Long Valley Market does have a Facebook presence, and announcements on incoming product availability are occasionally shared on Twitter. Social media efforts exist, but the traditional role of supporting local teams and activities, sponsoring community events, and participating in festivals and causes, seems to gain the greatest exposure for the store.

Farmers Markets in Mendocino County are plentiful, and they play a role in educating consumers and developing their palettes for specialty produce and locally grown fruits and vegetables. While shopping for goat's milk soap, fresh-cut flowers and starter plants for home gardens, many residents seek specific vendors known for numerous small crop productions including specialty greens, lettuces, sweet strawberries and summer squash. Some believe the abundance of the region's farmers markets could be partially credited with nurturing exploratory eating habits among county residents.

Local Relationships

Buying local produce is an active part of Geiger's business strategy. Michael Braught says the store buys from neighboring farmers including Irene Engber. She's a local farmer who owns Irene's Garden, which is a certified organic farm known for carrots, kale, cabbage and root crops.

Purchasing organic and conventional produce items through Nor-Cal Produce of West Sacramento has been happening for more

The attentive customer service is admirable and fitting, and great care toward maintaining clean produce displays is observable.

than 10 years, according to produce manager Ron Miller. But the broad buying power for the store comes from being a member partner of Unified Grocers, Inc., a wholesale grocery distributor based in Commerce, CA.

Miller, who has worked in produce at the store for six years, says Geiger's carries around 300 produce items depending on the season. All of the organic products are well marked with the recognized green and white stickers indicating 100 percent organic. Hand-placed signage also identifies the organic items.

During our visit, consumers searching for organics were selecting from dozens of items including 2-pound bags of organic lemons, red yams, Fuji apples, Butternut squash and Spaghetti squash.

Setting The Tone

Located next to the extensive wine aisle, the 3,000 square foot produce department on the right side of the store just past the popular deli section, is seen from the front entrance. Its inviting layout is convenient for shoppers who want to see it all and reach it all with the least amount of inconvenience.

Wooden tables filled with large bowls featuring tomatoes, avocados, grapefruit, and numerous loose produce items, fill the center section. Pineapples are plentiful as well as potatoes and onions. Complementing items encouraging produce purchases are displayed on spin racks and noticeable stands around the department.

A long cold case runs the length of the side wall and features packaged products and

bulk produce items. Other produce is showcased on three shelves in wicker-style baskets to maintain the farmers market-feel of the department.

Shoppers reach for chard, kale, beets, peppers, berries, mushrooms, broccoli, artichokes, green onions, pears, citrus, stone fruit, grapes, radishes and celery. All organic items are clearly marked.

The bagged salad section of the cold case included salsa, guacamole, dips and dressings as well as organic salads sold in clamshells. The cold juice section located within the produce department is stocked with Pom Wonderful varieties and other juice blends from Odwalla, Bolthouse Farms, and Naked Juice. Several flavors of Suja organic drinks are included in this popular section.

Thoughtful cross-merchandising efforts are integrated throughout the displays; for example, packages of Melissa's crepes nestled in with the apples, and packaged guacamole dip offered by the avocados, limes and garlic.

The attentive customer service is admirable and fitting, and great care toward maintaining clean produce displays is observable. When was the last time you saw an employee using a produce department-designated hand vacuum to remove broccoli crumbs before restocking the section?

Store manager Dan Guy is pleased with the steady growth seen in produce. Sales have increased 5 percent every month this year above produce sales at the same time in 2015.

Shanna Braught's decorating talents shine through in produce since she's responsible for the décor placement and the handwritten chalk signage she had specially created to help set the tone of a country store. Michael and Shanna wisely strayed from the usual planogram. They created a shopping environment where convenience and comfort are crucial in welcoming and maintaining the store's diverse customer base.

pb

Meet the class of 2016



*Listed alphabetically by last name.



Daniel Alonzo, 35
Sales Account Executive
Mann Packing Company
Salinas, CA

Years in Produce: 12

Hobbies: running, hiking, golf, watching sports

Motto in Life: Live every day to the fullest.

Work History: Alonzo started working for Earthbound Farm in 2004 as a sales coordinator, after interning there during college. In 2007, he was promoted to foodservice sales manager to manage key accounts. In 2011, he was promoted to retail sales manager to oversee key retail accounts. In May of 2015, he began working for Mann Packing Inc. as a sales account executive responsible for overseeing key retail, foodservice and wholesale accounts in the U.S. and Canada, as well as providing guidance to junior team members and support to the sales associates.

He has worked with new and existing clients to improve product exposure and gain distribu-

tion on new products and commodities. He has also worked closely with regional sales teams to build short and long-term strategies to support customer goals while achieving company sales targets and financial expectations. He holds a bachelor of science in agriculture business from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, and an MBA from Golden Gate University in San Francisco.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

Agriculture and farming has been in my family for many generations and had an impact on me growing up. When I was a kid, I'd accompany my dad, Andy Alonzo, in his pickup all over the Salinas Valley to inspect fields when he worked as a pest control adviser for Soil Serve, Inc. I would also spend time on my grandparents' ranch, Breschini & Sons Inc., where my grandfather and uncles grew fresh produce such as

lettuce, broccoli, and cauliflower. These things helped influence my decision to attend college at Cal Poly State University, where I studied agriculture business. While attending college, I completed a summer internship program for Earthbound Farms that taught me the fundamentals of the produce business. After college, I was hired as a sales coordinator, and I've been working in sales ever since.

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

Mann Packing Company has an experienced team of innovative and forward-thinking professionals that I work with and I go to them for guidance all the time. I also like to reach out to my dad for advice because he has a lot of experience in the agriculture industry and can offer a different perspective.

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

I would say I am most proud of being able to adjust to all the different responsibilities and tasks that have been presented to me over the course of time. I have had the opportunity to develop great relationships with so many customers across the U.S. and Canada in both foodservice and retail channels.

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

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Focus on building relationships within the industry. You'll be surprised how many times you will cross paths with the same people you first started working with. In the produce industry you need to be ready and prepared for change.



Brian Antle, 35
Vice President of Harvest
Tanimura & Antle (T&A)
Salinas, CA

Years in Produce: 10

Hobbies: Auto racing, flying and golf

Personal info: Married; a newborn daughter

Work History: Antle is a fifth-generation farmer from a Salinas Valley produce powerhouse. In his current role, he oversees 24 vegetable crops harvested on 35,000 acres with an annual production of more than 37 million cartons. His duties and responsibilities, both professional and social, go well beyond the farm into various business and community matters and follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps. He began working on the farm at the age of 14 and slowly worked his way up the ladder taking all positions available. After attending Cal Poly and majoring in agriculture business, he returned to the farm to manage the organic program. He eventually took on a bigger role in harvest and became vice president of harvest.

Antle has been instrumental in developing T&A's advanced harvest forecasting systems and collaborated in the development of current harvesting technology. Through his leadership role in community relations, T&A received approval to build employee housing on its property, which will give 800 T&A employees the opportunity to live in safe and affordable housing. He was able to achieve this feat despite opposition from neighbors. He is an industry leader and serves on the board of directors of multiple industry and community organizations. He received the Forbe's Impact Award in Innovation in 2015 for the company's Plant Tape transplanting system.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

I started working on the ranch when I was 14, riding my bike to work every morning to move

sprinkler pipes for the Tanimura Brothers and never looked back. Working on the farm I became interested in the harvest of the product because that's where the action was and soon began working in the harvest department building harvest equipment and eventually managing harvest crews. I thank my family for making me start on the ranch and work my way to my current position since it's much easier to manage at a higher level knowing what should be going on at each level.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

Automation is a must at the field harvest level. Harvest is by far still the most labor-intensive part of the puzzle and with a dwindling supply of employees willing to do that work, we must find ways to be more efficient with the resources we have. We must continue to look at ways to reduce the number of people needed through the use of automation.

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

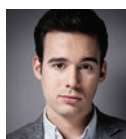
I have always had my grandfather, dad and uncle to rely on as well as the wealth of knowledge the Tanimura family provides. I also have my grandfather and uncles on my mom's side of the family who are partners in Ocean Mist Farms. I'm fortunate to have all of these people to turn to with hundreds of years of farming experience, which always makes it easy to find advice.

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

Embrace the technology upon us because it is shaping the future of farming. The use of automation, robotics, GPS and drones is taking the place of shovels and tractors, and the employees we are hiring now understand this and are looking for companies that also understand this.

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

I think locally grown hydroponics will be a growing trend as we look to be more sustainable and local to meet the needs of customers.



Ezio Bondi, 28
Business Development
Manager
Bondi Produce
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Years in Produce: lifetime

Hobbies: Filmmaking, basketball, painting

Motto in life: Hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard.

Work History: Ezio Bondi was born into the industry, and one of his earliest memories is

“The use of automation, robotics, GPS and drones is taking the place of shovels and tractors, and the employees we are hiring now understand this and are looking for companies that also understand this.”

— Brian Antle, Tanimura & Antle

being 3 or 4 years old, riding in a truck with his father, Gus Bondi. He officially began his career in 2011 after graduating from Ryerson University in Toronto. After obtaining a job in advertising proved difficult, he started working for the family business “temporarily” and has since held many different positions within the organization. His current role in the organization mainly revolves around business development for the company's foodservice division.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

My grandfather, Ignazio Bondi, founded Bondi Produce in 1976 when he emigrated from Sicily to Canada. Several years later, my father Gus took over. Produce is in my blood. I remember delivering produce with my dad. We would deliver to this pizza place and get a free slice of pizza. I remember wanting to help my dad make deliveries so bad. I would try to pick up boxes, but I was too weak. All I could manage to carry was a 5-pound box of mushrooms. I guess, informally, this was the beginning of my career.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see more technological innovation in our industry. I feel there could be more services offered that cut out middlemen and connect growers directly to distributors.

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

That, like any relationship, it is healthy to set boundaries between yourself and the customer. I used to give my cellphone number to everyone and anyone and tell them to call me anytime. That can get taken literally sometimes.

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

I'm most proud of the client base my team and I have developed. I get to work with some extremely talented chefs I admire and respect.



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There is nothing more satisfying than walking into an establishment you service on a busy weeknight, seeing all the patrons having a good time enjoying their food and knowing you contributed to making that experience happen.

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

I think that urban agriculture and by extension, vertical farming, will continue to become more and more commonplace.



Dominic J Cavallaro III, 32
General Manager
John Cerasuolo Co., Inc.
Chelsea, MA

Years in Produce: 16 years

Hobbies: Hockey

Personal info: Engaged

Motto in life: Focus on your goal; don't look in any direction but ahead.

Work History: Cavallaro III was born into the produce business always helping his uncle Kenny and father Dominic Jr. He first started working in the business during high school and spent summers working on the floor as a clerk. He started from the bottom — sweeping floors, loading and unloading trucks, driving trailers, making deliveries — anything that needed to be done for his dad and his uncle.

After graduating college, he started doing sales for cash customers to gain a little experience. He built a big clientele of cash customers who came to him on a regular basis over the next few years. In 2015, he was suddenly tasked to fill some big shoes. His uncle suddenly passed away, and he took over the management and control to keep the company operating at the same speed. With the passing of his uncle, he has continued to carry on the same tradition of excellence at John Cerasuolo Co. Inc.

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

When working with a perishable product, such as produce, you can never have full control of what can happen. I learned that the hard way a few times.

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

It is a hard job and life to get used to, but you have to keep your composure and have thick skin.

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

Get in line with the times. Be more tech-savvy and computer-oriented.

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

Packaged produce that simplifies peoples lives and makes cooking easier and healthier.



Megan Chedwick, 34
Director of Food Safety & Sustainability
Church Brothers Farms/
True Leaf Farms
Salinas, CA

Years in Produce: 9

Hobbies: Spending free time with family and friends; enjoying the nearby beach

Motto in life: Life is short; enjoy the moments and people in your life.

Work History: Chedwick's career began shortly after her graduation from Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo with a bachelor's degree in agriculture business. The unfortunate E. coli outbreak on the heels of her start in the industry allowed her to learn from the ground up. Utilizing other industry leaders, training programs and continued education, she helped create the Church Brothers food safety program and is now responsible for creating and implementing Good Agricultural Practices and various food safety protocols for the company's growing and harvesting operations. She and her food safety team handle all food safety-related duties including audits, risk assessments, employee training, customer requirements, and documentation review from plant to harvest for the company's growing locations in Salinas Valley, Yuma/El Centro and Mexico. She has been actively involved with the United Fresh Produce Association, the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement and Grower Shipper Association. She has also served on the food safety committees for those organizations.

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

The biggest challenge of my job is that produce is grown outdoors in the open environment. With science and recent industry efforts, such as LGMA (California Leafy Green Products Handler Marketing Agreement), there are so many preventative programs in place, but there's still the opportunity for potential food safety issues when it comes to ranch locations, animal intrusion, and other factors. The challenge is always to identify potential risk and implement corrective actions/measure to reduce the risk and harvest a safe crop.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I'd love to see more unity when it comes to food safety and traceability. In an ideal world, we (as

producers), our customers and the government could all agree on a universal set of food safety standards and guidelines.

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

That being successful isn't a one-person accomplishment but rather the result of collective efforts. In order to succeed you have to open yourself up to learning as much as possible, creating connections and relationships with others and most importantly giving back through volunteering and mentoring to continue the chain of producing leaders along the way.

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

My stepdad Steve Church has inspired me as he's shown me through hard work and dedication what a positive influence this industry can have on one's personal life and career. The produce industry is like no other in that the relationships and business connections made are life-long. He has shown through his own experiences that success isn't handed to anyone but rather earned with passion, perseverance and dedication.

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

My No. 1 piece of advice is: Don't be afraid to reach out and meet new people. Networking is so very important and is critical in establishing your career. You never know who you might meet along the way, and to have resources and supporters in your corner will always be of value when you're learning new things, taking on new tasks and establishing your career.



Jeremy Coleman, 38
Senior Buyer, Produce
Sam's Club
Bentonville, AR

Years in Produce: 10

Hobbies: Golf, fishing, watching sports, and spending time with family

Personal Info: Married; 3 children

Motto in life: "High expectations are the key to everything" – Sam Walton

Work History: Coleman has worked for Wal-Mart, Inc. for 18 years. In 2001, after completing the training program, he became a salaried produce manager at the Wal-Mart Supercenter in Tahlequah, OK. Two years later, when the company eliminated that position, Coleman took an hourly lead role with the produce team and returned to college to complete his degree. He held the produce team lead role for three years while in school.

After completing his education at the Univer-



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sity of Arkansas with a degree in marketing, he was promoted to assistant buyer on the fresh meat team at Sam's Club. He was soon promoted to buyer on the new business development team where he was responsible for all items in the fresh areas (meat, bakery, produce, café) in a couple of new formats Sam's was testing. For the past six years, he has worked in a buyer position handling all citrus, melons, avocados, cut fruit, premium juices, pumpkins and holiday items for the Sam's Club produce team. In January 2016, he was promoted to senior buyer over berries and cut fruit. During his time on the produce team, he has been awarded Divisional Buyer of the Quarter four times, Divisional Buyer of the Year twice, and Buyer/Buying Team of the Year for total company twice.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

When I was first hired on at Wal-Mart, my younger brother and I had the same hire date and he was tabbed to work in produce, while I was assigned to work in dry grocery. Each day he would express how exciting it was to work in produce, so I had always wanted to try it out for myself. After he moved on to another role within the company, I was asked to come over as a produce manager in training after succeeding across several other categories within the store.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see the industry connect better with the end customer. With the advancements in technology, there have been several gains to this point, but I still feel we have a long way to go before the consumer truly understands the effort it takes to get fresh produce from field to fork.

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

The produce industry is very polarizing, and most new people find out very quickly that either you have a passion for produce or you don't. Those who aren't able to adapt to the ever-changing environment usually want out quickly, but those who embrace this usually never want to leave. I love new challenges each day and look forward to learning something new every single day.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

The evolution of product packaging! I can recall several instances while working in store operations when we had to unload watermelon trucks one by one from the back of a semi. Now there are sophisticated sorting lines for consistent-sized product that can be packed into high graphic bins,

which makes for a very eye-appealing display.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

Well, I thought I knew a lot about produce after working in store operations for several years, but I honestly had no idea the amount of work it takes to get product from field to fork. The labor needed to run a farming operation is truly staggering. With today's technology, most end consumers assume there are machines doing most of the work in picking and packing. I was astonished when I first saw avocado pickers on a 20-foot ladder harvesting fruit with a pole and a small sack at the end trying to pick avocados from the top of a 30-foot tall tree. Or, millions of strawberries being picked one by one daily and delicately placed in a 2-pound clamshell.



Kristine Concepcion, 28
Director of Communications
National Mango Board
(NMB)
Orlando, FL

Years in Produce: 4.5

Hobbies: Paddle boarding, gardening, camping, and water sports

Personal: Single

Motto in life: Do not give up; the beginning is always the hardest. Keep pushing forward.

Work History: Concepcion joined the NMB in 2012 as communications specialist and was responsible for industry and board communications, including trade media, Mango Connection and Crop Report. In 2012, she was promoted to communications manager, then director of industry relations in 2014.

In 2016, she received recognition for her innovative efforts in developing successful communications campaigns and is now the NMB's director of communications. As a result of Concepcion's vigilant industry outreach efforts, the NMB received an approval rating of 91% during its 2015 continuance referendum, as compared to 73% in the previous referendum. She has expanded the NMB's reach into Latin America by efficiently teaching mango producers about the U.S. market and the NMB. Brand awareness within the mango industry continues to soar as she hosts special events.

She expanded the NMB's exposure to younger mango producers and exporters through digital communications. Under Concepcion's lead, the trade media program has succeeded in reaching more members with effective messages. Year after year, she has increased the number of impressions garnered, surpassing yearly goals by as high as 99 percent and as low as 5 percent. She also has grown the NMB's Crop Report from

just a few hundred subscribers to over 2,000. She started the NMB's industry-focused social media platforms with great success on Facebook and LinkedIn.

Prior to the NMB, she worked in the nutrition field for more than five years as a consultant teaching clients how to eat balanced meals and live a healthy lifestyle. She has a bachelor's degree in communications with a strong focus in marketing from the University of Central Florida.

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

I hope to continue working closely with other leading women in the industry to highlight and encourage even more women to work in agriculture. Whether it's contributing my ideas or becoming more active in other organizations, I will continue to strive to make a positive difference. In addition, with developing the NMB's first communications program, I envision creating an even stronger program to better support the NMB and its stakeholders to achieve their strategic goals.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

Specifically, for the mango industry, I'd like to see uniform and standardized packaging (size, palletized, box materials, etc.) to help overcome and improve some packaging and quality issues. Moreover, incorporate better temperature management practices across the supply chain to provide consumers with a ripe and ready-to-eat mango.

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

I am proud of the mark I have made in elevating communication initiatives to the next level in achieving the NMB's organizational goals of connecting with industry members. Being a young Latina who cherishes her culture, I was honored to receive recognition in "Breaking the Glass Ceiling" from Blue Book Services in a segment that honored Latinas making a positive mark in the food industry.

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

I would encourage companies to have strong internships to entice more millennials and provide them the opportunity to learn about different roles that are beyond their responsibilities. In addition, be more involved in the colleges in your area. Inspire your current team members to volunteer as speakers at special events that focus on careers; it's a great way to spread the word and entice new talent to your company.

**“Live for your family,
never stop learning, work
hard, and never
compromise your ethics ...
for your reputation goes
with you everywhere.”**

— Gino DiBduo, Sunwest Fruit Company



Gino DiBduo, 33
Sales and Marketing
Sunwest Fruit Company
Parlier, CA

Years in Produce: 10 years full-time post-college, 17 years including high school/summer internships)

Hobbies: family, hunting, golf

Personal: Married; 3 children

Motto in life: Live for your family, never stop learning, work hard, and never compromise your ethics ... for your reputation goes with you everywhere.

Work History: Part of a third generation table

grape farming family, DiBduo was born into the agriculture industry. He started working part time at about the age of 14, assisting in quality control of the field packing. By age 16, he was working summers in the packinghouse at Ballantine Produce (formerly in Reedley, CA). Over the course of two years, he palletized, managed receiving and quality control of field bins, and assisted in pre-harvest quality control. At 18, he began attending Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo working toward a degree in ag business, with focus in marketing and international business. During college, he continued summer work at Ballantine working as a merchandising analyst. Upon graduating in 2005, he took a full-time marketing position at Ballantine, and in 2006 was tasked to open a sales office in Philadelphia to help grow and manage eastern domestic sales and assist import programs.

In 2008, he returned to California to become a full-time sales representative, including assisting the management of the company’s Wal-Mart division. When Ballantine suffered the effects of the 2009 recession and was forced to close its doors, he joined Mulholland Citrus (in Orange Grove, CA) to help expand its domestic retail presence. In 2013 he was offered and accepted an opportunity at Sunwest. Currently he acquires,

builds, and manages accounts and relationships in excess of \$20 million. His creation of an extensive network in the produce, transportation, and packaging industries enabled him to have a tremendous amount of success at a young age. He has also taken an active role in the export of California Clementines and Murcotts to Australia.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see us find a better way to blend the traditional produce mentality with the current and future direction technology has played in today’s environment. There is a lot to say about getting up early, getting your boots dirty, and picking up the phone. With that said, technology has created a great deal of efficiencies and new ways to present information to the customer that cannot be ignored, and technology has helped keep us “fresh” with the changing consumer.

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

At the age of 22, and only after one year of full-time employment out of college, I was tasked with moving to Philadelphia (alone) to open up an eastern sales office. The goal was to study the current markets, assist in managing retail



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“Don’t get so down on yourself when you have setbacks, and instead realize they are the best learning opportunities.”

— Jon Dominguez,
Citibank Food and Agriculture
US Commercial Banking

accounts, develop new domestic retail relationships, and help manage our winter import program. In addition to the project being a success, I gained an invaluable amount of knowledge and confidence that helped accelerate my sales experience.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

Social media and technology have changed how we go to market. Consumers today are much more inquisitive, more likely to ask questions and do their homework. They want information and they don’t want to wait for it. The companies that can keep up with the demand will be successful. Food safety has also hit an all-time surge. Due to improved science, available information and speed of social media, we are all forced to improve our level of safety and responsibility to our consumers.

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

Packaging and convenience have continued to take over the produce department. Easy-peel mandarins, seedless grapes, cherry tomatoes, berries, pre-cut vegetables, and anything in a bag. If it’s easy to grab and easy to eat, it will have a future in produce.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

How fast certain industries can change. For example, 15 years ago we never really knew what a domestic Clementine was. Now it has become the fastest and most heavily planted citrus tree in the state of California, and some would say cannibalizing the Navel orange market. Table grapes are another example. Less than 15 years ago, the Thompson seedless was the largest green table grape variety in the industry. Today, it is potentially on its way to being extinct from the fresh market and being taken over by new improved varieties. Last, the Great A&P Companies was as well known then

as Google is today and just this year, filed for bankruptcy. Nothing can be taken for granted. It is a very fluid industry, and we must be willing to make changes and keep in touch with what consumers want. If you don’t, you can blink and be left behind.



Jon Dominguez, 35
Vice President
Citibank Food and Agriculture
US Commercial Banking |
Global and National Industries
Fresno, CA

Years in Produce: 13

Hobbies: golfing, hunting, skiing, and spending time with family.

Personal: Married

Motto in life: You miss 100 percent of the shots you don’t take.

Work History: With 13 years in ag banking, Dominguez supports food and agribusiness clients across the entire U.S. His main emphasis is working with clients in the Central Valley and Central Coast of California. He is known as working tirelessly to bring value whether it be crafting lending solutions in Mexico, Brazil, or Peru for cross-border produce grower/packer/shippers, or arranging trade products, international bank accounts and foreign exchange solutions for international ag marketers. Born and raised in Monterey County, he had his first experience in agriculture during high school working for a large artichoke grower on the Central Coast.

After graduating from Fresno State, Dominguez worked for 10 years for a community bank in ag real estate and equipment lending in the Central Valley and eventually the Central Coast area. He returned to school in 2012 to get an MBA and then went to work with the Agribusiness Group at Citibank with responsibility for the Salinas Valley region along with managing relationships across the Western United States. His role today has expanded to support companies in the produce industry with revenues from \$250 million to \$5 billion in sales. His position with Citibank provides him the opportunity to work with clients not only in the U.S. but globally.

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

Don’t get so down on yourself when you have setbacks, and instead realize they are the best learning opportunities.

Q: What advice do you have for someone new to the produce industry?

Network and make friends. No matter what area of the industry you are involved with, the most

important thing is relationships.

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

I see the global connectivity continuing to grow, and I think the technology innovation will have some big breakthroughs that change the industry.

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

Continue to promote technology innovation, women in produce, and recruit from the best Ag schools.



Lucas Dyer, 26
Procurement Manager –
Sysco/Fresh Point Corporate
Sysco/Freshpoint
Houston, TX

Years in Produce: 8

Hobbies: Anything outdoors: soccer, sand volleyball, running marathons, and hiking national parks; volunteering in the Houston Community for the Brighter Bites healthy eating school programs, as well as annually for the Houston Live Stock Show and Rodeo; cooking, big fan of BBQ and grilling.

Personal info: Married

Motto in life: Keep on Keepin’ on

Work History: Dyer’s produce journey began at an early age. Growing up in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, he got his earliest experience working for the family seedless watermelon company, Growers Select Produce. He was fortunate enough to work in a multitude of areas of the business including shipping/receiving, warehouse management and harvest management. He grew up fluent in Spanish and had many opportunities to work at Grower Select Produce’s Mexican operations in Jalisco and Tobasco. Via relationships made as a participant in the PMA Pack Family Career Pathways Program, he was hired by Sysco upon his graduation from Texas A&M, beginning in Dallas, TX, as a Manager in Training with a sales concentration. He then took the position of Pricing and Compliance Manager at Freshpoint Central Florida in Orlando.

Within a year, he was promoted to the role of Multi-Unit Sales Manager, where he oversaw all corporate multi-unit restaurant, hotel, hospital produce sales (\$50 million worth of business) and grew his management skills by supervising a team of 12 sales associates and account representatives. After a three-year stint in Central Florida, he joined the Sysco/Freshpoint Corporate Produce Procurement team in Houston. Currently, his role revolves around the management and negotiation of national procurement contracts for produce items such as asparagus, citrus, and

greenhouse-grown produce from North, Central and South America.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

I began in my family's produce company Growers Select Produce and worked there most of my life and summers during college. While completing my degree in Agribusiness from Texas A&M, I participated in the PMA Pack Family Career Pathways Program. This program gave me first-hand insight into the produce industry by attending the PMA Fresh Summit Convention and providing me industry professional mentors. Through this, I was offered an opportunity to further my produce career in foodservice distribution with Fresh Point/Sysco after I graduated.

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

Patience is an important virtue in the business; things will play out like they need to.

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

Continue to seek out aspiring young professionals who have a passion for food and where it comes from. Our generation is very health-conscious and cares about sustainability. The key is to market the true successes of what our industry does for health, the environment and our community.

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

With the growing concerns of water shortages in major U.S. growing regions and the continued large trends in "local" produce demand, I only see more regional/local produce growth.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

The fact that a handshake still is the preferred way of business for many parties. I love how large yet close to home our industry is.



Hannah Freeman, 37

**Senior Director,
Produce & Floral
Fair Trade USA
Oakland, CA**

Years in Produce: 13

Hobbies: Kiteboarding, fly-fishing, swimming and hiking

Personal: Single

Motto in life: The secret to having it all is knowing you already do.

Work History: Freeman is a leader in the emerging field of sustainable, ethical sourcing.

Having worked 13 years at Fair Trade USA, she partners with some of the world's largest retailers including Costco, Sam's Club, and Whole Foods as well as major grower/shippers including Dole, Calavo, and Oppy to find and support socially and environmentally sustainable supply chains.

She joined Fair Trade USA in 2003 as its new products associate, and was tasked with assessing the viability of several new product categories in Fair Trade. Up to then, the organization was almost exclusively a coffee organization. She explored chocolate and also moved into produce, noting how Fair Trade bananas were successful in Europe.

Over the course of her work at Fair Trade USA, Freeman has ascended the ranks at her organization from entry-level to now the head of a whole department. Since 2011, she's driven her team to grow revenue by 211 percent. Since 2004, she's helped produce producers throughout Latin America earn more than \$25 million in additional Community Development Premiums, which are helping farmers improve their businesses and the lives of their employees. Her team has grown to twelve people spread from Washington State to Costa Rica.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I think there's a real opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. The first is the labor shortage with no easy political solution in sight. The second is the fact there are still pockets — regions, growers, recruiters, foremen — where farm workers aren't treated with the dignity they deserve and where they lack access to the basics in life including sufficient food, potable water, a safe work environment, access to health care, and access to education for their kids. I've seen huge improvements in my tenure in the produce industry, and I'd love to see the industry continue waking up to the economic opportunity inherent in investing in their farmworkers.

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

When I look back at my life, I want to know that people have breathed a little easier thanks to my work; that a farmworker mom had a safe place to leave her kids while she works, that parents didn't have to worry about putting food on the table, that a farmworker dad who doesn't know how to read gets to feel the pride of seeing his kid go to college. I feel grateful knowing that I've had an impact thanks to this work.

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

Value diversity. Take a serious look at how the

industry values and treats women. Diversity is great for the bottom line, as is infusing companies with a greater sense of purpose beyond the bottom line. The younger generation wants to know we're having a positive impact on the world. A paycheck isn't enough anymore.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

Since I have my finger on the pulse of social responsibility, I'd say there's been a sea change in the last couple years, particularly since the LA Times articles on labor issues in Mexico. This has brought more transparency to those growers who are leading with the best practices and those who are lagging behind.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

What's surprised me most lately is how as we get more feedback from farmworkers, we're realizing farm owners and managers really lack information about what their farmworkers are facing. Recruiters and foremen may be up to all sorts of things that the farm management has no idea about. So driving transparency down through the ranks is incredibly important.



Ryan Fukuda, 40

**Regional Director Marketing
Avocados From Mexico
Irving, TX**

Years in Produce: 23

Hobbies: Spending time with family and friends; photography; gardening; cooking

Personal: 2 daughters

Motto in life: Follow your passion. Treat the world like you want to be treated.

Work History: Fukuda's first job in the produce industry, at the age of 17, was as a produce clerk for Gelson's Super Market.

After five years he obtained a retail sales merchandiser position with Ready Pac Foods, retail specialties division. As a retail sales merchandiser, he inherited the 13th place sales route and within three months, took it to seventh. After his first year, he was promoted to Extended Service Program (ESP) retail sales merchandiser and began selling to corporate produce supervisors and directors. He inherited the fifth place territory and within three weeks, took it to first. It remained in first place until he was promoted to retail sales merchandising supervisor in 2002.

In his four years in that role, he initiated processes that helped grow team sales from \$4,000,000 annually in 2002 to \$13,000,000 in 2006. He was promoted to sales manager in 2009. In 2010, he opened his own consultancy

and began helping five different companies with marketing, merchandising, sales and business development. He represented the Avocados from Mexico growers/packers association (APEAM) as well as the avocados from Mexico U.S. importers association (MHAIA). In 2013, when the two associations combined marketing efforts and formed Avocados from Mexico, Inc., Fukuda came on full-time with Avocados from Mexico as the regional director of marketing for the Western U.S. He has spent the last six years growing consumption in 47 states (with Canada coming soon) and has helped position Avocados from Mexico as a leading brand nationwide.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

The moment I walked into the Marina Del Rey Gelson's for the first time when I was 14 years old, I wanted to work for the upscale retailer. When I turned 16, I applied but wasn't hired. When I was 17, I applied again and got the job as a courtesy clerk. Months later, my store manager saw how hard I worked and how hungry I was for additional responsibilities. Management began using me as an apprentice to work various departments such as liquor, dairy, receiving, general merchandise, deli and of course produce. I was promoted to produce in 1993 and my produce career officially began.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see the produce industry position itself as the modern day pharmacy to counteract the highly processed flavor enhanced food products believed to be causing food-related illnesses.

I would also like to see the produce industry create more single and multi serve meal solutions. The bagged salad category has revolutionized produce, allowing consumers to look to the produce department for a quick lunch and/or dinner meal solution. But, there is still so much opportunity to develop convenient single and multi serve meal solution items.

I also think the retail produce industry needs to embrace #2 quality/grade produce and educate and retrain consumers on how "ugly"/non-uniform fruit tastes every bit as good, if not better, and may come at a lower cost. I would like to see the industry create more programs that try to utilize as close to 100 percent of the produce grown.

Last, I would like to see more health research within the produce industry. It's hard to believe that in the U.S., we have just officially discovered within the last decade that avocados are in fact good for us. Meanwhile the Aztecs understood the avocado's health benefits 12,000 years ago.

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

Everything I've learned seemed to come to me at the time I needed to learn it. My career has been a beautiful progression of exposure to different people and job positions. Throughout my produce career, I have served: shoppers, produce managers, store managers, district supervisors, corporate retailers, my sales team, growers, brokers, brands, manufacturers, category managers, exporters, importers and trade organizations. These opportunities of servitude got me to where I am today. In the beginning, I wish I had known to be more patient and understood what my mom, to this day still tells me, "Everything will be okay."

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

The produce industry needs to continue the trend of welcoming and seeking diversity with women and minorities in decision-making positions. We also need to work closer with private and public colleges not offering agriculturally focused majors. Our industry may be missing opportunities with people that may not have a true understanding of the produce industry. Also, produce brands, suppliers, trade organizations, and retailers could increase their presence at job fairs. I participate in PMA's and United Fresh's career pathway programs by mentoring college students. I mentor students assigned to me and emphasize networking to find a job and/or opportunities that they are passionate about. I challenge these students to follow up with potential job opportunities.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

I have been shocked by the lack of access some lower income communities have to fresh produce yet these communities have plenty of access to liquor and/or convenience stores. These food desert communities have a corresponding epidemic of diet-related illnesses. At Avocados from Mexico, we are supporting convenience stores ("C" stores) that offer marketing and merchandising solutions for avocados.



Jason Fung, 34
Director Of Category Development
The Oppenheimer Group
Vancouver, British Columbia

Years in Produce: 8

Hobbies: Sports including hockey, golf, hiking, snowboarding

Motto in life: Work Hard. Play Hard.

Work History: Fung joined The Oppenheimer

Group in 2009 as a category analyst, and was quickly elevated to the role of business analysis team manager. In 2011, he was named marketing manager, overseeing the analytical and creative ingredients of the Oppy go-to-market strategy. Two years later, he was promoted to manager, category development, and in 2014 he was promoted to director of category development. In his current role, Fung seeks opportunities for growth within all Oppy product categories, while leading the company's business analysis initiatives.

Constantly reviewing Oppy's portfolio alongside the demands of the market, he investigates and recommends new source countries, product lines, varieties and growing disciplines (such as Fair Trade Certification) to the company's category and executive teams. He also leads Oppy's growing berry category. Since Fung took over the berry category, it's been the fastest growing category for Oppy with top and bottom lines for the category seeing double-digit growth. The sourcing opportunities have also expanded as the category has entered into new areas around the globe. He holds a diploma in marketing from the British Columbia Institute of Technology, a BA in Economics from the University of Victoria and an MA in Economics from the University of British Columbia.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

After I completed my Masters in Economics, I started in the produce industry as a category analyst for Oppy in our Citrus and Greenhouse categories. I certainly didn't come from a produce background, but quickly fell in love with the complexity and rewards this business has to offer.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I think the most important improvement the industry can hope for is dramatic increased consumption of fruits and vegetables. Continuing to create demand for healthy, nutritious produce helps all of us throughout the supply chain — but most importantly, it helps our grower partners continue to expand their business for years to come.

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

Being a part of some of the fair trade programs for our growers around the world has been an incredible experience. Being able to contribute to the grower communities that not only support Oppy's business, but the produce industry as a whole is deeply rewarding. Seeing the scholarships, hospitals, dental clinics, infrastruc-

ture projects and other things that have been completed with the help of fair trade is an incredibly fulfilling part of my job. There are some incredibly touching stories from the farm level that are humbling.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

I think the biggest changes I've seen over the past eight years have been technological. There have been leaders in technology (like Oppenheimer) and the fruits of that labor are certainly starting to pay off. Technology has also created a platform for the industry to continue to tell our story in new and exciting ways...be it online, through social media or on mobile apps. Couple that with leading-edge technology and quick technological adoption on the growing side of the equation, and it's really changed the landscape in the short time I've been in the industry.

Q: How do you continue your education in the industry?

There are incredible learning opportunities every day in this business. Beyond that, certainly trade shows, and educational programs (like the PMA Emerging Leaders) have created some really great opportunities to learn. I've also been lucky enough to be a part of a few boards, both on the supply and retail side, that have provided phenomenal insights into the broader picture outside of the world of Oppenheimer.



Steve Geer, 37
Senior Customer Service
Markon Cooperative
Salinas, CA

Years in Produce: 11

Hobbies: Playing music, making beer, cooking

Personal: Married; 1 daughter

Motto in life: Balance

Work History: Geer's first job out of college was as a field inspector for Markon. Having graduated as a music business major at Chico state, he started out in the fields to learn the product at harvest point through shipping. He followed the growing season from Yuma to Salinas and back. After two years, he moved to an office position as sales coordinator. Within a year, he moved into a sales manager position, managing such accounts as Ben E Keith.

In 2009, changes in the company resulted in the creation of new positions in customer service support. Geer re-interviewed and solidified a customer service support role and worked his way up to his current position as senior customer support. In this role he is the lead for the Reinhart Foodservice account, overseeing and servicing this major foodservice account

spanning the Midwest and East Coast. He is also known for teaching younger professionals the art of listening, persistence, and diligence, which has made him excel in his current senior customer service role.

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

In my professional life, I have really enjoyed speaking with our vice president of finance, Barb Epperson. She has a wealth of knowledge and is great to bounce ideas off of. My direct supervisor, Rich Ramos is always willing to offer

his wisdom and experience as well.

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

We need to grab the attention of college grads while they are still in college — offering internships that open up opportunities to future grads is a great way to start.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

There have been many changes during the last

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11 years. Automation, such as the automatic Romaine harvesting machine, has cut labor costs. Food safety has become even more paramount to our industry. Social media has made everyone a content provider and all information is instant. You need a social networking presence online and you need to actively find ways to get people to become involved.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

The transition from the Yuma growing area to the Salinas growing area and back. Before starting in the produce industry I couldn't imagine the amount of work and coordination that goes into disassembling an entire plant, hauling it by truck to the new growing region, putting it back together, and having orders shipping without service interruption to the customer base.



Danny Goforth, 28
District Business Manager
Mann Packing
Salinas, CA

Years in produce: 12

Hobbies: Triathlons, camping, cooking, traveling; Meals on Wheels of the Salinas Valley board member; Partners for Peace volunteer.

Motto in life: Don't worry, be happy.

Work History: Goforth has been involved in the produce industry from a young age. Growing up in Central Valley, he was first exposed to the industry through his dad who works in produce sales. His father provided him with a job working on a stone fruit pack line at age 15, where he would spend lunches in the sales office learning about the business. He quickly became fascinated with agriculture, which motivated him to pursue a degree in agricultural business from Cal Poly. After graduation, he accepted a position as a sales coordinator for Colorful Harvest and subsequently transitioned to account manager role within the first year. He was given additional responsibilities as a commodity manager for strawberry and blackberry programs as well. After two years at Colorful Harvest, he decided to pursue a career at Mann Packing as an account executive. In this role, he managed the day-to-day sales for a portfolio of retail, foodservice and wholesale customers. His responsibilities were quickly expanded to include commodity management for Mann Packing's Snap Pea program, the case sales of which increased by 50 percent within the first year. He was recognized with an award for the company's core value of "Vision" for this effort. He was also sponsored by Mann Packing to participate in Leadership Salinas Valley, a 20-week professional development program

he completed last year. Currently in his fourth year at Mann Packing, he has been promoted to the role of district business manager. In this position he is responsible for growing Mann Packing's retail sales in the Western U.S. through current and new customer development. Since accepting this role, he has helped secure several high-profile retail customers for Mann Packing.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

I have been attracted to the produce industry from a very young age, and have seen myself being a part of it for as long as I can remember. I have yet to find another industry that provides the same level of opportunity or has the same sense of community.

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

Be patient, respect is earned. There is a lot of knowledge in this industry, and you don't know what you don't know.

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

I think visibility to high school/college students is key. For many, the perception of the produce industry is centered on being a farmer. When talking to college students, I am often met with surprise when explaining the business and science aspects of the industry. We should strive to engage younger generations and instill the knowledge that the produce industry has many different career paths.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

The industry is becoming more automatized, both in terms of production and business operations. Retailers are now relying on bids rather than relationships when determining who to purchase from, and the ordering process itself has largely become digital. The social media trend has also changed things considerably, as information exchange with consumers is near instantaneous. This can be a positive when used to inform consumers of your products, but also a negative when it comes to misinformation from the media.

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

I would expect at-home produce delivery services to continue their expansion, and that retailers will continue to draw customers in with "fresh." We have been seeing a trend with in-house or supplier-made meal prep items, as well as retailers providing their consumers with a desti-

nation space to eat meals and spend time.



Laura Kornegay Hearn, 32
Marketing & Business
Development Director
Nash Produce
Nashville, NC

Years in Produce: 7

Hobbies: Cooking and learning about new and delicious foods, spending time at the beach, exercise, church and traveling anywhere in the world.

Personal: Married

Motto in life: Taste and see that the LORD is good. How blessed is the person who trusts in him. Psalm 34:8

Work History: Hearn began her produce career almost seven years ago after being approached by someone she knew regarding her current job. As director of marketing and business development, her position entails everything applicable to creating and carrying out the marketing objectives of Nash Produce (a year-round supplier of North Carolina sweet potatoes). She focuses on constructing a cohesive and quality brand name that is displayed throughout everything — including the company's website, packaging, trade shows and services.

Her responsibilities also include interacting with current and potential customers, employees and more than 45 growers. Her main goal is to communicate the values and services Nash Produce offers to differentiate the company from other sweet potato suppliers. Since Hearn began, the company has built a consistent brand in the industry and has seen 20 percent steady annual growth in sales and profits over the past six years.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I see great value in working to find a universal approach to get consumers, farmers, industry professionals and those in governmental/regulatory positions to understand and connect on issues in agriculture and food production. While initiatives are always underway, there is an ever-present need for cohesive understanding from all sides on topics like immigration, food safety and health and nutrition.

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

I am blessed to have many people in my life who are fantastic resources. My husband and family are at the top of the list of people I go to when I need advice on most issues. My boss is someone who always takes time to educate and provide insight when needed. Each day he takes time to come sit in my office and have

genuine conversations and constructive feedback and training. I have also met a group of women through produce industry events that I consider my mentors and great friends. They have decades of experience in the industry and have priceless nuggets of knowledge and advice to share. And lastly, taking time to reflect and pray is something I have found creates the time and space to sort through any decision or matter.

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

I would have loved to tell my 'younger self' to remember that a career is something that is built over many years and not to feel discouraged in the growth process. That middle part is where you learn, try new things and fine-tune your skills. It's how you develop, make incremental moves and really chisel away to build your best self. I am still building my career and each day is more exciting than the last!

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

I am very proud of spending the past seven years in branding and growing Nash Produce as a leading supplier in the sweet potato industry. Through developing new branding initiatives, introducing new products into the market and attending more than 60 trade shows, I can look back and see tangible results. The relationships that were cultivated early on have blossomed into some of our major customers and great professional relationships.

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

Trends in packaging and innovation will only continue. As the world becomes more connected through social media and the Internet, we will see things that were not thought of years ago. The innovation in the fresh-cut sector will continue to explode as well. Fruit and vegetables cut into shapes kids will beg for and that make healthy cooking and eating fun for the whole family — packaging of mixed vegetables not normally paired together, short videos of the farmers/crops in the produce aisles as people shop and other convenient and value-added items.



Tyler Hodges, 29
Fresh Produce Sales
Superior Sales, Inc.
Hudsonville, MI

Years in Produce: 7

Hobbies: Hunting, golfing, running, kayaking, skiing

Work History: Hodges began working in the

industry seven years ago as a sales and logistics manager for a local farm in Michigan. He was responsible for building all sales in-house and developing new programs to accompany the existing.

He was instrumental in growing Todd Greiner Farms from a smaller more limited farm that sold only to local customers into one that now handles a variety of vegetable items and ships nationwide. He introduced multiple new programs to increase output, help achieve better crop rotation and extend season while improving revenue and sustainability. He also created a label seen more consistently across all items on case and item packaging.

Joining Superior this past year, he now manages existing and new accounts throughout the country on several different commodities. He leads the pumpkin and watermelon programs and is jokingly known as the "pumpking" within Superior. He has expanded Superior's line by adding several new items and pack styles to its already extensive offering. He is also involved in developing new programs for the company as well as assisting in logistics.

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

More of the same. Being able to walk thousands of acres of fields growing a variety of items we're responsible for bringing to market in a sustainable manner for our respected farms is a rewarding feeling that will never get old, not to mention challenging.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

Logistics is one of the most challenging issues affecting seasonal programs we cover. The country simply needs more drivers.

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

Being able to work under Randy Vande Gutche, president of Superior Sales and Todd DeWaard, sales manager of Superior Sales is a rare opportunity. Their work ethic is great to be alongside and with their industry knowledge they are very resourceful in countless situations. In the short time I've been here I've already learned a lot from them.

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

I'm proud of where I'm at today with everything I'm representing and responsible for from my start just seven years ago. Being in the produce industry regardless of your position consumes a lot of time so we better make sure we take pride in our work and we're having fun doing it.



Galen Johnson, 30
Business Development
Manager
Sysco Corp/FreshPoint Inc.
Houston, TX

Years in Produce: 7

Hobbies: Running, traveling, snowboarding, live music

Personal info: Single.

Motto in life: Be the best version of yourself.

Work History: After graduating from Northwestern University in 2009 where he studied economics and Spanish, Johnson began his career at FreshPoint Dallas as a pricing analyst. He quickly became acquainted with their systems and organized efforts and streamlined processes related to pricing, generating much higher levels of efficiency. He continued his role at FreshPoint Dallas in pricing, sales, and purchasing support until January 2012 when he was offered a position at Sysco Corporate in Houston as part of its National Procurement team. In 2013, he began working in a more focused role in national sales for FreshPoint and Sysco Produce. He helped create a new sales department structure at the office allowing for a more targeted approach for growing the business. In his current role, he works with several national produce accounts including managing a \$100 million national account, creating new lines of dialogue to better service the customer, gaining the business of a more than 200-unit chain restaurant through a very deep RFP process and working closely with their consulting group. He also secured the business of a more than 300-unit chain restaurant from a competitor through relationship building and cost savings.

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

Within the next five years I would like to continue to develop relationships with the many different groups and professionals within produce. The grower-shipper community is the backbone of our industry, and I see these relationships as the most important part of our success. I'm also hoping to continue growing in my role as a sales leader, and develop new and interesting ways to service our customers. We truly value their business and see ourselves as their most trusted business partner.

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

Slow down. Coming out of college, I was ready to rush through everything, learning as much as I could as quickly as possible. But I've realized there are no shortcuts in produce — things

are complicated and you can't solve everything overnight.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

Technology and education are the most important changes we witnessed. Our suppliers are getting smarter, better, faster at what they do — and safer, which is the most important piece. Food safety is more important than ever, if we want our industry to continue to grow we need to keep this as the top priority for all levels of the industry. Education from the consumer has also helped develop our industry as people want more variety for healthy options in their daily lives, and we've been able to deliver better tasting and fresher products for their needs.

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

We've seen "local produce" go from industry trend to mainstay feature throughout the nation. Currently, imperfect vegetable programs seem to be increasingly important for universities and foodservice operators around the country. I think as our industry continues to grow, there will be fewer "trends" and more long-term viable solutions providing value and nutrition to the customer.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

It's huge. Last year I participated in a leadership class with various members from all over the world, and it was amazing to see just how many different aspects of the produce industry were represented. From seed companies to grower-shippers, retail operators to foodservice distributors, transportation and repacking companies, I was blown away with the size and scope of this entire operation. I'm continuously surprised whenever I attend the latest produce industry events at how many amazing individuals are involved and how we're only getting bigger and better every day.



Amanda Keefer, 36
Director Of Marketing Communications
Produce For Kids
Orlando, FL

Years in Produce: 5

Hobbies: Gardening, dancing, traveling

Personal: Significant other; 2 children

Motto in life: Work smarter, not harder.

Work History: After working in travel publicity for 10 years, Keefer landed a job as public relations and social media manager at Produce for Kids. In this role, she brought to light the importance

of digital "influencers" and developed what is now the Produce for Kids blog. The blog was carefully designed to provide diverse content from relatable, yet influential bloggers who all have different areas of expertise. The bloggers' group carries on its support of Produce for Kids into the digital space on a daily basis.

Over the years, Keefer was able to keep Produce for Kids out in front of social media trends, while continuously emphasizing the importance of taking the time to listen to what families need.

In 2014, she was promoted to director of marketing communications at Produce for Kids after implementing two years of successful hyper-local retail public relations campaigns, doubling Produce for Kids social media presence year-over-year and forging strategic partnerships. In 2015, she successfully coordinated several Produce for Kids' initiatives including a new Produce for Kids Club promotion and digital Power Your Lunchbox campaign for back to school. In addition, she worked closely with the organization's digital marketing manager to launch its first printed cookbook through Amazon.com. Last year she also took the lead in a new partnership with Feeding America where the organization was able to donate more than \$270,000 equating to almost 3 million meals to families in need. She also grew the relationship with Jump with Jill, bringing their rock and roll nutrition show to 50 schools in the Midwest, entertaining and teaching more than 20,000 children how to properly fuel their bodies.

Under Keefer's direction, Produce for Kids' social media following increased by 96 percent to more than 125,000 followers across various social media platforms. Its media impressions for the year garnered 190 million impressions for a media value of \$9 million and website traffic increased by 60 percent.

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

It is my vision to surpass \$10 million in fundraising for children's charities in our retailer's markets as well as develop more ways to introduce fruits and vegetables to children at early ages.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I think the industry could do a better job of telling the story behind the brand or product. Consumers want to understand where the food is coming from. Even if it's not locally grown, there's a story and a history of how it got to your plate.

Q: What do you know now that you wish

you knew when you first started your career?

As many might say, I wish that I knew not to sweat the small stuff. I think that only comes with experience, but having children and 14 years in public relations and marketing has definitely helped open my eyes to this concept.

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

First and foremost, I am proud of the fact I continue to be part of a team that supports children's charities in our retailer's markets across the country and educates families on the importance of healthy eating. It is my passion to make an impact for future generations. I am extremely proud of the efforts I have made and continue to make to keep Produce for Kids ahead of digital and social media trends. We are comprised of a small team and it's not always easy to find the time to stay on top of trends, but it has been important to me and it allows us to be positioned as a thought leader. I am also proud of the conception, implementation and growth of the Produce for Kids blog and the digital influencers who serve as contributors.



Taylor Lemke, 31
Director Of Sales
Sun Belle Inc.
Schiller Park, IL

Years in Produce: 12

Hobbies: Spending time with family and friends; attending Chicago sporting events (loves all the hometown teams) and concerts; dancing and traveling

Personal: Single

Motto in life: What's a challenge today is experience tomorrow.

Work History: Lemke's first "official" produce position was during freshman year of college when Janice Honigberg, president and founder of Sun Belle, offered her a part time job in the accounting department before and after school. Upon graduation with a bachelor's degree in Spanish and Italian, she started full time at Sun Belle in logistics and customer support. Her responsibilities included the coordination of shipping documents from growing areas to final destination for all of the Americas booking and tracking trucks for both domestic and international routes and tracking air and vessel inbounds to Sun Belles' four locations and overseas customers.

After several years, she was offered the opportunity to start Sun Belle's West Coast operation including securing a third party warehouse (with whom the company still works today), assist sales and coordinate freight and inventory. A year later, she was promoted to Sun Belle's

West Coast sales and operations manager. In 2012, she returned to Sun Belle's headquarters and continued her West Coast responsibilities remotely but began taking on some Midwest accounts following the retirement of a colleague. In the fall of 2015, she was promoted to director of sales for Sun Belle's four U.S. locations and still works with several key accounts to maintain customer relevancy in the marketplace.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

It is literally in my DNA because from the time I was a young child, it was the only industry I knew since both my parents worked in produce for Dominick's. My dad (Al Lemke) left Dominick's after a long tenure and began working at Sun Belle. He mentioned to Janice Honigberg that I was seeking a part time job to earn extra money for college and she offered me a part-time job. Every summer throughout college, I would work at Sun Belle and experience another aspect of the business. As a result, prior to college graduation I was exposed to the many internal and external aspects of the industry. I clearly remember overhearing Sun Belle employees talking about 'clamshells,' 'stems' and 'grass' and having no idea of what they meant but becoming even more intrigued with the produce business.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see more education and innovative practices through greater category management at the store level. Consumer shopping trends are continually evolving along with technology and we need to blend the two through thought leadership. Currently, there are many articles in both trade and consumer magazines about the health benefit of berries and other produce items. I would love to see the industry as a whole (shipper and retailer) consistently rally behind this message. The Millennials have drawn more attention to this subject as well. We are in the era of health and knowledge through technology and it needs to be embraced.

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

Development and implementation of mentoring programs for the next generation. Start by highlighting the uniqueness of this industry through increased internship programs and speaking engagements at both the high school and college level. We need to let new talent know that it's not just about farming or sales. It's a cohesive partnership top to bottom (farm to table) with so many incredible opportunities to see and learn every side of the business. I don't necessarily

think outsiders or new talent understands that when coming in. I sure didn't.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

Technology has made it less personal especially with increased usage of email and online ordering. While technology has improved efficiency, the produce industry prides itself on a foundation of personal relationships. I strongly believe, whenever possible, personal interaction makes a world of difference while still respecting the value of our customer's time.



Daniel Lord, 36
Sales/National Accounts
Taylor Farms California
Salinas, CA

Years in Produce: 15

Hobbies: Golfing, scuba diving, running, mountain biking, spending time with family

Personal: Married; 2 children

Motto in life: If a job is worth doing, do it right, or don't do it.

Work History: Lord started as a field inspector with Markon Cooperative inspecting vegetables and berries seasonally between Salinas and Yuma, AZ. After three years in the fields, a purchasing position opened up in the office and he transitioned. He remained in the position purchasing mostly dry produce (bell peppers, cucumbers, squash, melons, citrus and avocados) for eight plus years. Lord then moved into a product manager post where he managed a small team of buyers and field inspectors from Nogales to Florida. To broaden resume, he left Markon for a sales position at Growers Express in Salinas. For two years he worked to establish a customer base selling commodity Salinas vegetables throughout the U.S. and Mexico. For the past six months he has worked for Taylor Farms, currently working in sales for the Taylor Mexico Division. Lord also manages projects for the company's national accounts division.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

I was a psychology major in college with only a vague idea of what I wanted to do after graduation. A friend's father was a strawberry salesman in Watsonville. He thought I could do really well in the industry. I had a couple of interviews that went ok and then found an advertisement in the local Salinas newspaper for Markon. I went in that day for an interview and started the next week.

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

My ability to have success in the extremely varied roles I have performed. Different skill sets are required for different jobs and I am proud to have crossed over with success.

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

Pay attention to everything. Most especially, pay attention to what happens in the fields. The only reason any of this is possible is because of the work in the fields. Understand what happens there and the rest will be much easier.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

A: It still amazes me how far behind the times some of the produce companies continue to be. You see region by region, there are companies who have thrived in an evolving world without evolving much itself. I guess the core of the business has not changed that drastically.



Laura Matar, 39
President, Chief Operating Officer
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.
Toughkenamon, PA

Years in Produce: 20

Hobbies: Spending time with family; photography

Personal info: Married; 2 children

Motto in life: Live life to express not to impress. Don't strive to make your presence noticed, just make your absence felt.

Work History: Matar began her produce career 20 years ago at Country Fresh Mushroom Co. while she was attending college, and since then has worked in many different areas of the business. Her first role was in office administration, and from there she moved on to assisting in quality assurance and filling in with material purchasing. After graduating with her bachelor's degree in business administration with a concentration in marketing management, she joined the sales department, beginning as an inside sales representative and training for an outside sales position, ultimately becoming vice president of sales. After many years in the sales department and doubling sales during a six-year period, she transitioned to the operations side of the business and was named vice president of operations. After two years in the position, she became the president and chief operating officer of Country Fresh this past November.

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

In the next five years, I hope to have achieved growth and success in my current role as presi-

dent and chief operating officer of Country Fresh. I would also love to be able to apply the training and mentoring skills I've learned through the years to help others advance their own careers. I have had the chance to work with great leaders both within Country Fresh and on our board of growers, and this has motivated me to take more of a leadership role in the produce industry. I have participated in the Produce Marketing Association's Emerging Leaders Program, have been a PMA Ambassador for their Career Pathways Program and have participated in PMA Women's Fresh Perspectives Executive Track.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see expansion in leading-edge technology. We should focus on developing innovations in various areas; technology can help us not just with packaging but how we do business. We also need to work on minimizing losses with extending product shelf life.

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

For day-to-day operations and business strategies I always seek the advice of my mentor, Edward Leo, County Fresh's chief executive officer. I am also fortunate to be able to seek guidance from past president, Jim Howard, and members of the Country Fresh executive committee. When I need personal advice I always turn to my husband and family.

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

To attract more talent the industry needs to offer and encourage internships. We should be working with local colleges and universities to develop and expand career development programs for students. And we should also strive to be more visible within the community.

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

One major trend is a continuing increase within the organic industry. I also believe we will see growth in consumer value-added products, as more will continue to be developed to complement today's fast-paced lifestyles.



Carol McMillan, 34
Director Of Information Technology
Naturipe Farms LLC
Salinas, CA

Years in Produce: 13

Hobbies: Traveling, skiing, biking; global outreach programs to support education and development in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo; education improvement in remote area of the Dominican Republic; medical outreach programs in the Dominican Republic; ESL to local immigrants; working with youth through local church programs

Personal: Single

Work History: As the leader of Naturipe's IT team, working from Charlotte, McMillan must foresee the industry's direction, understand the IT needs of every department and business unit in the company, and provide workable solutions to help them remain at the forefront. Overseeing a team of eight, she is challenged to find efficiencies and prioritize projects to exceed the high demands of the industry, especially with respect to food safety and traceability. She is a 2013 graduate of Cultivate, an internal leadership development program and has also completed PMA's High Performance Management Program.

McMillan grew up on a farm in the Dominican Republic. After college she took an accounting position at Global Berry Farms (now Naturipe Farms) in Naples, FL. Less than two years later, she transferred to one of the owners' offices, Michigan Blueberry Growers, in Grand Junction, MI. During her five-year tenure there, she worked hand-in-hand with growers in all the major growing regions from Florida to British Columbia.

She designed and implemented a full traceability program (from the field to the consumer) for both fresh and processed berries, developed a keen awareness of the challenges of the labor force in the produce industry, and worked with the growers to help meet these challenges. In 2010, now armed with a grower/shipper perspective and a vast amount of experience in production and the supply chain, she returned to Naturipe Farms, and has since taken over the leadership of the IT team.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

While our farm in the Dominican Republic was primarily a dairy goat farm, we always planted fresh fruits and vegetables. As a kid, I loved to go out and pick the fresh, organic produce and eat it on the spot. Guavas, cherries, peppers, and tomatoes ripened by the tropical sun were delicious. I was always intrigued by the global business world and therefore obtained a bachelor's degree in International Business Management, Spanish, and Economics. The international aspect of Naturipe Farms is what attracted me to the company and once I got a taste of the produce industry, particularly the berry category, I was unable to part from it.

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

Designing and implementing MBG's traceability program was foundational for my career and it makes me proud to look back and see a product that is still actively maintained, fully in use, and an invaluable asset. Since then, I have been given the incredible opportunity of leading Naturipe Farms' IT department and have been able to enhance decision-making, provide increased food safety, and increase efficiency within the organization.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

Consumers, buyers, and growers have all been transformed by the vast amount of information now available to them. An increasing number of consumers want to know who grows their produce, where it is grown, and how it is grown. They care about harvesters getting paid fair wages, about sustainable growing practices, and about supporting local agriculture. Buyers are more conscious of the different varieties within the berry category and their quality characteristics. They also need not only quality assurance but assurance that the product can be quickly traced back in the event of a recall and that the product was sourced responsibly.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

How much innovation has hit the produce industry. Innovation has come in many areas – new varieties continue being developed and new marketing strategies are introduced that engage an ever-growing segmentation of consumers. Packaging continues to be revolutionized to increase cooling efficiency and decrease waste and mechanical harvesting and packing equipment that helps pick and pack the perfect product continues to be engineered. I also think microbiological sampling has reached an unimaginable level of precision.



Gunnar Moriarty, 39
Customer Group Manager/ Strategic Account Manager
Robinson Fresh
Eden Prairie, MN

Years in Produce: 14

Hobbies: Golfing, coaching, Wisconsin Badgers, volunteering at both sons' school

Personal: Married; 2 sons

Motto in life: It's kinda fun to do the impossible. What's next?

Work History:

Moriarty started with C.H. Robinson (CHR) in 2002 as a strawberry salesman right out of college. After a few years he moved to the vegetable side of the business and supervised the procure-

ment of those items until moving to the logistics department. At the beginning of 2006 he moved into an account management role for the top five customers within his region. He graduated from CHR's KASP program (Key Account Sales Program) in 2010, and in 2011 took a role as a strategic account manager, which moved him to Woodridge, IL. He is currently the customer group manager for the Great Lakes region and oversees all produce customers for the region. He has oversight of all activities with retail and wholesale customers, including but not limited to accountability to P&L management, sales and volume growth, customer engagement, annual budgeting and management of the team. He has sat on and participated in numerous divisional and regional charters with Robinson and is an active member of the annual United Fresh Public Policy Conference in Washington D.C. and was accepted into the PMA Emerging Leaders Program.

is local to their area or from a different country, and why. The consumer has evolved from strictly price and eye appeal to a much more mindful consumer.



Allan S. Napolitano II, 30

Sales And Partnership

Development

Vision Import Group LLC

Hackensack, NJ

Years in Produce: Lifetime

Hobbies: Collecting records, playing music (guitar,

piano, harmonica), winemaking, gardening, volunteering, motorcycle riding, sailing, fishing, hiking, cooking, studying philosophy

Personal: Single

Motto in life: Work hard; play hard.

Work History: Napolitano was born into produce with both his mother's and father's families in the business for as far back as can be traced. His personal start to the business came at a young age sweeping floors and stocking at his grandfather's wholesale shop — Samuel S. Napolitano Inc. in Englewood, NJ. He soon began

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

I was recruited out of college at a job fair. I was fortunate enough to have a few different job offers. My personality and appetite for a fast paced career in an ever-evolving landscape and dynamic industry helped me choose CHR and the produce industry. Now I couldn't imagine being in another industry.

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

Growth. Ever-changing growth. Robinson Fresh has evolved over the past two to three years so my career path may include a position that is not yet created. I envision contributing and impacting our company and possibly the industry at a higher level. I also plan to continue to learn and mentor people.

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

Having the opportunity to lend coaching or advice to an employee/co-worker/industry peer and seeing the "switch" click when the solution comes is gratifying. I am a graduate of the CHR KASP program (Key Account Sales Program) and through that program I have been connected with and mentored some of the brightest up-and-coming talents in the industry.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

Consumers are becoming more and more educated on produce. From the growing practices and food waste to conventional and organics. They want to know if the product they are buying

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accompanying his grandfather to New York's Hunts Point Produce Market and then going by himself. During college he worked in the business on weekends to pay his tuition. After college, he worked for Sony Corporation of America for about four years to gain a different perspective. In 2011, he was lured back to the industry by Vision, starting as a sales associate. He is now a sales manager. Currently, his biggest focus is on partnerships and sales — fitting customer needs with plans to meet those needs and grow their respective businesses.

Since joining Vision, Napolitano has become a foodservice guru and handles significant foodservice accounts. Though Vision served some foodservice clients when he joined the company, Napolitano has developed it into a major client segment. His sales numbers have more than doubled every year since he started working at Vision. He has managed to secure business on a consistent basis and is continually adding value to the company as a team player. He has developed a specific process to follow with respect to order tracking, truck tracking and all the steps through delivery to ensure the highest level of customer service. Napolitano has also been successful in contract pricing to cover certain aspects of his foodservice clients' business.

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

The main person is my father, who has been in the business his whole life. When I need to gain some perspective I go to Hunts Point Produce Market before coming into the office. There are a lot of great people who really know this business at Hunts Point.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see more streamlining in terms of ordering and sales systems. Many companies use a suite of services and a lot of time is spent updating the same information into multiple systems. I would like to see technological improvements made where we can have multiple systems to be able to communicate with one another.

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

To always keep in mind that the customer is number one. That means when things go right or wrong you owe your customers all the information that you have. Share it and let them decide what is best for their business. Support your customers, if they grow, you will too.

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

We will continue to see more demand from consumers who want to know where their product is coming from traceability, etc. The consumers will want to have a closer relationship with the source of their food.

Q: How do you continue your education in the industry?

I attend many trade shows throughout the year, taking the lead in organizing and setting up our displays. On my own I am taking farming courses through Cornell University. For my entire life I have been part of the produce business in almost all aspects except for direct farming. I am working to educate myself more on that aspect of the business with my current line of study.



Daniel Pollak, 39
Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing,
Co-Owner
CarbAmericas Inc.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Years in Produce: 18 years

Hobbies: Playing ice hockey, fishing, fire department, spending time with family

Personal: Married; 3 children

Work History: Pollak grew up in the family business, following in his grandfather, father and brother's footsteps. Growing up, he spent countless days working odd jobs within the company, being groomed to join the company when he graduated college. In 1999, after graduating from Ithaca College, he went directly to work for his father and brother at Hapco Farms. He spent a few months in each warehouse location (Pittsburgh, Atlanta, North Carolina and Florida) learning the business from the ground up. From there, he moved back to Long Island and the corporate headquarters.

In 2004, along with his cousin and father, he moved to Florida and took control of an underutilized import division called CarbAmericas. He has spent the past 12 years, growing and developing this business.

When he began focusing his attention on CarbAmericas, it was doing around \$12 million in sales and losing money every year. Through developing new relationships, starting new growing and processing projects and opening branches in multiple countries, Pollak turned it into a vibrant and profitable company. This year, CarbAmericas is estimated to do more than \$50 million in gross sales. Pollak is also very active in the National Mango Board, where he has served as assistant chair for the mango marketing committee, chairman of the marketing committee and chairman of the Mango Board. He currently serves as ex-officio chair.

“You will have some amazing highs and some deflating lows, but at the end of the day, at the end of your career, you can comfortably say it was a fulfilling life.”

— Daniel Pollak, CarbAmericas Inc.

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

My father, Harvey Pollak. He has been by far the biggest teacher, supporter, and role model anyone could have asked for. He has guided me and let me reach for the stars. In addition I have made friends within the industry (colleagues, friendly competitors and leaders in the industry) that I lean on when I need advice.

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

I wish I kept my mouth shut and listened more. I was an arrogant young kid coming into the business with an 'I can do it better' attitude. Boy, was I wrong. If I could go back and talk to myself coming right out of college, I would tell myself to calm down. I would tell myself to listen and absorb what is going on and to learn the business to become a leader in the industry.

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

I think being voted as chairman of the National Mango Board has been one of the highlights of my career. This important position reinforces the success I have achieved in the industry. I can proudly say I work hard, honorably, ethically, and have had success making a name for myself within this one small aspect of our business. Everyone felt enough confidence in me to put me on the board and then put me in charge of the organization. For this I am humbled.

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

You will have some amazing highs and some deflating lows, but at the end of the day, at the end of your career, you can comfortably say it was a fulfilling life. Take your time and learn every aspect of what your focus is on. There is no blueprint to this industry, Mother Nature doesn't allow that. Confidence and knowledge take years to learn in this industry and if you put the time in, good things will follow.

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

There are a lot of wonderful trends about to happen in this industry, way too many to mention. We will see new packaging and promotional programs ... complete changes in the way produce is marketed in the U.S. With the extensive countries we work with, I am extremely lucky to have traveled all over this world looking at produce. The different ways each and every country markets its produce is unique. I think we in the U.S. will learn from what other countries are doing and adopt some of the best practices out there.



Abby Prior, 36
Vice President/Business Development
BrightFarms, Inc.
New York, NY

Years in Produce: One
Hobbies: Gardening; outdoor activities (jogging, hiking, boating, skiing)
Personal info: Married; 2 children
Motto in life: Always be all in.

Work History: As vice president of business development for BrightFarms, Prior is trailblazing new ground to help meet the ever-growing demand for local produce year-round. She brings extensive experience building and leading teams and an impressive background in marketing, operational strategy, new product launches and business development. Before joining BrightFarms in June 2015, Prior was a marketing executive for Bimbo Bakeries USA (BBU), the largest baking company in the U.S.

Prior to BBU, Prior served as senior manager of creative services at Aramark, where she led promotional development for branded food partners within the foodservice sector. She also worked at Unilever across multiple food categories in both brand management and sales. She holds a marketing and international business degree from Penn State University and an executive MBA from Temple's Fox School of Business. She currently lives in Philadelphia and splits time between BrightFarms' New York City office and its Yardley, PA greenhouse.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

When I joined BrightFarms, I was inspired by our company mission and the opportunity to put my food marketing background to work towards a category and business model I believe in.

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

At BrightFarms, we are committed to altering

the produce supply chain by offering nutritious local produce nationwide. In five years, we will have accomplished that goal.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see more transparency in labeling. Consumers like to see where their food was grown, how it was grown and how it got to their store.

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

How finding a job that gives you purpose and meaning benefits every part of your life.

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

In my first eight months at BrightFarms, we weathered the bankruptcy of our largest customer. We've brought on new customers and learned from the challenge. We are better for it today, and fresh, local produce is alive and growing in Bucks County, PA.



Tim Rabon, 35
Director Of Corporate Strategy & Human Resources
Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc.
Pelion, SC

Years in Produce: 9
Hobbies: Playing music (guitar), water sports, gardening, camping, community volunteer for various children's events, church praise band
Personal: Married; newborn twins
Motto in life: Losers quit when they're tired. Winners quit when they've won.

Work History: With almost nine years industry involvement and five years with his current company, Rabon began his career in the produce industry at a summer job during college and graduated school with James Sease Farms, a local peach farm owned by Mike Keisler. During the seven summers that followed, he would eventually graduate to running his own roadside stand selling peaches, strawberries, corn, squash, and other fruits and vegetables. After obtaining a Masters of Human Resources from the University of South Carolina, he was hired by a computer manufacturing company named Solectron. Over the course of six years he moved up into a corporate human resources role taking him to manufacturing locations all over the U.S., Mexico, and Europe acting as a compliance consultant to the leadership teams at each location.

In 2010, he returned to the produce industry as a senior human resources manager with Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc. The position offered him an opportunity to take the knowledge and

processes of a Fortune 500 company and apply them to a rapidly growing family business that had been a pillar of the community his entire life. Since being with WP Rawl, he has been promoted to the director of corporate strategy and human resources and is now actively involved in setting the strategic direction of the business as well as leading the human resources, health and safety, and training and development groups.

Along with the leadership team at WP Rawl, he established a strategic business plan that helped the company grow sales by more than 35 percent in the past four years, expanded their growing regions to ensure a more than 80 percent self-produced supply chain, and redesigned the company organizational structure to better support the business. He successfully transitioned the company's field operations employee base to a 95 percent H2A population (more than 260 employees) within three years while still maintaining business growth.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

In the near term, our industry is in desperate need for a solution to our labor shortages. I recently read an article that stated almost 10 percent of crops were lost in 2015 due to lack of harvesting workers — 10 percent. That continuing trend could one day result in our industry struggling to sufficiently provide food for our children, our families, and our nation. To that end, I would like to see improvements in the availability of a viable workforce as well as improvements in technology focused on specialty crops that would even reduce the need for hand harvesting.

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

Business, regardless of the industry, is as much about people as it is about the bottomline. Our company and its products are supposed to help improve people's lives. A business, a manager, an individual misses the mark if, at some level, its actions aren't working to make things better for the people it touches. For the longest time I thought a company's sole purpose was to make money but, after being part of a team responsible for executing on a lay off impacting thousands of people, I realized the devastation that can be caused by solely focusing on the bottom line. My decisions now are filtered through the lens of human responsibility — what impact will this decision have on those it effects and are those effects too great to move forward?

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

Learn to distinguish the urgent from the

important. We work with a perishable crop and everything is always urgent (or at least it seems that way). Don't let that constant urgency get in the way of what brings long term value to the company, its employees, and the people it serves.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

There has been a paradigm shift in what is considered a "good" farmer. The old model primarily looked at the quantity and quality of a crop each season and one was considered successful if the number of good crop seasons outweighed the number of bad crop seasons. Today, growers have to navigate a sea of regulations (EPA, FSMA, DOL, state agencies, local agencies, etc.), labor challenges, water and land conservation practices, customer requirements and grow a good crop to be successful. Every year my respect for farmers increases as I see what they have to go through just to get a crop planted and harvested.



Cody Ramsey, 36
Director of Foodservice Sales
Mann Packing Co.
Salinas, CA

Years in Produce: 9

Hobbies: Golfing, crossfit, mountain biking, wakeboarding, surfing, snowboarding, archery

Personal: Married; 3 children

Motto in life: Family First.

Work History: The third generation of a produce family, Ramsey grew up in the industry and around the Mann business. His first official role at Mann Packing was as an appointment scheduler for the shipping warehouse, around nine years ago. He took a short stint away from the industry and came back when a position opened up in Mann's sales office as a sales associate/assistant. Within a few years he was promoted to account executive allowing him more depth in the business — creating and executing contracts, product management, new product rollouts and day trading of commodity products. He was recently promoted to director of foodservice sales. Under his tutelage, US Foods named Mann Produce Vendor of the Year in 2015.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

My family has been involved with the produce industry for more than 50 years and specifically with Mann Packing since the 1970s. I have seen it my whole life, and I am very fortunate to be

a part of it.

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

I generally go to Rick Russo, who is my direct boss. Rick has played a key role in my career. I would also go to my father (Dick Ramsey), Lorri Koster (Mann's chief executive) or my grandfather (Bill Ramsey) depending on the advice I am looking for.

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

Find a good mentor and ask a lot of questions. So much has changed over the years in our industry that it is very beneficial and informative to hear the challenges they have faced and accomplishments they have made.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

It definitely seems to be more complex since I first started. Things such as systems, traceability initiative, food safety and processing methods are all great to have but they were also big changes for the entire industry.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

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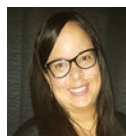
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Q: How do you continue your education in the industry?

I attend PMA every year, both foodservice and retail. It is a goal of mine to further educate myself through various programs that are offered. Things I have done recently outside the industry include the Leadership Salinas Valley Class 31. I also currently sit on the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.



Alondra Rodriguez, 38
Supply Chain Manager
Baldor Specialty Foods
Bronx, NY

Years in Produce: 17

Hobbies: Enjoys work and being a foodie

Personal: Mother of two children

Motto in life: Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Work History:

By age 18, Rodriguez was bartending and already a single mom of two kids. While buying limes for the bar one day, she met someone from a small produce company in Puerto Rico and ended up with a data entry position at that company. Once there, she progressed through many jobs including accounts receivable assistant, accounts receivable manager, office manager and sales manager. Years later, one of her account's customers recommended her for a position in one of the top three companies in Puerto Rico. One year in, she was handling 80 percent of the produce buying and imports — including trucking, ocean, and air. She decided to move to New York in August 2008, yet bad timing (due to the recession) prevented her from landing an industry job and she ended up in a job buying carpets for a year.

After a year, she received an offer from Baldor Specialty Foods, and within a few years, she became senior buyer handling 260 produce items for Baldor. She worked closely with her upper management, sales agents, and vendors to help develop key programs for multiple items Baldor offers and developed and maintained a full line of microgreens. She achieved the overall highest growth for avocados and bananas for Baldor. In 2015, she transitioned from the purchasing department and became the supply chain manager for fresh-cuts.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

The produce business has been my school from the time I fell into it after meeting a lime supplier during my bartending days. From my

time in data entry in Puerto Rico through my U.S. positions, it has been challenging journey. At Baldor, I was the only female and Hispanic buyer on a long established team. Then the fresh-cut position took me from my comfort to a whole new level and learning experience like processing schedules, adding new systems and technology to the mix. As a single mom at 17 from Puerto Rico and no college degree, I have made my career through my jobs, and I'm loving every minute of it.

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

This is not a job — it's a career. People in high school don't say, "I want to be in the produce business," so it gives real value to those who make it.

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

Promote it and give a chance to new ideas. There are still traditional-style businesses around, and that can be discouraging to the young hunger and vision.

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

Small batch specialty items are on the rise, but the highest growth we see is the pre-cut, value-added product.



Shane Rogers, 36
Sales
J&J Family of Farms
Loxahatchee, FL

Years in Produce: 10

Hobbies: Staying fit, traveling, cooking, fishing, camping

Motto in life: If you're gonna be dumb, you gotta be tough.

Work History: Rogers started with Rosemont Farms, in Boca Raton, FL, as a sales coordinator where he assisted in the management of key retail accounts. He also managed one of the company's forward distribution centers. After a year, he stepped up to account manager, becoming the lead on a crucial portfolio of clients. He successfully built sales while overseeing all sales, procurement, logistics, and operational aspects of his client's year round supply chain that included dry vegetables, asparagus, sweet corn, broccoli and value added items.

Three years later, Rosemont was acquired by Robinson Fresh, and Rogers transitioned into a category manager position specifically focused on dry vegetables.

Using Robinson's advantage in technology and logistics he helped strengthen customers'

existing supply chains while building new supply chains for other strategic level and target customers. He also served as a resource and subject matter expert to support his teammate's efforts selling dry vegetables across the country.

In the fall of 2015, he joined J&J in a sales role after the company expanded its grower portfolio and sought out a highly competent sales person to help grow its sales. During his time with J&J he has exceeded expectations, generating and building business with the company's newest and largest customers.

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

I want to help expand our value well beyond what you would typically expect from a grower/shipper. We do a lot more and we want to keep expanding. We offer our customers high-quality produce and other supply chain services that are tailor-made to meet their individual needs. Promotional planning, innovation at the farm and store level, logistics and supply chain reliability are a few of the things that we hope set us apart. And in five years, I hope the industry, both customers and growers, look at us as a valuable partner that creates results.

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

Simple hard work, honesty, ownership and sincerity.

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

I don't think many people even consider working in the produce industry as a career option. And I'm guessing that most people aren't aware that some of these jobs exist. In terms of sales, there are so many pathways you can take. And a lot things for sale don't actually bring value to the world. What's wonderful about the produce industry is that it's an industry with purpose. You're a part of something meaningful and inherently good. The work you do is deeply satisfying. And produce is something that is always there — in good times and bad times. These are messages we should be using to communicate to new and existing talent.

Q: How do you continue your education in the industry?

I am very observant and ask a lot of questions. I feel my best education comes from interacting with people across all aspects of this business — often in casual conversation. Somedays a lesson may come from a CEO or a category manager. And someday an important lesson may come from someone working on our production line or

driving a truck. I often find that the little things I unconsciously hear during the day prove to be most valuable.



Jamie Rolfe, 30
Senior Sourcing Manager
Wal-Mart
Valencia, CA

Years in Produce: 2.5

Hobbies: Attempting the acoustic guitar, reading, hot yoga

Work History: Right out of college with a journalism degree in 2007, Rolfe started at Wal-Mart in an administrative assistant job within Wal-Mart marketing. About a year later, she was promoted to an assistant marketing manager. Wanting to experience more of what Wal-Mart offered, she moved to operations for more than a year. Then she became a buyer for Adult Beverage. She fell in love with California during many trips as the wine and liquor buyer for the West Coast.

When a job opportunity opened in the California Global Food Sourcing she jumped at it. In her current position, she now buys citrus and garlic.

Though most of her professional achievements are confidential to Wal-Mart, as a senior sourcing manager and commodity coordinator, she is accountable for a team of five hubs that all partner to deliver strategic sourcing plans, cross-functional team alignments, program coordination, quality standards and cost negotiations. She is also in charge of “team fun” for her Wal-Mart team, where she organizes events twice a quarter to help the local Salvation Army chapter. She also holds an MBA from the University of Arkansas, which she obtained while working as Wal-Mart’s adult beverage buyer.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

I think my rise from my first position at Wal-Mart is unique, though I didn’t start in produce. After I received my degree in journalism, my dream was to work in marketing and have big ideas that would change the advertising world as we know it. One small problem was they weren’t hiring. I decided to take an entry level job at Wal-Mart to better learn the entry level management positions. I knew if I worked the hardest and became an invaluable asset to the floor, I would be recognized.

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

There are always challenges. The best plan made three months in advance is great but inevitably something will change and you have to adapt to those changes.

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

How growers want to work with Wal-Mart. After a season, we gather corrections of errors from all teams and suppliers. I love to get feedback on how to make the next season better. It really motivates me as a sourcing manager when suppliers/growers say they appreciate what we do for them and the customer. It makes me appreciate my job and my work even more.

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

Talk to customers and find out what their needs or wants are in produce. As long as your goal continues to focus on the customer, you won’t go wrong.

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

The way people eat has changed so much and continues to evolve. Millennials are changing the way we eat. They want their food healthier, fresher and to know where it is sourced. I think as a retailer we have to continue to partner with our suppliers on getting that information to the customer effectively. I would love customers to know where their food is grown and the work that is put into getting it from farm to table.



Jose Rossignoli, 38
General Manager,
Tropical Category
Robinson Fresh /
C.H. Robinson
Eden Prairie, MN

Years in Produce: 12

Personal: Married; 2 daughters

Motto in life: Balanced Success

Work History: Rossignoli’s expertise in the produce industry includes retail business development, financial planning, and grower development, with a strong background and passion for tropicals. He is a graduate of the University of Florida’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, where he obtained his Bachelor in Science degree in 2003 and Master of Agribusiness degree with a minor in International Development in 2004. Immediately after, he joined Brooks Tropicals as a financial analyst where he spearheaded the development of forecasting models for tropical commodities. His ability to work with growers in advance-planning with a high focus on retail sales solutions led him to serve as Director of National Sales and later as Vice President Of Sales and Marketing for Brooks Tropicals.

After a successful career at Brooks Tropicals, Rossignoli served as vice president of sales and

sourcing for Colorful Harvest based out of Salinas, CA. He joined Robinson Fresh in July 2012 and was promoted to general manager of Robinson Fresh’s Tropical category in January 2014. In this global role, he leads the overall direction, supply plan and investment strategy of the tropical category. Recently, he has been able to expand his role to include management of all Latin American grower development and he is working to build multiple category solutions for customers in North America, Europe, and Asia.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

I was introduced to Pal Brooks, the president and owner of Brooks Tropicals, a semester before completing my MBA program at the University of Florida. There was something singular about this opportunity: He wasn’t only looking for an employee, but an apprentice. I wasn’t only looking for a job, but a mentor. I joined his organization with a focus on the financial arena, but slowly gravitated to the sales and marketing aspect of the operation under his leadership. Fantastic experience.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see Congress pass a comprehensive immigration reform that addresses the labor needs of our industry. I would also like the industry to come together and work toward a concise definition of social certification programs. From a sales and marketing standpoint, I would like to see a push to drive retailer and consumers towards specs that are more focused on flavor and eating experience instead of cosmetic appearance.

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

Collaborating as a consultant to the USAID’s Farmers-to-Farmers program and spending three weeks working with local farmers in Nigeria, Africa.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

Food safety is in our minds every day in every project. It has changed the way we do business and how we develop supply chain solutions globally. Also, the definition of “grower” has changed. There was a point where the definition of grower was correlated to land ownership and cost effectiveness, whereas I see customer groups moving to a definition that is closer to “consistent supply and efficient supply chain.” It has been an interesting evolution from a definition standpoint and one customers continue to

embrace. Last is global expansion. The need to serve the entire harvest and successfully market the different crop profiles forces organizations to find alternate, emerging markets (Asia and Europe as examples).



Matt Roy, 34
Director, Category
Operations – Produce
US Foods
Rosemont, IL

Years in Produce: 19

Hobbies: Working on the yard; playing with his kids; college football

Personal info: Married; 2 children

Work History:

After delivering the afternoon newspaper for several years, Roy landed a job as a sacker at a grocery store and unknowingly took the first step into produce career. His passion and work ethic were recognized and he became an assistant produce manager during his senior year of high school. From there, he went on to run three retail produce departments including the largest in size, largest in volume and opened up a new store from the ground up.

After nearly 10 years in retail, he decided to broaden his experience and took a job as produce buyer for a family-owned foodservice distributor and soon after became director of produce. After the company was purchased, Roy went to work for a large retail wholesaler. He spent 2.5 years there as a buyer and a category manager. He then joined US Foods as a sourcing manager. After a few months in the sourcing role, he moved into the West region category manager for produce, overseeing all the produce operations for eight West Coast-based facilities. In October of 2015, he moved into his current position.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

My first job was sacking groceries. Even at a young age, I found myself with a lot of passion and commitment related to working in a grocery store. I almost immediately got involved with sacking competitions (familiar to those in retail) and have a couple of trophies and a newspaper article to show for it. After helping out stocking produce a few times I got an opportunity move to produce completely for a \$1 more an hour which was pretty exciting to a high school kid. I almost immediately felt at home in produce and probably drove my first manager crazy with all the questions and ideas I threw at him.

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

Be prepared for a lot of hard work; and being rewarded with lifelong relationships and very fulfilling work.

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

Leverage science and technology to make the industry attractive for career seekers.

Q: How do you continue your education in the industry?

I went back to college to get my bachelor's

degree and graduated in 2014. I continue to speak and moderate on panels, and attend multiple trade shows annually. Currently, I participate on one committee as part of the Southeast Produce Council. I'm looking to be more involved on additional committees and get involved with boards.



Rachelle Schulken, 32
Marketing Events Manager
Renaissance Food Group
Rancho Cordova, CA



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Years in Produce: 7 years

Hobbies: Running (half and full marathons); going for walks with husband and dog; Orangetheory Fitness; traveling; baseball (go Giants) and football (go Packers); golfing; trying new restaurants; wine tasting.

Personal: Married

Motto in life: “Be Ambitious. Do well; live well; eat well. Keep your priorities straight, your mind right, and your head up. Do what you love. Love what you do.”

Work History: Schulken began her career in the produce industry as a customer service representative (CSR) with Renaissance Food Group, responsible for obtaining and manually keying in customer orders with complete accuracy. As a CSR, she was invited to attend a customer function. A few months later, she was invited to PMA. As she celebrated her first anniversary with the company, she interviewed and was chosen for a position as a marketing coordinator — a newly created position. As marketing coordinator, she organized large trade shows in conjunction with the vice president of sales and marketing, as well as attended the shows.

After about a year in the position, she took a number of graphic design classes, and began creating sales and marketing promotional material, POS material, and began custom-designed, in-house labels for products. Over the next year, her role continued to evolve, and she began managing sales meetings at company production facilities around the country and took on more small, regional show management. In 2013, she was promoted to marketing events manager, incorporating trade show and sales meeting management and corporate event management. She also began to take on a public relations role, as well. In 2015, she worked with a salad dressing company to create Crop Circles, a pop-up style farmers market that delivers fresh, free produce to underserved, “food desert” communities. She has also began managing RFG’s social media presence.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see continued industry improvements in “women in produce” educational sessions, seminars, and recognition events. The industry has taken steps toward recognizing women; however, I feel more emphasis can be placed on educating and empowering women in this highly male-driven industry.

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

The produce industry needs to think and act like a Millennial. Technology is here to stay, so

it needs to be utilized to educate people of my generation on both the importance and potential within this industry. In talking to industry colleagues from older generations, it seems as though many of them followed in the footsteps of a family member or mentor who worked in the produce industry. Today, my generation isn’t the type to simply “follow in the footsteps of ...”, so the industry needs to enhance education at the pre-college, college, and post-college levels using outlets such as social media and websites, highlighting that the produce industry today isn’t the slow-paced lifestyle it once was.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

The organic, local, non-GMO consumer-driven push has changed the industry in a big way. Consumers used to purchase produce because it was healthy and delicious, but now, consumers choose what produce to eat based on where it was grown and what chemicals or genetic modifications were (or weren’t) used in the growing of the produce. This shift has also created a boom in organic farming. Grocery store produce departments see more space dedicated to organic and local produce; another effect of this change. The non-GMO push has changed the industry so much, in fact, that legislation has been introduced to disclose products that have undergone genetic mutation. This trending change is only beginning.

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

A push toward transparency in sustainability and recycling, especially in convenience/pre-packaged goods. Many people purchase convenience items; however, with the Millennial generation and Gen Z, these young consumers will want peace-of-mind that the packaging their items are being made in can be recycled, composted, and was made from planet-friendly materials. These generations will also want to know that the workers growing, picking, and packing their food are treated equally and humanely with fair pay wages, labor practices, and humane working conditions. With the need to feel good about what they’re purchasing, Millennials and Gen Z are driving this next big trend.

Q: How do you continue your education in the industry?

I attend trade shows where I educate myself by listening in on discussions that our sales team has with current and potential customers, I attend educational sessions and workshops/seminars at the shows when my schedule permits, and I attend show-sponsored networking events, such

as Women in Business receptions, leadership receptions, and pre-show golf tournaments to maintain current relationships. I also recently attended the United Fresh Midwinter Leadership Meetings, where I participated in sessions and well as managed events for the association’s board members. I sit on many committees with the Fresh Produce and Floral Council (NorCal committee and sub-committee, SoCal Golf committee, Dinner/Dance committee, and the Apprentice committee).



Heath Shoup, 31
Sales Manager
West Pak Avocado Inc.
Murrieta, CA

Years in Produce: 14

Hobbies: Professional off-road racer, avid snowboarder, boating, and being with family and friends.

Personal: Married; 1 son

Motto in life: A family that plays together stays together. It’s what you do that makes you who you are and how you project that to others that makes you memorable.

Work History: He started work full-time in West Pak’s packing house in Temecula, CA, the day after graduating high school at the age of 18. He was the only male on an all women hand-packing avocado line. During his time on the packing house line, he was given the opportunity to go to college and achieve his business management degree. After spending a year on the grading table, he began running the company’s bagging operation for key customers including Wal-Mart, Sam’s Club, and Costco. He then began to learn and operate the precondition avocado program. After two years operating the precondition program, shipping and receiving, he volunteered to fill a need as a commercial driver and drove a semi-truck for West Pak Avocado for two years.

As a result of his development of relationships with key growers and managers during this driver position, Shoup moved into West Pak’s field operation and sourced California Avocados for the company. In the off season, he took on the role of sales assistant for the sales team while working with the field department and helped the sales team with order processing, customer calls, freight and managed a few customer accounts. After working with the field department and as the Sales Assistant for two years, he transitioned into a full time sales person. Within two years of being in the sales department, he became the lead sales person generating 30 percent of West Pak’s total business. During his third year in sales, he additionally took on the role and responsibility of logistics manager

and grew the company's logistics program 10 percent year over year in revenue. One year ago, he took on the position of sales manager and is now tasked with helping the current sales force grow avocado sales.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

I grew up on 25 acres of avocados in Fallbrook, CA, and attend some of the first PMA's with my father, Randy Shoup. On the weekends as a young kid, I would beg my father to come into work with him to see the weekend packing in the avocado packing house. He would let me go on ride-alongs with the field engineers to see the growers and be around all aspects of West Pak Avocado. My father saw my fascination for the industry and even brought me along on 2 a.m. calls to the Los Angeles Produce Market to see his customers.

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

I turn to those who have a lot of experience in our industry. I highly respect and learn from people like Bob Harada from Stater Brothers, Roger Schroeder from Stater Brothers, Chad Miller from Sprouts Farmers Markets, Cory Oliver from Sprouts Farmers Markets, Melissa Heinrich

from Wal-Mart, Emiliano Escobedo from the Hass Avocado Board, Jan Delyser from the California Avocado Commission and Doug Meyer from West Pak Avocado.

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

I am most proud of having the opportunity to work in all areas of West Pak Avocado. It has given me a real understanding of all the departments in our company. It has helped me cultivate relationships in all departments so I can be there for our teams. Developing our teams and knowing I have helped someone develop into a successful asset gives me a real sense of accomplishment.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

The biggest changes I constantly see in the produce industry include food safety, packaging and technology. Food safety is constantly being improved as there is a greater demand for strong food safety regulations and transparency within our industry. Packaging is becoming more sustainable and user-friendly with new ideas and new ways to market our products. Technology is playing a key role in ensuring a more perfect

product for the consumer to guarantee a good eating experience every time.

Q: How do you continue your education in the industry?

I continue my education in the industry by participating in as many trade shows as possible, staying up on all trade publications and being involved in different organizations like the Fresh Produce and Floral Council. I am also very involved in the different avocado associations including Avocados From Mexico and California Avocado Commission, and I hold an alternate position on the Hass Avocado Board. I also joined and completed the PMA Emerging Leaders Program.



Fernando Soberanes, 29
**Grower Relations/
Lead Sales Associate**
The Giumarra Companies
Los Angeles, CA

Years in Produce: 7

Hobbies: Sports (football and basketball), live music, acoustic guitar, outdoor activities, and spending as much time as possible enjoying the Southern California scenery

Personal: Single



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Motto in life: “Wisdom equals knowledge plus courage. You have to not only know what to do and when to do it, but you have to also be brave enough to follow through.” — Jarod Kintz

Work History: After graduating from Syracuse University, and working within various fields of the business world, Soberanes was offered an entry-level position in February 2010 with The Giumarra Companies. With his lack of experience handling fruit at the time, his first responsibility was literally learning how to apply PLU stickers to fruit — by hand. He then was given additional opportunities to work with every sector of the company beginning with Quality Control. He supervised the operations and logistics side of the business where he helped streamline and error-proof processes to become more efficient. Soon after, he was offered a sales position to focus on customers’ individual needs. About three years into his tenure, he noticed an opportunity to improve communication with Spanish-speaking only growers.

Sobranes has been selected to be part of Giumarra’s brand ambassador team. As a brand ambassador, he does his best to promote and instill The Giumarra Companies core values of “Above and Beyond Quality Service.” Today, he practices those values, improves division operations, creates a more efficient inventory management system, and streamlines communication between warehousing, sales, transportation, and accounting. He also developed an environment where growers can freely communicate in their native language and helped eliminate any misunderstandings, cultural differences, and steadfastly improved the grower and receiver relationships.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

After working temporary jobs in the San Diego area, I was looking for an opportunity that would challenge and push me to grow as a business professional. After developing the personal connections with the growers and their families at Giumarra, my position with the company became more than just a job. It became very clear the produce industry was my career. I plan on being part of this exciting business for a very long period of time. It is truly the most satisfying feeling to successfully plan, create, and execute a solution for our customers, our grower’s harvest, and share their hard work with every consumer so they too can enjoy the fruits of their labor.

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

The fact that we are not only trading produce but more importantly we are trading trust. Trust

between the grower and the receiver, between the sales person and the buyer, even between our warehouse, transportation, sales. Trust is what makes this deal work.

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

Given how important trust is for the business, being honest and true to yourself will be key in gaining trust from both customers and growers. Patience is crucial, because experience is the one factor that truly makes an individual more knowledgeable about the business.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

Within our organization I witnessed several IT advances. This includes new operating systems and cloud-based software technology which helps both sellers and growers operate more efficiently from anywhere around the world. This same technology is being applied literally into the ground with more efficient use for farming applications, including irrigation applications.

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

Online grocery shopping. This idea/business has been around for over 10 years or so, but with one major changing trend, shopping tendencies. This is what I see as the next big change making our business more viable. The change coming actually started with the consumer. From the greatest generation to the early Baby Boomer generation, they did the shopping and wanted to personally see what they are actually buying. Now, I see the generations from late baby boomers through the Millennials, they are the new online consumers.



Ryan Thomas, 28
Customer Service
Markon Cooperative, Inc.
Salinas, CA

Years in Produce: 3

Hobbies: Watching baseball, playing tennis, board games, Life Group at Calvary Monterey Church

Personal: Married

Motto in Life: Colossians 3:23 - “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”

Work History: Prior to his employment with Markon, Thomas successfully started, maintained, and eventually sold a business services company. The company operated for seven years under his leadership, and was eventually acquired by a multinational corporation in 2012.

He moved to Monterey in effort to take some time off from his career and coach baseball at a

local high school, with the intention of eventually moving back down to the Southern California area, but stayed after meeting his future wife and took a job at Markon. During his first six months as a customer support specialist for the company, he was responsible for handling product quality concerns, assisting with customer logistics, and backing up the Markon customer service team.

Currently, he manages five Broadline Food Service Distribution Center accounts by establishing and maintaining effective channels of communication between customers, suppliers, and co-workers. He provides day-to-day customer support for these accounts, including order entries and sales confirmations, tracking unit volumes, and handling all issues from the time an order is placed until it arrives to the customer. He is known as being intuitive, and for his adaptability and “get-it-done” attitude. He has been nominated as a CPMA Passion for Produce candidate in 2015.

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

The biggest challenge and opportunity we face is keeping consistent and effective communication with our customers. Mother Nature, among other things, can throw a wrench into maintaining the quality and standards expected from end users. At Markon, we strive to be ahead of the curve, updating foodservice teams of what to expect before product boards a truck heading to their distribution center. This daily challenge allows us to be pro-active, ensuring our customers are receiving the best quality produce available, at the best value, when they want it.

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

One of the larger recent trends that will continue to be a driving force is the consumer’s demand for transparency. Customers are demanding complete transparency regarding the food items they are consuming and the companies supplying them. We are also starting to see an emphasis on produce taking over plates as the new centerplate focus over protein. Chefs are finding ways to create new dishes that make the produce the star of the plate.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

As technology continues to advance, I am anxious to see changes implemented in the next five to 10 years that will improve efficiencies with harvesting, loading, and increasing product shelf life. Advancements in these categories would benefit laborers, logistics companies, distributors, and consumers to name a few.

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

My generation is concerned with making an impact: doing work that serves a purpose. To attract and retain young talent, the industry needs to keep in mind that young workers find fulfillment in serving for the greater good. Another challenge will be in retaining workers for the long-term, as members of my generation tend to move between multiple industries and careers throughout their working lives.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

In the course of my tenure within the industry, we have seen several changes: An increased focus on California water supply and conservation; increase in value-added product offerings; continued attention to Food Safety and consumer demand for product transparency; advances in technology allowing more items to be harvested automatically (leaf items and celery, for example); and more transportation regulations to improve driver safety.



Alejandro Toro, 36
President
Vega Produce LLC
Miami, FL

Years in Produce: 8

Hobbies: Kite surfing, wakeboarding

Motto in Life: What you allow is what will continue.

Work History: Toro's first job in the U.S. was at Bloomsxpress Inc. in Miami, FL, where he started as a sales representative and worked up to sales manager. During his time there, he serviced large retail chain stores and gained invaluable experience in logistics and customer service. He then moved to an opportunity as part of a partnership for a financial factoring company called Andeano Financial and gained exposure with many growers and packers in Central America. However, when the recession hit, the company was forced to close its operations.

He partnered with one of the growers he helped finance at Andeano and founded Vega Produce in 2009. Vega quickly reached \$5 million in sales within the first six months of business and was able to establish a steady and consistent supply chain of ethnic produce in a matter of months — no small feat given the economic climate of the time.

For close to six years, Toro developed, managed, and grown Vega's sales by double digit figures for each of those years. With his team of diverse professionals, he created one of the largest importers of Asian vegetables into the U.S. Vega has become consistently the



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Now, as president of Vega, it is his primary responsibility to develop and solidify the supply chain and take charge of the overall direction and strategic approach for the company. However, sales remains in his blood, and he stays involved in the day-to-day operations in selling Vega's products. Toro is also known for his concern for his growing communities. Each year he loads a container of toys, food, and miscellaneous product to give away to the children of Guatemala whose parents work at Vega's growing operations there.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

Before I was fully invested in the produce world, I worked for a factoring company providing financial services to many Latin American companies, including export growers. I learned the farming and agricultural side of the produce industry as I helped facilitate the financing of their operations. My network grew and had the pleasure of partnering up with many of them as I founded Vega Produce. I saw a great opportunity to help connect growers and the massive produce markets in the U.S. in a transparent and open approach, and that vision became a reality in 2009 when I received my first produce container from Honduras.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

I would like to see a balance between grower needs and customers as well as a stronger focus on educating and providing benefits and healthier eating habits to the end user. Also, many consumers do not see how diverse the supply chain is and the many families involved in making it happen. Creating social awareness to help provide support to those in need would be amazing.

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

Focus on being the best in one category or product. We made attempts to enter as many categories and commodities as possible, but that did not strengthen our company's position. Finding your strength and making it better is much more effective than finding your weakness and trying to change it.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

What has really shocked me is how many produce firms out there haven't embraced technology in their operations and keep it old school.

I believe the industry still has a lot of traction to gain. I'm staying current with new technologies and practices.



Gina A. Widjaja, 37
Director of Marketing and Communications
Hass Avocado Board
Mission Viejo, CA

Years in Produce: 11

Hobbies: Travel, food photography, volunteering, foreign language, salsa dancing, cooking, yoga
Personal: Married

Motto in Life: Do what you love and believe in. It feels less like work when passion is involved.

Work History: Widjaja started out as a project manager at Sunkist Growers in 2005 where she was assisting the vice president of marketing with the consumer communications program. Three years later, she was promoted to advertising and PR manager where she managed the global integrated marketing and communications program. In this position, she directed the launch of a new mobile website and an app offering ways to track personal diet goals, as well as established Sunkist's social media presence.

In addition, she expanded the web presence by creating four country-specific sites for Sunkist Asia. She was the first to have been selected from Sunkist Growers to participate in the Produce Marketing Association's inaugural Emerging Leaders program in 2011.

In Spring 2012, she was a recipient of the Packer's Women in Produce for her accomplishments in implementing the digital marketing program successfully to bridge the communications gap between consumers and the Sunkist brand.

In fall 2012, Widjaja took an opportunity with the Hass Avocado Board (HAB) in developing and launching their nutrition platform. As marketing and communications manager, she worked with HAB's agency partners to implement the marketing strategy and coordinated its programs targeting health professionals, consumers, and trade.

With passion and tenacity in achieving not only her marketing goals but those of the Board in promoting Hass avocado consumption in the U.S., she was recently promoted to director of marketing and communications in December 2015.

Q: How did you begin working in the produce industry?

Even though I was a business major in an ag school, I didn't start working in produce until six years after I had graduated. I was doing marketing for various industries, namely arts

and culture, kitchen textiles and residential construction. Later, I decided to take a sabbatical leave to improve my skills and pursue studying Spanish in Spain. When I returned, I worked with a recruiter who told me there was an opening for a marketing project manager at Sunkist Growers. Growing up in Indonesia, Sunkist was so popular that the name was used to call a Navel orange variety, such as how Kleenex is synonymous with tissue in the U.S.

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

I hope to be able to grow in my position and increase the awareness consumers have of avocado nutrition benefits even more than what we are able to do today. With more research in place, I hope to increase the U.S. per capita consumption of avocados to 10 pounds. We are at 6.7 pounds today and 4.8 pounds when I started a few years ago.

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

I'm proud to have developed and executed a strong nutrition marketing program targeting health professionals and their clients as well as the food and wellness-involved consumers that led to having "good for you" and "nutritional benefits" as primary reasons for purchasing avocados. This effort has also contributed to the two-point increase of the per capita consumption of Hass avocados in the U.S. since I first started in 2012.

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

There will be more health-focused consumers who seek nutrition information about what they're eating. Organic products are going to be even more widely available and affordable. Ugly fruits are going to be the cool fruits. And more consumers, particularly the Millennials, will want to see transparency about the companies and products.

Q: What has shocked or surprised you about the produce industry?

I think the produce industry is finally getting recognized as consumers are making changes to their eating habits and the foodservice industry is making fruits and vegetables "cool". Now you walk into a gastropub and you'll see Brussels sprouts and cauliflower on the menu consistently

We have a lot of produce ambassadors out there, be it consumers, bloggers, health professionals, the media, USDA MyPlate, or foodservice operators who contribute to this growth.

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Price Chopper's Local Hub Model Sets Stage For Sourcing Safer Produce



Groundbreaking hub system standardizes and mitigates food safety and quality control issues, and expands local supply.

BY MIRA SLOTT

When *PRODUCE BUSINESS* recognized Price Chopper's Market 32 with its coveted Retail Sustainability Award in our May issue, we highlighted numerous ways the chain is reinventing sustainability. However, one uniquely intriguing and potentially industry-altering program warranted a more in-depth exploration.

"This is what the future of local produce sourcing looks like — a sophisticated, go-to-market architecture to ensure GAP-certified, quality-controlled product; a model not just for our company, but for the entire industry," says Joe Berman, manager of corporate social responsibility.

Rick Reed, vice president of produce and floral merchandising, championed this innovative system, a dramatic departure from the industry norm, where local farmers (many of whom are not GAP-certified) get access to supermarket produce departments without proper food safety oversight.

Countering this phenomenon, says Reed, Price Chopper has galvanized a network of food hubs that are already food-safety certified and many operate under far stricter standards than legally required.

"All hubs are at minimum GAP-certified," says Tyler Blance, marketing program coordinator - local. "Some are also SQF-certified, and others are in the process of getting SQF-cer-

tified. Price Chopper encourages enhanced food safety certifications and is working with each hub to continually raise food safety processes to the next level."

Each of the hubs has inspectors who act as the gatekeepers for the chain. "We leveraged those state-of-the-art facilities as hubs for GAP-certified local growers to bring their products," says Reed. "In turn, Price Chopper backhauls each hub's collective volume to its main distribution center. Here the products, which have been consolidated from various growing areas, are inspected again more intensely for quality and safety, and consistency. Then from the DC, the inspected products can be distributed more widely and strategically to meet demand for local produce across the chain's entire network."

PRODUCE BUSINESS' editors recently met with the chain's executives at the Schenectady, NY, headquarters and engaged in dynamic discussions with Reed and other stakeholders on the genesis of the program, its transformative impact, and why it behooves other retailers and companies down the supply chain to determine whether the model fits with their own operations.

"I've been in this business for over 30 years, and this was the biggest and most transformative project I have ever worked on," says Reed.

In its ideal, the system is a collective win: increasing availability and sales of



safe, quality, local produce to a broader swath of customers, opening new doors for local growers, improving logistics efficiencies, and reducing food miles as well as carbon footprints.

As is often the case in undertaking a sea change, there was some push back. Not all growers were enthusiastic about getting on board for various reasons, but thanks to the chain's well-honed supplier relationships, there is an overwhelming willingness to partner through the learning curves in implementation, says Reed. In kind, Price Chopper is actively engaging in robust back-and-forth feedback with growers to resolve glitches and tweak the system.

HUB SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The local hub process is managed through a sophisticated website portal (growershub.com), which allows real-time interaction between

“This is what the future of local produce sourcing looks like — a sophisticated, go-to-market architecture to ensure GAP-certified, quality-controlled product; a model not just for our company, but for the entire industry.”

— Joe Berman, Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility for Market 32

the growers and Price Chopper. “We put out there, ‘Here is what our demand is on a weekly basis; here is what our demand is going to be for a promotion two to three weeks out. ...’ The growers respond, ‘Based on seasonality, this is what we think our yield is going to be; what our crop is going to be.’ We come to a lid price we all agree is right for the product based on availability, demand, etc.,” says Reed.

The upside to this dynamic interaction with a vast grower base is Price Chopper is able to

find more volume, and more locally grown, says Reed. “The integrated system allows for distribution of a greater range of local produce items to more stores and more regions.”

Price Chopper's six hub locations are: Pine Island, NY (A Gurda Produce); Syracuse, NY (Mento Produce); Albany, NY (Capital City Produce); White River Junction, VT (Upper Valley Produce); Burlington, VT (Reinhart Foodservice); and Hadley, MA (Plainville Farm).

■ HUB IDEA STARTED IN VERMONT

Price Chopper's hub concept emerged around five years ago as a clever solution to a local grower distribution challenge in Vermont. Its profound benefits to all of Price Chopper's stores became clear and proliferated, explains Tony Pellegrino, a long-time supplier to Price Chopper through his own company, Pellegrino Sales and Marketing in Troy, NY.

“It was really Rick's vision,” says Pellegrino, crediting Reed, vice president of produce and floral merchandising at Price Chopper for driving expansion chain-wide. Pellegrino is an owner of, and early partner in developing, the hub system's innovative web portal, GrowersHub.com.

This interactive sourcing platform connects small regional growers to larger chain-store buyers. “Growers can drop off large orders at a hub location to be picked up by the supermarket's backhaul logistics,” instructs the website, explaining that GrowersHub allows the buyer to access 30 plus farms in the Northeast region in one buying session.

Price Chopper was a huge supporter of Vermont Hydroponic, a smaller tomato grower in Florence, VT, represented by Pellegrino. “We needed to figure out a logistics system to get product from Vermont to Price Chopper,” according to Pellegrino.

An impetus connects back to Neil Golub's desire to push boundaries with innovative



ideas tested in the chain's Market Bistro store concept, where a spectacular living display of Vermont Hydroponic tomatoes grows in a fully operating greenhouse within the produce department.

“Everyone was involved in the planning stages, from Neil Golub (executive chairman of the board at Price Chopper) to Rick Reed, all the way down to the buyer. “True entrepreneurship at its best,” says Pellegrino.

At the same time, Price Chopper wanted to source more local product from Vermont, and at the heart of the season it was hard for the chain to deal with these disparate small growers. The first hub spot was born.

“Price Chopper was one of the first retailers in our area enacting minimum GAP-certification requirements, and we worked with some of the growers to get that done. We also monitor the certi-



cations to ensure they are updated each year,” says Pellegrino, pointing out, “We found a couple of the growers didn't have those GAP updates after the first year.”

The farmer's job is to move all their produce, but Price Chopper wanted to make sure it was getting the best quality product.

“Some farmers were picking product fresh in the morning, but delivering it in unrefrigerated trucks hours later. When corn is packed in mesh bags, it holds heat, loses the sugar content and flavor, and rapidly degrades; so the quicker you cool it down, the more prolonged shelf life, quality and food safety,” says Pellegrino. “The old sourcing structure also created a nightmare in billing when you had 40 growers going direct into 100 stores twice a week. Now the growers get paid quicker, Price Chopper gets savings in the efficiencies, and consumers get better value.” **pb**

“Now Price Chopper picks up our produce at the hub and takes it to their warehouse, which is more convenient. Before it was a little like herding cats; I do not miss dealing with those 15 different stores all the time.”

— Brian Reeves, Owner of Reeves Farms

“Before, local farm deliveries were isolated in pockets, with growers doing direct-store deliveries to the handful of units neighboring their growing operations. There is a local farmer here, and it can deliver to these particular stores here,” says Reed. “The reality is local sourcing is usually confined in silos and inflexible. Now with this spanned out infrastructure, we are able to satisfy the demand of the entire chain. For instance, we used to source a fair amount of product from New Jersey because our locally grown was basically targeted into the areas where the local growers could deliver,” says Reed.

“Now, I’m looking from a 50,000-foot view. I’m stepping back and saying, ‘Here is our demand; here is what our overall volume requirements are going to be over a period of time. What do you have coming off your farms?’ Then we are able to bring more local product into our DC and distribute it throughout the chain.”

The model is so intrinsically different than the existing supply chain infrastructure. It

connects so many parties that were prohibited from entering the market otherwise, or forced to overcome enormous barriers to integration, according to Berman.

“What if this hub system was developed collaboratively on a national basis, through whatever mechanisms were necessary, and the functionality of these hubs was replicated? Just imagine what that new infrastructure would do to the national food dialogue relative to the accessibility of local food products and food safety,” speculates Berman.

“Neil Golub (executive chairman of the board), Jim Baldwin (manager of food safety and sanitation), and I met with Commissioner Richard Ball and other folks at the New York State Department of Agriculture,” says Reed. “They were very intrigued by this mechanism to ensure food safety of local growers, because the state actually fosters these farmers markets, and they are starting to realize there is a lot of risk. There hasn’t been a systemized mechanism to know who is certified and who isn’t, or for traceability.”



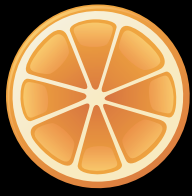
“When we sat down and started to have conversations around local agriculture in New York State,” continues Berman, “the single biggest barrier to market penetration for local agriculture producers is: How do you address issues of food safety, quality and oversight? This is a recognized market barrier New York State has been endeavoring to overcome for a long time. From a private commercial perspective, we know this infrastructural approach works, and there may be ways to expand this particular model and to help enhance it even outside of our trade footprint,” says Berman.

Exemplifying the heightened need, and recognizing the challenges small producers face in complying with food safety standards, USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS) division launched GroupGAP. “Under the GroupGAP program, growers of any size — as well as established grower groups like food hubs and other marketing organizations, and even research and promotion programs — can be USDA GAP-certified as a group,” AMS reports.

The cornerstone of the program is to make USDA GAP certification “accessible and affordable for all growers by sharing resources to meet the requirements of both the USDA GAP program and their buyers.”

GroupGAP also is geared to verify compliance with the on-farm food safety requirements of the FDA’s Food Safety Modernization Act. AMS reports it is “already working with many different buyers in the retail and food-service communities to promote acceptance of GroupGAP, and all of the food safety audit-based programs we offer.” USDA’s AMS effort to get all growers big and small GAP-





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7:00-8:00 am Registration
8:00-8:30 am Continental Breakfast
8:30-8:45 am Welcome Remarks by Jim Prevora/Introductions
8:45-9:30 am Overview: **What's Trending In Foodservice**
Gerry Ludwig, corporate consulting chef at **Gordon Food Service**

9:30-10:45 am Discussion Panel 1: Consumer Behaviors and the Marketing Of Fresh Produce

Learn from a panel of foodservice marketing experts how they use consumer trend information to influence marketing and menu decisions. Do consumers follow through on the health and nutrition they say is important to them when making choices while dining out? Do consumers make different menu decisions when dining in restaurants vs. settings such as on-site corporate dining or college campuses?

Featuring:

Stefano Cordova, vice president food operations & food business development, **Starbucks**
Sharon Olson, president of Olson Communications and executive director, **Culinary Visions Panel**
Paul Pszyblyski, senior director of culinary development, **California Pizza Kitchen**
Maeve Webster, president of **Menu Matters**
Rafi Taherian, executive director **Yale Dining**

Panel Moderator: Ellen Koteff, vice president editorial for **PRODUCE BUSINESS**

10:45-11:15 am Conversation Break
11:15-11:30 am Ideation: Fresh Menu Challenge
11:30-12:30 pm Breakout Luncheon; Facilitator **Tim York**, president of **Markon**
12:30-1:00 pm Presentation of Small Groups – Led by Culinary Students

1:00-2:15 pm Discussion Panel 2: Matches Made In Heaven — Partnerships That Sell Produce

Hear examples of successful partnerships that market fresh produce throughout the foodservice channels. Learn why the role of industry catalysts at the beginning of the process is critical to the success in marketing partnerships between shippers and distributors/operators. How do produce shippers who want to promote their brand at the restaurant level partner with operators? How do commodity associations partner with operators to move more of their crop while educating consumers on the benefits of fresh produce?

Featuring:

Rich Dachman, vice president of produce, **Sysco**
RJ Harvey, corporate executive chef and wellness manager, **Compass Group — Morrison Management**
Peggy McCormick, president of **MMM Marketing**
Steve Solomon, culinary director for the **Mushroom Council**
Joe Loiacano, senior manager of fresh produce, **Wendy's**
Robin Fisher, produce category manager, **PF Chang**
Steve Kenfield, vice president, **HMC Farms**

Panel Moderator: Amy Myrdal Miller, founder and president of **Farmer's Daughter® Consulting**

2:15-2:30 pm Conversation Break
2:30-3:15 pm **Chef Demo: Ron DeSantis**, director of culinary excellence, **Yale Dining**
3:15-4:30 pm **Discussion Panel 3: Getting The All-Important Consumer Buy-In**

What are some of the marketing strategies for introducing new produce-centric menu items? Hear examples of how operators roll out new menu items with a fresh produce focus. What is the marketing message – does it emphasize health, organics, farm-to-table, or just great flavor? What are the internal marketing strategies to promote the item to operations down to servers at the unit level? A health message on menu items used to mean a quick death to that dish... Has that changed with consumers' interest in health and nutrition going mainstream? What other factors are taken into account to make savvy decisions to reach as many consumers as possible?

Featuring:

Jean-Marie Clement, director, food & beverage concept development and international integration, **Walt Disney Parks and Resorts**
Gerry Ludwig, corporate consulting chef at **Gordon Food Service**
Darryl Mickler, senior director of research and development at **Hard Rock International**
Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice for the **Idaho Potato Commission**
Michael Sabourin, corporate executive chef for **Windstar Cruises**

Panel Moderator: Susan Renke, **Food Marketing Resources**

4:30-4:45 pm Wrap Up



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certified goes well with the Price Chopper local hub model.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Part of Price Chopper's hub system strategy involves advocating, facilitating and providing the necessary food safety resources and training to local growers, and just as important, doing the follow-up verifications.

"The administrators of the hub actually check on where growers are in the process and where they need to be. It is really a whole

process to get more growers GAP-certified," says Reed.

"I think this system fundamentally changes the relationship dynamic between us and the grower community, when we step in as a resource provider and an educator, and when we talk about what trade partnerships should look like," says Berman. "It deepens these stakeholder-driven business collaborations and makes them richer and longer-lasting."

"These become meaningful partnerships," agrees Reed, pointing out some grower rela-



tionships 50 years in the making. "Those already cemented partnerships also help ease the transitional period and ward off any resistance toward change."

GAINING CONTROL OVER PACKAGING AND LABELING

"One of the other benefits to the food hub system is it enables us to control the packaging and know we have the proper cartons," says Reed. "We were getting things delivered directly to the store that were in old banana boxes. Who knows what has been in them and potential issues with cross-contamination? In addition, the system allows for labeling standardization."

"Before this hub system, there was really no quality control," says Reed. "Growers got product to the back door of the individual store, the store pushed it, and that was it — we were stuck with the quality being good, bad or indifferent."

Individual stores got used to having the local farmers in their narrow community pockets delivering directly. Sometimes with the ability to pick product early in the morning and get it to the store later that same day.

"There is some romance to that," acknowledges Reed.

However, that romance dissipates when there is no temperature or quality regulation and that product could be sitting out for several hours losing shelf life on the back of an unrefrigerated pickup truck, explains Pat Iannotti, director of shrink administration for Price Chopper.

When the hub system was first getting underway, Iannotti was a zone director responsible for all the stores in Vermont, where Mazza corn (picked fresh from the Sam Mazza farm in Colchester) was an iconic seasonal mainstay.

"The folks in Burlington love Mazza's corn, so when it went from his farm direct to our Burlington stores, it was a great thing," Iannotti explains. "Now we're shipping Mazza's corn from a Vermont hub to our DC warehouse in

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Price Chopper strives to ensure every store in the company gets the best local produce, guaranteed to be GAP-certified, and inspected to meet standardized quality specifications.

Schenectady, NY, and then that corn is going to be shipped back out to all of our stores.”

“As I came here [to headquarters] to help execute the program on a company-wide scale, I saw how the whole thing worked with a different set of eyes, and that it was much better for us as an organization,” says Iannotti. “We make sure every store in the company gets the best local produce, guaranteed to be GAP-certified, and inspected to meet standardized quality specifications.”

If you are the produce manager and a grower brings you 10 bags of corn, you’ll open up a bag and taste it, but are you doing quality control like they would do here at the warehouse? “No,” he explains. The system also has strong mechanisms in place to alleviate cold chain disruptions, which intertwines with shelf-life and shrink.

When expanding distribution of local produce, are there any limiting factors on where it can be marketed by state, region or commodity? Reed says the answer to that is yes, and no. For vegetables in general, there are no real distinguishing factors.

“Nobody cares whether it is a New York zucchini or a Pennsylvania zucchini; corn, on the other hand, is a different story,” says Reed. “For the corn, we do have several different slots, five or six to meet consumers’ local preferences; Vermont corn, Massachusetts corn, New York corn, etc. We also market locally grown corn more generically to expand availability, and that goes out to a big portion of our network. It is not easy managing inventory, let alone managing inventory for all the separate slots.”

There is a cursory inspection at the hub, so the hub operators are not getting into full-blown specs, explains Reed. “The hubs make sure product is in the right box with the right label, and the temperature is within the range

we desire,” he says. “When we started this system, we knew we couldn’t go from somebody’s shed that is unrefrigerated to USDA specs, and we figured that in, because we didn’t want to establish a spec that just couldn’t be hit.

“But we tightened down the requirements a little bit,” Reed continues. “We brought in all the growers to introduce the system, and of course there was some uncertainty of compliance, but GAP certification is absolute. We can’t shoulder that risk. The hub is more or less a consolidation point for the local product growers drop off. A couple of hours later we are getting it into the DC for a full-blown inspection with our expert Quality Assurance team.

■ GROWER PERSPECTIVES

There are pluses and minuses to everything. “I’m a realist,” says Tony Pellegrino, principal at Pellegrino Sales and Marketing in Troy, NY, and also a founding partner of Growers-Hub. [See “Hub Idea Started In Vermont” on page 57].

It depends on your vantage point. For some growers, competition has increased. They may have owned the supply/demand quotient in their area because other local options hadn’t been available. For growers already invested in GAP certification and refrigerated trucks, delivering direct to stores (and in some cases also to Price Chopper’s warehouse), their competitive advantage might be undermined by the now-equal playing field.

“Prior to going to this hub system, we delivered direct to each of the chain’s stores in our vicinity,” says Larry Eckhardt, owner of Kinderhook Creek Farm, in Stephentown, NY. “We’d get a daily order the night before or early that morning. It certainly was very personal, and we had relationships with seven or eight stores. It worked very well for us. But

had drawbacks for Price Chopper,” he says.

Product was not consistent through the entire chain: size, quality, delivery methods and pricing was hard to control. “Not hard for us, but from a chain standpoint, it became cumbersome and disjointed. Some stores had abundance of supply and others hardly any. Price Chopper wanted a way to get product

■ LOGISTICS ADVANTAGES



The strategy is to broaden local produce coverage while optimizing logistics efficiency, more sustainable trucking routes, mileage and backhauls, according to David Schmitz, director of transportation for Price Chopper. “We don’t have a huge local window, but that window, where we’re handling 20- to 25-plus total locally grown commodities in a season, is significant when you think of all those trucks driving around to all those places,” he says.

“Rick and his team created these regional hubs nearby our stores, allowing us to orchestrate a very robust backhaul program,” says Schmitz. “Typically, you are not picking up a truckload of produce in one of these hubs. Usually, because these are a bunch of small growers, root vegetables and things like that, on a good day, you’ll get half a trailer to three-quarters of a trailer in the prime growing seasons; and maybe a little more if it is a corn grower, but it is very minimal cost on our side to pick the product up and get it back to the warehouse,” he notes.

“There are some really aggressive emissions reductions for transport we have been able to achieve by building out the infrastructure, yet I would say there are probably more on the grower side, because we are keeping them from traveling any further than they have to, which just adds costs to our produce as well. For the growers, it’s all straight-lined. They go to the one hub location closest to their operation.”

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fresh to all stores," Eckhardt says.

On the plus side, Eckhart says logistical issues in having to do so many separate store deliveries has diminished. "We'd get to a store to unload 20 cases of corn and have to endure long wait times at the back door behind all the other trucks that needed to unload products. Meanwhile, our product was sitting on the truck and we needed to deliver to five more stores," he says. "With this hub system, we make one delivery to the Albany hub."

"We thought with the hub system, we'd be

featured in more stores and see a noticeable increase in our volume, and it hasn't happened yet, but the hub system is relatively new, and Price Chopper is still working the bugs out of it," says Eckhart, adding, "our volume has crept up, so maybe our expectations were too high with the learning curve. Price Chopper and the smart growers realize this is a partnership, and it is important to work this out together," he says.

"We're kind of unique from a grower standpoint," says Brian Reeves, owner of Reeves



Farms in Baldwinsville, NY. "Price Chopper started the hub system primarily to replace direct-store delivery, but for quite a few years, we did business through Price Chopper's warehouse and also direct delivery with 15 stores. It was a good-news-bad-news scenario for us.

"We already had the trucks with the refrigeration capability, and we had third-party food safety certification for years," he says. "Our hub, [Syracuse, NY-based] Mento Produce, is closer to our company (only 20 minutes away). Now Price Chopper picks up our produce at the hub and takes it to their warehouse, which is more convenient. Before it was a little like herding cats; I do not miss dealing with those 15 different stores all the time."

Reeves continues, "To the growers that are smaller or have logistics issues, they could expand through this system. But in our case, we shrunk a bit, because what we brought separately to the warehouse is down some 10 percent; but we gained back volume and hopefully some more this next year.

"When you institute a new method, it takes time to adjust," says Reeves. "Price Chopper is open to suggestions for making the model better. In some ways the hub system made more competition for us. They took a bold move, and with it comes growing pains. I think it also says something about Price Chopper, in referring me to speak with *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, for this article. They know I am honest and upfront, just like them, but that is why they are such a good partner."

FORWARD THINKING

"This year we're trying to do more with Price Chopper, and build our infrastructure," says Pellegrino. "We've received interest in GrowersHub from various companies, including Wal-Mart.

"We have to walk before we run, and get it right for both the growers and the retailers," he continues. "This will require adjusting the model to different customers. Price Chopper had a far-reaching vision. I think the growers hub system is the future, and the sky is the limit on enacting that vision."

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THE EVER-DEBATABLE DIRTY DOZEN LIST

More dirt than dirty, the list grows detractors.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD



The Environmental Working Group (EWG) recently issued its 20th annual “Dirty Dozen” list of fruits and vegetables as part of its 2016 Shopper’s Guide to Pesticides in Produce. This year’s list (drawn from the USDA Pesticide Data Program, Annual Summary, Calendar Year 2014) begins with a new fruit in the top position, strawberries, and then follows with apples, nectarines, peaches, celery, grapes, cherries, tomatoes, spinach, sweet bell peppers, cherry tomatoes, and cucumbers. Hot peppers, kale and collard greens merit mention. EWG also lists its “Clean 15” fruits and vegetables, among them are avocados, sweet corn, pineapples, and cabbage.

Are the crops named by EWG particularly prone to pests, warranting increased pesticide use and residues? “The fruit crops on the list are susceptible to a wide range of diseases and insect pests, and several of the vegetable

crops (like tomatoes and cherry tomatoes) are susceptible to diseases which spread rapidly and kill infected plants quickly,” explains Andy Fellenz, organic fruit and vegetable coordinator, Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, Inc. (NOFA-NY) in Farmington, NY. “Consumers have extremely high standards for appearance. These high appearance standards, combined with quick spread of disease, can lead to a prophylactic approach to pest and disease management and a relatively high rate of pesticide use.”

USDA AND FDA MONITORS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) monitor and guide the safety of fruits and vegetables in the U.S. The USDA’s AMS Monitoring Programs Division directs and oversees the Pesticide Data Program (PDP) database; PDP works with the Environmental Protection

Agency (EPA) to monitor pesticide residue levels in foods to ensure they are at safe levels and to set limits on the amount of pesticides that may remain in or on foods marketed in the U.S. In the most recent USDA’s Summary, more than four in 10 samples had no detectable residues and nearly all of the items tested by the USDA were below the EPA tolerances.

“Reporters and bloggers should read the actual USDA report that EWG states it uses to develop its list before they cover the ‘Dirty Dozen’ release,” says Marilyn Dolan, executive director for the Alliance for Food and Farming (AFF) in Watsonville, CA. “USDA findings show ‘residues do not pose a safety concern.’”

In contrast, bacterial contamination from bacteria during growing and processing poses a greater risk. The new FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) establishes science-based minimum standards for the safe growing, harvesting, packing, and holding of fruits and vegetables grown for human consumption to minimize contamination that could cause serious adverse health consequences or death. FDA also provides safety guidance for the fresh-cut sector of the produce industry, and introduces measures to reduce risk of bacterial growth and contamination.

CONCLUSIONS MISMATCH SCIENCE

The EWG’s list has been discredited by most in the scientific community. A 2011 analysis of the “Dirty Dozen” by UC Davis scientists concluded the EWG’s methodology was flawed. Using USDA’s PDP data to estimate exposures to the most frequently detected pesticide residues, the scientists found that all pesticide exposure estimates were well below established maximums. They concluded that the most commonly detected pesticides pose negligible risks to consumers and that EWG’s methodology lacks scientific credibility.

“The report also found that EWG’s recommendation to substitute organic forms of

produce for conventional forms does not result in a decrease in risk because residue levels are so minute, if present at all, on conventionally grown fruits and vegetables," says Dolan.

"Anyone who reads USDA's analysis of pesticide residues knows that EWG's 'Dirty Dozen' is a bogus PR stunt not based on science," says Tom Stenzel, president and chief executive, United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C. "EWG doesn't let facts from the USDA get in the way of trying to scare consumers about pesticides that are a critical part of our ability to grow safe and healthy fruits and vegetables. If EWG really cared about consumer health, they would encourage people to make half their plate fruits and vegetables, and not worry about extremely low level of residues that EPA deems safe."

Although strawberries hold the top position, "this is not really about strawberries," says Cindy Jewell, marketing vice president, California Giant Berry Farms in Watsonville, CA. "The analysis and report published by the EWG takes an official government report and manipulates the data to develop a secondary report that is not verified or approved by USDA. It is also important to note the most recent USDA report includes strawberry samples for the first time, even though strawberries have been in the 'Dirty Dozen' every year (without government data)."

The California Strawberry Commission notes that EWG issues contradictory statements about strawberries, highlighting them at the top of the "Dirty Dozen" list while naming conventionally grown strawberries as a "best food" in the 2014 Summary.

BIG HEADLINES, NOT PESTICIDES, HARM CONSUMERS

AFF adamantly opposes the "fear-based marketing" employed by EWG. "It may be undermining efforts by health officials everywhere to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables," says Dolan. "A study conducted by the John Hopkins Center for a Livable Future that found conflicting messaging on food safety and nutrition may detrimentally impact the dietary choices of consumers, especially those with lower incomes.

"We aren't surprised that EWG has a new No. 1 this year," says Dolan. "Media coverage of the 'Dirty Dozen' has fallen dramatically in the past five years. We knew that the new No. 1 would be a popular fruit and favorite among children, because this is an EWG prerequisite for a No. 1 placement."

Cal Giant's Jewell has similar concerns. "EWG receives a huge percentage of its income



In her article on foodinsight.org, Elizabeth Held, director, White House Writers Group, Washington, D.C., promotes the message: "Don't Discriminate When it Comes to Fruits and Veggies." She says, "whether you choose organic or traditionally produced fruit and vegetables, the important thing is to get plenty of servings each day and to handle all food safely to prevent foodborne illness."

from consumer donations. In order to attract funding, they need a compelling hook — 90 percent of Americans eat strawberries, so being on the top of the list gets them more publicity than less popular items."

AFF points out that any residues present are in such small amounts that children could eat hundreds or thousands of servings without any adverse impact. A risk calculator on AFF's website, safefruitsandveggies.com, estimates that "a child could eat 1,508 servings of strawberries in a day and still not have any effects from pesticide residues," says Dolan.

"Dirty Dozen" headlines do not appear to harm the industry, however. "We believe many in the media have come to understand it's a farce and don't cover it as real news," says United Fruit's Stenzel.

"It has not affected our sales," says Jewell. "If anything, it provides the opportunity to have a conversation with concerned consumers about why fresh is a good thing."

UNITING BEHIND THE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE MESSAGE

"The message we should all be promoting to consumers is that a diet rich in fruits and veggies, whether conventional or organic, leads to better health and a longer life," says Dolan. "Consumers deserve truthful, credible information about the safety of their foods so they can make the right shopping choices for their families. Not only is the 'Dirty Dozen' list significantly scientifically flawed, it is also just bad advice."

Even EWG encourages consumers to eat all types of fruits and vegetables. Its website notes "the health benefits of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables outweigh the risks of pesticide exposure. Reduce your exposures as much as possible, but eating conventionally grown produce is better than not eating fruits and vegetables at all."

Fellenz of NOFA-NY notes that eating organic is safe. "A core tenet of the National Organic

Program is a holistic Integrated Pest Management approach to pest and disease management," he says. "If you wish to avoid the possibility of your fruits or vegetables having any synthetic pesticide residues, purchase certified organic fruits and vegetables."

"At California Giant, we expanded our organic operation to address the demand of those consumers preferring organic," notes Jewell. "This has also resulted in the use of more organic methods in our conventional fields to further help our farmers reduce the need for and cost of synthetic materials and improve overall health of the plants and fruit."

Jewell adds that "strawberries, along with all of the items on the 'Dirty Dozen' list, are good for you, whether conventional or organic. The choice is personal, and sometimes economic."

In her article on foodinsight.org, Elizabeth Held, director, White House Writers Group, Washington, D.C., notes "whether you choose organic or traditionally produced fruit and vegetables, the important thing is to get plenty of servings each day and to handle all food safely to prevent foodborne illness." The FDA advises consumers to wash their fruits and vegetables to reduce and often eliminate residues, if they are present at all, as well as reduce contamination.

"We all need to work together to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables," says Jewell. "As a nation, we are not eating enough fresh food to help prevent obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other diseases. These major health issues are not created by conventionally grown produce; they are created by poor diets, fast food, processed foods, and not enough activity in our lives."

"The best recommendation is to eat more of both organic and conventional produce — whatever is affordable and accessible for you and your family is the right choice. The only 'list' you really need is your own shopping list," says Dolan.

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UK's Retail Revolution May Portent Future For Produce

Deep discounters, the dining-out movement, convenience shopping and online retailers are just some of the factors affecting traditional retailers ... and ultimately their suppliers.

BY JIM BUTLER

Unquestionably, things are changing in the U.K. grocery market. Strongly held convictions about the power of the so-called Big Four (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrisons) and concrete assumptions about the behaviour of British consumers have been ripped apart, never to return. The discounters (Aldi and Lidl) are no longer mere irritants in the eyes of the established retailers. Their combined market share — and the fact that they are often grouped as one, single force for low prices — now singles both out as major players.

The weekly shop — for so long the bedrock on which so many hung their analytical hats — has lost its status, as the convenient modern notion of 'shopping more, buying less' gains traction. Online shopping continues to rise, though not necessarily at the pace predicted by those same analysts.

Everything is changing, and it's changing faster than ever before. Pronounced flux is the defining characteristic. Brand loyalty schemes are being toned down, and in-store promotions are being reduced. Arguably, the one thing we can rely on is that sensational talk of 'price wars' still dominates most media coverage of the grocery market. But is the U.K. market still an attractive proposition for suppliers? What about Brexit (or "British exit"), the possible exit of Britain from the European Union? Where's the good news?

PREPARING FOR THE PERFECT STORM

Well, first the good news. This is not a downward spiral. According to forecasts by the food and grocery research and training charity, IGD, the U.K. food and grocery market will grow to be worth £200.6bn (approximately \$290 US billion) by 2020 (a 13 percent increase on its mid-2015 figures).

Indeed, IGD's chief executive Joanne Denney-Finch believes that we're living through a genuine revolution in food retailing. Speaking at the Asia Pacific Retailers Convention and Exhibition conference in Manila last October, she proclaimed change was sweeping through global food retailing.

"The revolution is so big and powerful, that no-one knows exactly what the future will look like," she said. "While this is creating the most challenging conditions for food retailers I've ever seen, there are many opportunities too. Retailers around the world are responding creatively and starting to build a new future."

Shore Capital's retail analyst Clive Black recognises that the industry



is going through enormous, rapid and challenging structural change. He believes a number of factors have come together to create this shift — most notably the changing habits of the modern consumer. "People are eating more food outside the home," he points out, "which is naturally a big challenge to supermarkets; people are wasting much less food; they're cutting down their calorific intake and eating more food that is associated with health and well-being. And they're also shopping in different ways ... in convenience stores, in discount stores and online. All these changes have an impact on supermarkets."

Fraser McKeivitt, head of retail and consumer insight at Kantar Worldpanel, is another to acknowledge the shifting behaviour of consumers. Big trolley shopping in the expansive out-of-town superstores is slowing down, although it remains a big and important part of the market.

"That [customers making less big shopping trips] is the direction the sector is heading in," he states. He says money is flowing out of those big supermarkets in three directions. "It's going online, which the big supermarkets retain, but much

less profitably because it costs a lot more money to deliver online. It's also remaining in the supermarkets, but via basket, not trolley, shops and that brings into consideration the range you need in shops and how stores should be laid out. And then the third one is the flow of those trolleys towards discount retailers."

This perfect storm has hit the Big Four hardest.

"I think the big supermarkets know what the challenges are now," says McKeivitt, "but they haven't yet found the device or the levers to stop that flow of money."

Black picks up on this point. His analysis leads him to conclude that stronger management at the Big Four — which still controls 75 percent of the grocery retail sector — is finally paying dividends. "They realised some of their limitations," he says. "In addition, some behaviour that wasn't sustainable or in anyone's interest — never mind the consumers — has changed; so rather than continuing to open new stores, they concentrated on making their existing stores more effective."

FALLING VALUES AND SIMPLIFICATION

One of the biggest challenges facing the U.K. grocery retail market in 2016 remains falling values. The value of food retail sales continues to fall; in short, that's deflation. And while that may seem like good news for consumers — McKeivitt notes that shoppers are enjoying a golden period of cheaper groceries with like-for-like prices falling every month since September 2014 — it's still of great concern for retailers who consequently struggle to grow their revenues.

David Gray, senior retail analyst at Planet Retail, sees some cause for optimism though. Whereas 18 months ago, the sector was hamstrung by both falling value and volume — consumers were buying less as well as prices going down — today, volume has risen.

"Shoppers are putting more items in their basket," he explains. "Which is a better situation than 12 months ago. It's still a challenging situation, but it's better."

So what is driving this rise in volume? Broadly speaking, Gray attributes it to a general improvement in consumers' financial situation. "The economy isn't doing too badly," he suggests, "there's a bit more confidence. There are, of course, some uncertainties around — the EU vote for instance — but generally there's been an upturn in consumer confidence. Which should lead to increase in volume."

One area where the retailers, the Big Four in particular, have taken positive steps is in simplifying their price proposition. Granted, this happened in direct response to the discounters entering, then winning, the so-called price war, but it has led, in Black's view, to a more honest relationship with the customer.

"Absolutely," he says, "because the large supermarket groups not only became detached from their customers, but they treated them as idiots. Those customers, particularly two or three years ago, really needed those supermarkets to have a stronger price proposition because their budgets were under so much pressure. And that's why they went to Aldi and Lidl."

The superstore groups, Black believes, thought they were more intelligent; had more customer insight and therefore put forward very complex propositions and tried to fool their customers. Evidence of this was extensive coupons and vouchers, promotions between groceries and fuel, lots of promotions, lots of multi-buys and lots of price matching claims. In his estimation, it was behaviour that took some time to change.

"We are in a pattern now where there has been major progress in simplification to reduce the complexity of the proposition to customers," he argues. "A far more stable, simple and straightforward, and ultimately lower-priced proposition, and also far more simple and cost-effective

businesses to support that price proposition and strengthen the balance sheet. So there has been some quite fundamental structural change. I wouldn't say that the industry is out of the tunnel, so to speak, but there is certainly light at the end of the tunnel where there wasn't a couple of years ago."

There seems to be a general shift in where retailers are putting their money. They're taking it out of loyalty schemes and putting it into lower prices, which Gray believes is what customers ultimately want. To that end, Sainsbury's halved the value of Nectar points, and it recently stopped brand matching with Asda (a move that inspired Tesco to announce it would honour any Sainsbury's Brand Match coupons until June and, which prompted one media outlet to claim that Tesco had 'parked its tanks' on Sainsbury's lawn). Morrisons retained its loyalty scheme, but not its price-matching discounts. And Tesco cancelled its Clubcard Boost programme, reportedly to the chagrin of a significant number of its legion of customers.

"There is a bit of a margin hit," notes Gray, "but they are also taking with one hand and giving with another. A retailer's main objective is to be profitable at the end of the day. I think there's a lot of work gone into premium own labels, premium own brands. If you can get consumers to trade up, then you can make a lot more margin on a premium own brand. So it's not just about a race to the bottom in terms of pricing. Tesco is investing in health and wellness ranges, it is investing in re-launching healthy lines, [it is] re-launching its Tesco Finest range and trying to get consumers to buy higher margin products."

But price remains the dominant factor, for consumers and retailers alike, in the sector. Especially when it comes to those everyday staples that shoppers generally know the price of bread, milk, eggs and the like; where there has been extensive price matching and discounting of late. However, the price reduction on everyday items has broadened to include a far wider range of lines, dragging several fresh fruit and vegetable items into the fray.

Gray argues that casting the net wider — in the hope to get customers through the door and then make your margins on premium lines — only makes it more difficult for retailers to make money. "The discounters have come in and really disrupted the market," he states. "If Aldi or Lidl had been a publicly listed company, I don't think they'd still be in the U.K. They came into the U.K. in the early 90s and didn't deliver their first profits for over 10 years. If that was a publicly listed company, shareholders wouldn't stand for a market entry of 10 years without profits. So in effect, they're reaping the rewards of their ability to take a long-term view. If you look at Tesco in the U.S., five years with no profit, the plug was pulled. Lidl and Aldi, they're willing to stay 10 years and get that reward, and I think to a degree that's what they're getting now."

GETTING THE RIGHT FIX ON PRICING

Professor Heiner Evanschitzky, chair of marketing at Aston Business School, believes that the Big Four's obsession with price has been to their detriment. It is quite simply a battle they can never hope to win.

"Price seems an easy instrument to fix," he says. "Simply make it cheaper and demand will increase. It's classic economic theory. However, once competition is put into the equation, it doesn't look that simple any more. It's a myth that the Big Four can compete on price with discounters due to the very nature of the discounters' business (smaller lines). It's impossible for the Big Four to mimic that."

One of the secrets to the discounters' success, Evanschitzky believes, has been their ability to re-focus the minds of UK consumers and make price the primary consideration when they go food shopping.

"[The discounters] managed to educate the customers in such a way

that they now firmly believe that price is the most important factor in retailing. Therefore, the point of comparison will always be the discounter, and there is no way any of the Big Four can beat an Aldi or Lidl on price — no way!”

In its most recent set of grocery share figures (published on May 4 for the 12 weeks ending April 24) Kantar Worldpanel noted that the Aldi and Lidl axis maintained its record share high of 10.4 percent, with Aldi on 6 percent and Lidl on 4.4 percent. McKeivitt predicts that they’ll have 14 percent of market share by 2020, and without the availability of a reliable crystal ball, most would agree right now with his assessment that there’s still room for them to grow.

“There are still some people who won’t enter their stores,” says Gray, “but to a substantial degree, they have changed the UK consumers’ perception of a discount store. Aldi has done a fantastic job with its advertising and marketing. It has done a great job in changing the perception of its products compared to brands, and that has had a positive effect for them. It has succeeded in that goal. However, this

shift in perception hasn’t come cheap. Aldi has spent more in marketing comparatively than Sainsbury’s in recent years.”

Black adds: “I think it’s fair to say the rate of leakage from the Big Four to the discounters has slowed down. Aldi and Lidl are here to stay but their recent growth might start to decelerate. They’ll continue to open new stores but they’re going to have to fight a bit harder for their trade.”

He claims that once customers feel comfortable that the pricing in a superstore has sufficiently narrowed to discourage a trip to a discounter alternative, then other factors come in: choice, ease of parking and of ease of checkout services.

PROSPECTS FOR BETTER RETAIL HEALTH

We are just over halfway through the second decade of the 21st Century and in the middle of the greatest shock to the system the Big Four has ever experienced since rising to prominence in the early 90s, so how healthy is Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Asda and Morrisons?

Tesco remains the largest single superstore group, with 28 percent

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of the retail market; followed by Sainsbury's on 16.5 percent; Asda with 16 percent; and Morrisons on 10.6 percent.

Black regards Sainsbury's as the most stable of these four operators. "It has a high specification customer base," he says. "I think it will continue to plough its own furrow at the higher end of the market."

Tesco, meanwhile, is engaged in a massive programme of reconnecting with its customers. Black notes that this involves material price investments and simplifications as already outlined, plus major changes to its supply chain and major changes to how its stores are configured. "We expect Tesco to stick to what it was 10 years ago, and that is a shop that anyone can shop in when it had broad appeal," he explains.

And with Morrisons also 'going back to the future' in Black's analysis, by focusing on the safety net of its idiosyncratic Yorkshire roots as a high service, high fresh food store, it is Asda that feels the most vulnerable.

"It feels exposed to Aldi and Lidl at the sharp end of the discount spectrum," he states. "And the capabilities of Tesco and Morrisons in fresh food is stronger than Asda at the moment. It's certainly going

through a difficult time at the moment — it's losing market share. One senses it needs to re-find the art of selling; it really doesn't seem to know where it is at the minute."

As for the discounters, well, they're becoming mainstream. They're offering more premium products, which suggests opportunities to those in the food industry. As McKeivitt puts it, they are no longer solely about being cheap; their message today is all about value.

It's nothing new to predict that online shopping will continue to grow, but the analysts' perspective has altered in recent times. Although Gray believes this growth is slowing somewhat; however, he notes it is still the fastest growing area of the grocery market. Of course, this has ramifications for superstore profits. It's still proving more cost-effective at this point for superstores to fulfil most online orders, because it costs more to establish dedicated forms of consolidation and distribution.

And then there's Amazon — the big, fat elephant in the room. Its Amazon Pantry service already delivers long shelf-life items, and it is only a matter of time before this evolves into perishable items such as



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fresh fruit and vegetables. But, as the behemoth discovered in trials across the pond, this brings with it a new set of challenges.

Gray notes: "I think Amazon doing Amazon Pantry makes sense, because it's what Amazon is good at: putting stuff in a box, putting long shelf-life items that don't need any attention into a box, and sticking it in a distribution system. Starting to deliver fresh perishable items is a whole new ball game. The costs are in distributing perishable items because it's so difficult from a logistical point of view."

Black shares the pessimism: "We expect Amazon to appear, but we don't expect it to be in charge of the grocery market in 10 years time or 20 years time."

TRENDS

As more people eat out of the home, the foodservice sector will continue to grow — both in size and importance. Black expects innovation within this arena to make great strides in the forthcoming years.

Convenience is another key factor to take into consideration. McKeivitt recognizes that consumers will pay a premium for products that are expedient. He explains: "People will pay a lot of money to have a lot of effort taken out of their life in that way. People are also living in smaller households than they were decades ago, which impacts upon how they eat. People are eating on their own a lot more these days — so smaller portions, easier to cook portions."

As the consumer demographic changes, the opportunities extend beyond formats and products. Evanschitzky points to our aging population as a key sector that is being failed by the current retailers. "Someone needs to capture that huge segment, and I'm puzzled why no one does it," he sighs. "We've done research on the elderly that confirms their purchasing power, brand affinity and the like. The market is ripe for a new entrant."

There are still plenty of opportunities out there, says McKeivitt. "Classic marketing done right will still bring great results to people."

Gray argues it's about the Big Four acclimating to the new normal. Previously, they could count on overall profit margins as high as 5 percent — much higher than on the continent. Since the arrival of the discounters there has been a reset of what can be achieved, he says.

So as long as retailers adapt to changing consumer behaviour, adjust to lower profit margins, find ways of making online shopping profitable, reconfigure stores to allow for smaller, more convenient shops, resist the temptation to fixate on price and simplify their offer, all will be fine.

pb



GEORGIA GROWN PRODUCE

*A DIVERSE GROWING REGION THAT'S MORE THAN VIDALIA ONIONS AND PEACHES,
THE STATE PROUDLY PROMOTES THE MANY BOUNTIES OF ITS LOCAL FARMS.*

BY LISA WHITE





Farm workers harvest Georgia bell peppers.



Whether regional or domestic, a product's origin is powerful in the marketplace today.

Looking at the makeup of Georgia's fruit and vegetable Farm Gate Value, blueberries are No. 8, onions are 18th and peaches are 35th in commodity rankings, according to the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA), located in LaGrange, GA.

Georgia has the unique ability to grow a vast array of fruits and vegetables, from blueberries to Vidalia onions, watermelons, Satsumas and sweet potatoes. The state's varied soil allows for diverse production.

Today's consumers want to buy products they trust, and they seek a relationship with their food and strive to support local businesses. This is particularly evident with the success of the Georgia Department of Agriculture's Georgia Grown program.

"This is our economic development program for agriculture," says the department's commissioner, Gary W. Black. "Rather than this being a governmental program that prints up a bunch of stickers that are inventoried, which doesn't work, we built the power of this program around a license to the use brand."

Those that use the Georgia Grown label are businesses in the state related to agriculture, such as produce, food processing, forestry and protein production.

Today, this program has approximately 900 license holders and continues to grow rapidly, mainly due to word of mouth.

CONSUMERS EMBRACE LOCAL GROWERS

"The focus on locally grown produce has really picked up and there is more consumer

awareness of Georgia Grown products ever since Gary Black took office six years ago," says Andrew Scott, director of marketing and business development for the Nickey Gregory Company, which has locations in Atlanta and Miami. "A new logo, a new website, as well as educating consumers in Georgia and around the Southeast helped increase the consumption and awareness of Georgia Grown."

Georgia Grown licensees can choose from a number of membership levels, from the Silver Basic up to the Founder's Circle — each offering different benefits.

"Those dollars roll back into the Georgia Grown commodity commission, which helps market and promote the program," says Black.

Forest Park, GA-based J.J. Jardina Company, Inc., a third-generation produce wholesaler established in 1925, specializes in premium fruit and acquires product from around the world.

"Commissioner Black is very supportive of the Georgia Grown industry and, from a legislative standpoint, he is very aggressive in creating favorable access and opportunities for growers and wholesalers like us," says Matt Jardina, J.J. Jardina's vice president of business development.

He touts Black's 20/20 initiative, geared to allocate "20 percent of every meal in every Georgia public school every day to be comprised of Georgia products by the start of the 2020 school year."

"This has put a big focus on Georgia Grown products," says Jardina. "The challenge is how do we facilitate that goal by connecting the state's growers with its buyers."

There are still growers in the state that have not established relationships and

outlets on the buying side to move product to a broader population. This results in many missed sales opportunities for Georgia Grown produce, so companies such as J.J. Jardina, which works with many supermarket chains and foodservice distributors, as well as other wholesalers, are helping facilitate the Georgia Grown produce movement.

While the benefits of Georgia-grown items include rich soil that creates high yields and cheaper freight due to the state's centralized location, Brian Rayfield, vice president of business development at J & J Produce Inc., headquartered in Loxahatchee, FL, says the focus on locally grown products has created some loss of business to local deals in the Carolinas and states north of Georgia.

Still, he predicts Georgia Grown product sales will continue to grow.

"I feel the future is very bright for Georgia Grown due to the quality of farmers in the state; the climate in the spring and fall months in Georgia; and the Georgia Department of Ag's push behind the consumption of Georgia Grown products," says Scott at Nickey Gregory.

GEORGIA CERTIFIED

At issue with the smaller growers are the food safety and certifications that are required, which are becoming a barrier of entry due to the price.

"It's necessary for Georgia growers that haven't historically gone through the required certifications to now have this be on their radar to participate in a big way in Georgia Grown initiatives," says Jardina. "Companies like ours spend a fair amount of time and money to ensure our certifications are in place from a storage and warehousing standpoint, but everyone in the food chain has to be looking at where they need to make

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investments to make sure their certifications are up to speed.”

To accomplish this, there needs to be a greater level of coordination between growers and buyers to effectively deliver on the commissioner’s vision, he says.

In addition to its buyer relationships, J.J. Jardina is establishing more relationships on the grower side to make this happen.

Though Georgia Grown is a marketing campaign, not a produce certification, the program provides resources for its members to promote their certified fruits and vegetables that are Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) or Primus-certified.

“We provide resources to help growers connect the dots to talk to proper entities and achieve whatever certification level their customers may want,” says Black. “We also work with certifying entities and match up growers.”

DEVELOP A SAFETY PLAN

For both large and small scale growers, meeting food safety regulations is a protocol driven by retailers and their requirements. It is standard for retailers, wholesalers and

“SWEET ONIONS ACCOUNT FOR NEARLY A THIRD OF TOTAL ONION CATEGORY SALES, WITH VIDALIA’S TOTALING 62 PERCENT OF TOTAL SWEET ONION SALES.”
 — JOHN SHUMAN, SHUMAN PRODUCE

buyer groups to require food safety program third party audits from their suppliers.

The Produce Food Safety Services program, the food safety educational arm of GFVGA, provides ongoing assistance to large-scale growers needing to develop food safety plans, and to small-scale growers wanting to ensure produce meets retailer food safety requirements.

“Food safety is the first step to selling produce and getting it to market,” says Beth Oleson, GFVGA’s director of food safety and education.

Recently, Oleson has been working with several food hubs and micro-farm coalitions around Georgia to provide food safety education, on-farm group trainings and creation/review of food safety programs for these small operations.

In addition to assistance with food safety initiatives, the Georgia Grown program also interfaces with retail partners, such as

Kroger, which has been an avid Georgia Grower advocate. The chain has promoted these products extensively in the Atlanta market, in particular.

“If a retailer wants to engage with producers, we’ve had successful source shows with chains, including Kroger, Harveys Supermarket and Bi-Lo,” says Black. “It’s a good way for us to introduce items and form relationships between retailers, producers and wholesalers.”

This isn’t always easy. Like many other states, Georgia faces production challenges, such as unpredictable weather, access to legal labor and harmful weeds and insects.

Additionally, Georgia growers continually are faced with new regulations to uphold to, federal programs to enroll in, and food safety standards to adhere to all in order to stay within the law and have a marketable crop.

AN ABUNDANCE OF PRODUCTS

Along with Vidalia onions and peaches, Georgia ranks as one of the nation’s top producers of pecans, peanuts and watermelons.

In spring and fall, the main produce items grown in Georgia include (Vidalia) onions, peaches, pecans, peanuts, blueberries, cabbage, watermelons, bell peppers, collards, carrots, greens, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, squash, tomatoes and sweet potatoes.

Roy Lee Smith Produce Sales has been in business since 1998 and is based in Americus, GA. The company deals mainly with green beans planted in Georgia, but he also handles a small amount of bell peppers.

“The green bean crop fits in with the rotation of other vegetables, such as corn and cotton,” says Taylor Neighbors, president and chief executive. “We grow beans in Miller County below Camilla and move to Sumter and Lee counties as time progresses.”

Green bean harvesting in Georgia runs from May 1 to July 1 and packaging starts on Oct. 1 and ends Nov. 15 and then in Florida runs from Nov. 5 to May 1. As a result, these states have green beans nine months out of the year.

The company has a niche in spring and fall. It finishes up with Florida green beans

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and starts business in Georgia around May 1.

"In the spring, Georgia green beans are more coveted than Florida's, but in the fall it's reversed," says Neighbors.

Most of Roy Lee Smith Produce's items are shipped north of the Mason-Dixon Line as well as west and to Canada.

The company is Primus GSF-certified. "It's a step above Primus, and there has been more emphasis on this certification," says Neighbors. "Even before we were certified by Primus 10 years ago and GSF four years ago, we've kept a very clean packing house."

"The north Georgia mountains also grow quite a few apples in the fall," says Scott at Nickey Gregory. "Some lesser known products that are becoming more popular here are broccoli, strawberries, Brussels sprouts,

asparagus and even persimmons."

Growers say labor has been a big challenge for farmers in Georgia as well as inconsistent weather in the spring that can hurt the new crops.

When it comes to Georgia produce, most would be hard-pressed not to think about the sought-after Vidalia onion.

"Sweet onions account for nearly a third of total onion category sales, with Vidalia's totaling 62 percent of total sweet onion sales," says John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce, located in Reidsville.

Known for the mild, sweet flavor and versatility in cooking applications, Vidalias can only be grown within a 20-county region in Southeast Georgia in a total area of approximately 6,000 square miles, or approximately 10 percent of the state of Georgia.

VIDALIA REIGNS

There are roughly 100 growers who farm Vidalia onions on about 12,000 total acres each year. This year, Shuman Produce anticipates good volume of RealSweet Vidalia onions from its 2,300 acres, which equates to roughly 20 percent of all Vidalia onions shipped annually.

Weather fluctuations continue to be a challenge for Vidalia onion growers.

"This year, we experienced almost near perfect growing conditions in March, however last year rain caused some quality issues early in the season and contributed to some additional concerns with the storage crop last June and July," says Shuman.

"Additionally, both labor and fuel costs continue to be important issues affecting the Georgia produce trade and the sweet onion industry."

A Look at Retail and Foodservice

Georgia's retail and foodservice operations have profited from the many produce opportunities offered by growers in the state.

As Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets' stores look to purchase fruits and vegetables, the 1,110-store chain first looks to the areas in which it operates. The states that are local to Publix include Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina and North Carolina. The chain has 182 stores in Georgia.

If the product is not available in one of these states, the chain expands its search across the United States. And if the product is not available in its operating states or across the U.S., then it will source produce abroad to meet the customer demand.

"As the weather starts to warm up, the growing season shifts from Florida to Georgia for many crops, including blueberries, Vidalia onions, zucchini, yellow squash, watermelon, peaches, cucumbers, bell peppers and beans, just to name a few," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets. "As an aside, we also offer our customers At Seasons Peak, a program designed to remind customers of the true seasonality of fruits and vegetables, when their produce will be at the absolute peak of season, ripe and fresh and best to eat."

The chain also runs Georgia Grown ads to support produce from Georgia. Piglet Supermarket, a single-store operation in Soperton, GA, purchases about 90 percent of its produce outside of Atlanta on the off season. However,



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREW THOMAS

produce manager Ricky Reese also works with local growers and gardeners to source many of the store's produce items.

"We're such a small town, most everyone knows who I buy our products from," says Reese. "I have two people who sell okra when the heat doesn't kill it and another customer who grows corn for us."

The store will buy 300 to 400 ears of corn. Reese also purchases tomatoes from area growers. "In the summer, we get the majority of produce from people in town," says Reese. "These items are fresher, more popular and cheaper, and much of it is organic, which is what the majority of people are looking for today."

A number of Georgia's restaurants are highlighting produce from local growers. The restaurant Five & Ten in Athens was built as a community foodservice establishment where locality mattered. It opened in 2000 before the term "farm to table" became commonplace.

"It was a restaurant where I planned to learn



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREW THOMAS

more about food and the area that I call home," says Chef Hugh Acheson.

The menu is a constant mashing of Southern history of food with the principles of French and Italian food, which helps set this eatery apart.

"I have always cooked seasonally, I can't think of any other way to cook," says Acheson. "I would get bored cooking the same things every day, but seasonal change makes cooking bloom every day. When I think of produce I naturally want to find what's nearby, and in the agrarian landscape of Georgia, that is a lot."

Five & Ten's dishes incorporate local blueberries, asparagus, strawberries, lettuces, okra and beans, in addition to wheat of all shapes and sizes.

"It is an endless field that we use in different ways," says Acheson. "Knowing the name of a grower gives food a story and a narrative. It gives the hands that plowed a better reason than just a transaction. Food should be more



L. G. Herndon Jr. Farms in Lyons is one of the last growers to produce baby Vidalias, also called Lil' Bo's Sweet Petite Vidalias. The farm hand-harvests this product, which is planted after Thanksgiving.

"Retailers get excited to promote Vidalias in spring and summer," says John Williams, L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms' sales and marketing manager. "We'll have a Georgia Grown day, bringing in vendors to talk about what they're looking for."

The farm started growing sweet potatoes about six years ago and has had strong support from the Kroger chain.

Recently, L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms also started growing organic produce, including greens and onions. "The humidity and insects can be challenging in the summer, although it's not bad in the winter," says Williams. "Retailers tell us year-round

sourcing for organic produce is difficult."

The farm has a designated staff member oversee food safety. Its products are Primus-certified and several audits are done annually.

GEORGIA IS THE 'NEW' CALIFORNIA

"There has definitely been a big push for local produce, which is growing as fast or faster than organic," says Vince Stanley, general manager at Generation Farms, which is the result of a recent merger between

Stanley Farms and Coggins Farm and Produce Inc. Located in Lake Park, GA, Generation Farms' retail packaging uses the Georgia Grown logo.

Among Generation Farms' products are Vidalia, red and organic onions, as well as carrots and sweet potatoes.

Although the state continues to have environmental constraints, its farms are dedicated to be good stewards to the land.

"Georgia is the new California without the water shortages and agricultural restrictions," says Stanley. "We're truly in the vegetable belt, which provides a variety of soil,

“RETAILERS GET EXCITED TO PROMOTE VIDALIAS IN SPRING AND SUMMER. WE’LL HAVE A GEORGIA GROWN DAY, BRINGING IN VENDORS TO TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY’RE LOOKING FOR.”

— JOHN WILLIAMS, L.G. HERNDON JR. FARMS



PHOTO COURTESY OF FORTIFY RESTAURANT



PHOTO COURTESY OF FORTIFY RESTAURANT



PHOTO COURTESY OF FORTIFY RESTAURANT

than a transaction."

The restaurant plans on expanding its use of Georgia grown produce, as it is invested in the state and local product, he says.

"We really just want people to assume we use the best products and are happy to prove it every day," says Acheson.

Opened two years ago by Jamie Allred and Jack Nolan, Fortify Kitchen & Bar in Clayton, GA, has partnered with 20 Georgia farms, many of which are less than an acre.

"We pick and choose which ones we work with, since certain ones specialize in different produce items," says Allred.

Approximately 80 percent of Fortify Kitchen's menu ingredients are sourced from either Georgia or North Carolina, although in winter, only between 25 and 30 percent of produce is sourced from its home state.

The restaurant's menu features three vegetable sides nightly that were grown in the state.

The restaurant also holds its Fortify Farmers Wednesday program each week. With this initia-

tive, farmers hold court at a table in the front of the restaurant to talk about the items sourced from their land. The menu expands to include a tapas special that offers four or five produce items from the farm.

"Farmers meet with our customers to answer questions about how they grow their produce and where they're located," says Allred. "It's a good promotion for these farmers."

The items Fortify Kitchen incorporates in its dishes includes kale in the spring and local lettuce for salads. Squash also comes in at this time, as well as a large supply of beets and turnips. Carrots are popular, too.

"Locally grown carrots are much different than conventionally grown and easier to cook with," says Allred. "The flavor is 40 times more intense and more like a carrot should taste, with a better flavor and crunch."

The biggest challenge in utilizing local produce is due to Fortify Kitchen's location, which is in the northeast corner of the state.

"I try to use produce from as many local

farmers as I can, but because there are such small farms in our area, I can sometimes only get half as much product as I need," says Allred.

As a result, he's had to reach out to farmers to ask if they can add a crop to supplement the restaurant's supply. Many times, the growers will stagger the planting to keep Fortify Kitchen in steady supply of necessary ingredients.

"There are a couple farmers I meet with once a season to talk about items they'll plant, and I'll use on the menu," says Allred. "I plan out if I need 10 pounds of tomatoes a week or 20 pounds of collard greens and will make sure we have enough for the season."

The most recent challenge many of Fortify Kitchen's farmers are dealing with are the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) rules and regulations.

"These small farmers are having trouble adapting to these changes, as they are barely making a living as it is, and the new requirements then make it harder for them to turn a profit," says Allred. pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHUMAN PRODUCE



“We can adjust our operation at any time to handle the elements that are coming,” says Bland. “It can be wet here one day and too hot the next, so learning and having experience in dealing with crops is one of the most important things to being successful.”

Bland Farms supports the popular locally grown programs, but only a small amount of its products are sold in the state. “I feel like locally grown is overrated when looking at the big picture,” says Bland. “We need the best product available, and if it’s from two states over at a better price, that’s where buyers have to discriminate.”

JUST PEACHY

Georgia Grown produce is not just about Vidalia onions. The state also is well-known for its peach production.

Dickey Farms in Musella, GA, primarily grows peaches, which flourish in Georgia and the Southeast and are known for high quality and a sweet taste. This fruit also can be quite labor intensive.

“There is a real push from consumers across the country seeking locally grown produce,” says Lee Dickey, the farm’s general manager. “People have an enhanced interest in knowing where their produce comes from.” He says more retailers also are making an effort to visit individual farms, rather than going through a broker, to save on shipping expenses.

In Georgia, growers sometimes contend with late freezes, which can be detrimental to peach production. “In the past three to four years, we lost 30 to 60 percent of our crop, which is fairly common,” says Dickey. “It can be challenging compensating for this, so it comes down to managing business and labor.”

The farm is expecting a full crop for 2016, which hasn’t happened for the last five seasons.

Dickey Farms is Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified and is audited on an

annual basis. However, this is not heavily promoted, due to the lack of inquiries from its customers.

“It’s more regulation-driven,” says Dickey. “We have a dedicated food safety director in our business who keeps up with what’s going on in terms of regulations to ensure we’re at forefront of this and staying on top of it.”

Lane Packing Co. in Fort Valley, GA, grows peaches and pecans, which benefit from the state’s climate and soil. “The climate is outstanding, since we usually get sufficient cold weather and peach trees need sufficient chilling for a bud break,” says Mark Sanchez, Lane Packing’s chief executive. “Peaches require a certain amount of chilling hours below 45 degrees from mid-October to mid-February, and we recently had just under 800 hours of chilling when 1,000 hours is typical.”

Peaches thrive in cooler nights and hot, dry days, and the state gets enough rainfall at the right times for this fruit. Farming has challenges every year in terms of crop production, and the weather is always the biggest unknown. With this past season, El Niño was in full force, with barely enough chilling hours this year due to warm, wet weather.

“Now we have a great crop coming,” says Sanchez. “But we will see some effects [on supply] later in the season.”

He has seen locally grown peach sales increase, especially in the past five to six years, as consumers want to know where their food comes from and minimize their carbon footprint.

The farm mainly supplies peaches to the Atlanta and Florida markets.

“A good number of our peaches are sold here in the Southeast at Wal-Mart, Kroger, Publix and Winn-Dixie markets,” says Sanchez.

Lane Packing has promoted its produce with marketing campaigns that include photos and stories about the farm for store produce sections. This has been effective in terms of building trust with consumers as well as highlighting the business’ food safety initiatives.

GAP is a critical part of Lane Packing’s business and becoming more important every year.

“For many years, we’ve had a comprehensive food safety program in place,” says Sanchez. “We conduct third party audits every year, and we were one of the first peach growers to get Global GAP certification.”



Ripe Sales

Refined ripening, from program to display, transforms the bottomline.

BY HOWARD RIELL

PHOTO COURTESY OF PEAR BUREAU NORTHWEST



Presenting consumers with perfectly ripened fruit calls for retailers to skillfully combine the science of produce with the science of retailing. Whether done in-house or by a third party, the process of ripening a wide variety of fruits — from bananas, tomatoes and avocados to mangos, papaya, pears and more — can supercharge impulse sales and enhance a produce department's overall luster.

Doing so, however, requires top-quality fruit, solid processes and coordination among a variety of departments. It's a management task well worth undertaking, as Americans come to expect world-class, ready-to-use fruit more than ever before.

The obvious retail advantage to selling ripened fruit is that it is instantly consumable, a crucial factor in generating impulse sales, says Mike Maxwell, president of Philadelphia-based Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation, one of the largest wholesale produce distributors in North America. "When people go to the store to pick up avocados they want a little give to them because they want to go home and use them. 'Hey, I can go home and make guacamole; I can use that right now, I don't have to put it away or set it up to ripen at home.' It does definitely enhance the product."

Most fruits are harvested mature, then ripened with ethylene. "Your process has to be solid, and you have to be committed to it for it to work," advises Gary Campisi, senior director of quality control for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. in Bentonville, AR. "Everybody who plays a role in it — from the people who source the product all the way down to the buyer, the person who replenishes the product to the ripener — all have to be engaged to do the right thing for the customers. The whole supply chain has to work in concert so that no one part of it has any more say in it."

Having a customer-centric focus is key. "If it comes down to, 'Well, I really need the product, I don't have time to ripen it, I just want to be in stock' then the customer loses," says Campisi. "Everybody has to work together because it's not about any one person, it's about the customer."

"First of all you have to anticipate your demand," explains Dick Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting Service, Inc. in Monrovia, CA. Seasonal variations must be accounted for. "You sell more bananas in the winter, because in the summer they are competing with so many tree fruits, grapes, melons." During the winter, bananas "are an easy item to put in every kid's lunch box. It has its own carrying

case and it doesn't bruise easily. So you have to figure the demand, and then you have to ripen them accordingly."

Geography presents another challenge. Bananas from different parts of the world — "say, an Ecuador banana versus a Costa Rica banana," notes Spezzano — react differently. "And then various supermarkets have various programs as far as what color they want to have at their retail stores. Ideally you want a No. 4 to No. 5 color banana (on a scale from 1 to 7), which gives you fruit that is three-quarters ripe and has nice appearance." Some companies will merchandise a No. 3 color "because they don't want to take any shrink, and you take less shrink when they're green. But you take less in sales, also."

THE PROCESS

There are slight variations in the ripening process for each commodity, explains Steve Page, vice president of Catalytic Generators Inc. in Norfolk, VA, "but it is imperative to have complete control of the temperature, humidity, ethylene and carbon dioxide levels inside the ripening chamber and throughout the cold chain."

Most produce is ripened at a distribution center or shipping location, notes Karen-Ann Christenbery, Manager for American Ripener LLC in Charlotte, NC, which works with both. Depending on the fruit being ripened, she says, it will be treated with 100 to 150 parts per million of ethylene for 24 to 48 hours at 65-68 degrees F.

"The humidity level must be kept above 90 percent to keep from having any weight loss in the fruit." Boxes of fruit should be air stacked with spaces between them to allow good air flow. Fans in the rooms will distribute ethylene through the boxes, and help remove carbon



PHOTO COURTESY OF PEAR BUREAU NORTHWEST

dioxide and heat from the fruit.

Christenbery recommends retailers ensure distribution centers are maintaining fruit at the correct temperature and ripening according to guidelines. "This will make sure the fruit is ripe and ready to eat when it arrives at retail."

Carbon dioxide levels above 0.5 percent slow the ripening process, so ripening rooms need to be properly vented. Weight loss is also a concern when the humidity levels are less than 85 to 90 percent, says Christenbery. This can also make the fruit more susceptible to handling damage. "Non-uniform ripening can also be caused by poor air flow between boxes."

Many supermarkets, of course, have their own banana ripening rooms. According to Spezzano, "It takes a certain amount of volume to really be able to afford banana ripening rooms. A room that holds 2,000 boxes, which is two loads, holds about \$50,000 of product. The average room holds 2,000 boxes. There are some that hold 1,000 boxes, and some 3,000."

A supermarket chain with 150 stores is likely going through 18 or 20 loads a week, says Spezzano, with 960 boxes in each. "That's 18,000 to 20,000 boxes a week. They are on a four- or five-day cycle and it takes five days to get them ripe, so you always have to have backup."

"When I came to work for Wal-Mart in 1993 it was all about bananas, because bananas represent 9-10 percent of the total produce sales," recalls Campisi. "It could be 1 percent of the total store sales, so it's a big item that gets a lot of people's attention." Indeed, the massive retailer was operating 18 ripening rooms when

Campisi came aboard in 1993; today it has 600, with another 10 coming later this year.

Campisi says that some retailers have regretted working with third-party ripeners because they lose control. "When you have better control — better mechanics to do it — and everybody working in concert you have better control."

Conditioning for pears can take place at the shipper level in specially designed rooms or in a retailer's avocado or banana ripening room, says Kevin Moffitt, president and chief executive of Pear Bureau Northwest in Milwaukie, OR. The Pear Bureau has step-by-step instructions for conditioning pears as well as a ripening consultation available to work with retailers' receiving and ripening staff.

"Any retailer with a banana or avocado program can easily initiate a conditioned pears program by following a similar model," says Moffitt. Communication and coordination with the supplier or distribution center is key. "It takes one to three days for pears to be conditioned, and time should be allowed for cooling and transportation so retailers need to plan ahead to keep the fruit in stock."

The benefits of a conditioned pear program are many, including:

- Consumers are looking for riper fruit on display at retailer, says Moffitt. "Recent research has shown that 50 percent of consumers eat pears within one to two days of purchase, and 71 percent within three days."
- Carrying conditioned pears can be profitable for the retailer. A controlled test conducted by Nielsen Perishables Group at a West Coast retailer in 2012 showed that conditioned pears outsold non-conditioned pears by 19.5 percent.
- Retailers can differentiate themselves from their competition by carrying ripened fruit.



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Whether done in-house or by a third party, the process of ripening a wide variety of fruits can supercharge impulse sales and enhance a produce department's overall luster.

"Once consumers know that they can get ripe, tasty fruit at a certain retail store they will come back again and again," says Moffitt.

COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE

According to Procacci's Maxwell, retailers can make mistakes due to a lack of product knowledge. "A lot of times if you're selling to a chain store the inspector may say, 'This is a

"Once consumers know that they can get ripe, tasty fruit at a certain retail store they will come back again and again."

— Kevin Moffitt, Pear Bureau Northwest

little givey.' He's got to understand that this is a pre-ripened program and this is what you will get. But once the knowledge is out there and the communication is there about the spec they are after, it seems to go pretty well."

Communicating that knowledge to store personnel is just as key, he adds. "The produce manager has got to handle them a little differently. He needs to understand what the product is: 'They are not bricks; they have a little give to them,'" says Maxwell.

Labeling is another major consideration in stores. "They should display the labeling correctly at the store level so the customer knows this is a pre-ripened program. When we give them pre-ripened stone fruit you get softer peaches, softer nectarines. People have

to understand why they are like that."

Retailers can manage their ripening programs and ensure steady sales by rotating their stock to keep the fully ripened fruit on top and offer consistent quality to the consumer. High on the list of potential pitfalls is shrinkage. Once the fruit has been triggered it will continue to ripen until it is over-ripe, says Page, "so the retailer must mold their ripening programs around their sales to avoid throwing away what they have worked so hard to ripen."

The effort will pay off both in sales and customer loyalty. "The consumer will quickly associate your store as the best supplier of produce in town," adds Page, "and return time and time again to shop for all their grocery needs." **pb**

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The Art To Tying In

Fresh approaches to companion products for fruit often yield double rings.

BY JOHN LEHNDORFF

Produce sales tie-ins are not exactly a new idea. Historians report merchants in marketplaces sold fruit right next to nuts, bread and other favorites to grab the ancient equivalent of a double-ring from customers.

The question isn't whether tie-ins help sell more fresh fruit — they clearly can — but whether there are larger co-marketing opportunities out there because of evolving demographics.

Supermarkets are using quality fresh produce to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace as consumers continue the quest for cooking solutions, convenience and “free-from” formulations anybody in the family can eat.

Whether referred to as “companion products,” “complementary products,” or “tie-ins,” non-produce PLUs can include dressings,

caramel dips, pie shells, shortcakes, crepes, angel food cakes, glazes, and chocolate, yogurt or cheese dips.

Proximity still rules, like keeping the caramel dip next to the Granny Smith apples, but location can matter more, say experts. Seasonal free-standing displays are more likely to catch the attention of shoppers, especially regulars who follow a familiar, rapid route through the store. Placing strawberries next to glaze, shortcake, sponge cakes and canned whipped cream — where shoppers encounter it face-on — invites an impulse buy.

The fruit companion product tent has expanded in number and types of products in the past decade to feature banana bread and other mixes, smoothie mixes, and a wide range of good-for-you snacks formerly seen mainly in the natural foods stores.

Companies are introducing new companion



products from snacks to dips as well as fresh display and marketing approaches.

HEALTHIER DESSERT OPTIONS

Melissa's/World Variety Produce has had long-term success with tie-ins including crepes, an item which have been on produce department shelves for 25 years.

“Tie-ins increase sales in the produce department or they wouldn't be there. Retailers have reported to us 10 percent to 20 percent increases in sales in the berry category and higher during promotions with tie-ins,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations at the Los Angeles-based distributor of specialty produce and companion products.

Schueller ticked off the reasons tie-ins are attractive including guaranteed sales, typically a much higher markup than fruit, and much less perishable. However, not all tie-ins have the durability of Melissa's crepes. “There have been some companion products that have just fizzled after a while. One is those vegetable washing sprays that became popular after a produce safety issue came up. Consumers realized they didn't really need the spray to clean



their produce,” he says.

However, overall health concerns are driving consumers toward fresh fruit. “Crepes and sauce displayed next to the berries are perceived as a lighter, healthier option than a lot of other desserts,” he says.

Melissa’s introduced a new kind of companion product called Clean Snax three years ago. The shelf-stable, bite-sized squares of chia and flaxseed are lightly sweetened with honey. They are also gluten-free, low-fat, low-sodium and contain no artificial ingredients.

“This is the third year we are carrying Clean Snax and they have only gotten more popular. We just added a fifth flavor, cranberry, to go with the coconut, pepitas, quinoa and almond flavors,” says Schueller.

“Clean Snax are not placed in the granola or snack bar supermarket aisle even though the ingredients are similar. Granola is no longer seen by consumers as being really healthy.”

A lot of new products are vying for attention in the produce department where retail produce executives are naturally possessive about their floor and shelf space and devoting it to slower selling non-produce items.

PRODUCING A DOUBLE RING

Tropical Foods, a manufacturer and packer of roasted nuts and dried fruits, started out as a bulk foods distributor. Today it supplies major supermarket chains. “We have a tub program for supermarkets where we put in snacks, nuts, seeds, dried fruit and candy,” says Chad Hartman, director of marketing of the Charlotte, NC-based company.

“Crepes and sauce displayed next to the berries are perceived as a lighter, healthier option than a lot of other desserts.”

— Robert Schueller, Melissa’s/World Variety Produce



Tropical’s items include everything from wasabi-coated peanuts to probiotic yogurt raisins and goji berries, but one of the fastest selling item is Dip & Devour, a line of chocolate-flavored coatings in milk, dark and white in resealable, microwavable containers.

Like similar meltable dips, the product is typically pictured with strawberries or bananas, but consumers also dip in dried fruit. “My favorite fruit to dip in the milk Dip & Devour is dried pineapple; apricots are great, too,” says

Hartman.

The newest addition to the Dip & Devour line is peanut butter melts for celery, apples or bananas (and perhaps an occasional cookie).

“The peanut butter Dip & Devour has been a much tougher sell because it’s new and unfamiliar, but anytime we can do an active demo program with a microwave in stores it sells all day long,” he says. Hartman says sampling tends to happen at store grand openings or customer appreciation days.

■ GETTING CHEESE AND FRUIT TOGETHER

You see apples served with Cheddar on cheese plates. Strawberries are often paired with Mascarpone cheese on restaurant menus. Goat milk Chevre is often sampled with peaches at farmers markets.

But look in the typical supermarket produce department and you probably won’t see a triple crème cheese displayed next to raspberries or fresh figs or smoked Gouda nestled by the Cotton Candy grapes.

Cheese, deli and prepared foods departments are often adjacent to produce sections. Sometimes the cheeses and grapes are only a few yards apart.

According to Sue Merckx, director of marketing for Plymouth WI-based Sartori Food, it’s a matter of tradition and supermarket department separation.



When the company does tastings at the corporate offices, “we always incorporate fruit on the cutting board with our

cheeses,” she says.

The website for Sartori Cheeses suggests matching the company’s aged SarVecchio Parmesan with red grapes or dried pineapple and Dolce Gorgonzola with figs, pears and red grapes.

Since everyone — including consumers — agrees cheese and fruit are wonderful together, why are they seldom displayed as tie-ins?

“We work with deli departments. We never work with produce departments. It’s because they are two different management offices,” she says.

Sartori does partner with Salad Girl organic dressings for in-store demos featuring vegetable and cheese skewers ... but not fruit.

pb

“In terms of promotion, the thing that drives customers to the fruit the most is an IPR (item price reduction) on the shelf and in-store signage.”

Digital and mobile advertising has become essential in reaching younger consumers. “What we try to do is show the product and how easy it is to use in videos, Instagram and Twitter,” says Hartman.

He has seen displays with two rows of strawberries in clamshells with a row of Dip & Devour up the middle, but one store’s approach caught his eye: “The most effective marketing I’ve seen was strawberries and Dip & Devour wrapped in the same package by one retailer. The double ring is automatic,” he says.

The least effective approach? “The moment they put it under the end table near the potatoes, it’s over. It stops selling,” says Hartman.

EXPANDING PALATE, NEW FLAVORS

“The American palate is expanding to include more exotic fruits and ethnic tastes,” says Margi Gunter, brand manager at Lighthouse Foods. The Sandpoint, ID-based makers of refrigerated dressings, dessert dips and crumbled Blue, Gorgonzola and Feta cheeses

recently launched OPA Greek yogurt dressings in the pourable format in five flavors including curry and strawberry poppy seed.

“With new pairings, like fruit with a savory dressing like our OPA curry Greek yogurt dressing, the key is to have the consumer taste it. Curry is a flavor that can be kind of scary but this is very mild and goes so well with tropical fruits like mango,” she says.

In order to support effective sampling, Lighthouse ships demo kits to the demo companies.

“Even if we aren’t partnering with a produce company we always have the demo company buy their fruit from the store,” says Gunter. “We had the greatest consumer reaction to demos by just hulling fresh strawberries and putting a dollop of Opadipity Creamy Cheesecake or Vanilla Almond in the center. Consumers could see the easy two-step process and kids were clamoring for more. Moms were quick to comply because who wouldn’t give their child more fruit?”

She isn’t kidding — Gunter has 5-year-old triplets. “When I pack lunches I give them cut fresh fruit with a light coating of strawberry poppy seed dressing. They really like it.”

Lighthouse co-promotes its dips and dressings with fruit on sale in the produce department. “By purchasing our product, consumers can get \$1 off their bananas or strawberries. It incentivizes them to try our product and get discounts on produce they already buy. Consumers who try the product tend to become repeat buyers,” she says.

SMOOTHIE MIX A STEALTH SELLER

Concord Foods has marketed fresh produce companion products since the 1960s, says Samantha McCaul, marketing manager of the Brockton MA-based company. Concord’s top products by unit sales in 2015 were guacamole mix, smoothie mix, apple crisp mix and caramel apple wrap.

Some products are perennial winners like Concord’s Chiquita banana bread mix. “Bananas are such a high volume item in a lot of homes that they often have overly ripe fruit. So the banana bread mix sells all year round and is much less of an impulse buy,” says McCaul.

Concord’s familiar smoothie mix flavors, banana, strawberry and chocolate banana, were joined two years ago by a new variety that was a bit of an experiment. “We didn’t know how it would go with the kale and apple smoothie mix. That is one of those products that really crept up on us steadily and now it’s selling very well. You add one cup of kale, an apple, ice and water and blend it,” she says.

Concord offers a 140-pack shipper display unit of smoothie mixes that can fit next to the kale or Granny Smith apples. “Instantly redeemable coupon promotions have energized sales on smoothie mixes and Chiquita banana bread mix. We have close to a 30 percent redemption rate from our 2015 offer,” says McCaul.

“We have research that shows 65 percent of shoppers that buy Concord Foods banana smoothie mix, also purchase bananas at the same time,” she says.

Concord’s newest product is spot-on, trend-wise. Simply Concord caramel dip pairs with apples, pears and other sliced fruits. The clean label product has a handful of recognizable ingredients, no artificial flavors and is non-GMO. McCaul added the dip tastes “fantastically good.”

It’s good news for anyone who sells fruit. Shoppers’ definition of “healthy” has evolved beyond simply free from the bad stuff.

“When consumers are interested in indulging in an occasional treat they want to know it is made from the best real ingredients,” she says.

pb

Peruvian Avocados Meet Exotic And Tasty Criteria

How using promotions that play off the fruit's health benefits and taste can increase sales.

BY HOWARD RIELL



The stars seem ideally aligned for Peruvian avocados to continue to rack up market share in the United States and Canada. Commodity board executives say the task for retailers is a basic one: present consumers with excellent product backed by promotions that generate interest and offer value.

“The avocado has seen tremendous momentum in recent years with no signs of slowing,” says Timothy Spath, avocado category manager for LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd. in Westchester, NY, an importer of fresh fruits and vegetables. “As consumption continues to rise, there are times when Mexico can experience shortages, and sometimes these shortages can happen in months when the Peruvian avocado is available. It is up to the different exporting countries’ committees to promote the product and educate the customer at the same time. If this can be done effectively, it is beneficial for the industry as a whole.”

TRAJECTORY PATH

Sales are expected to increase by between 15 and 20 percent this year due to “excellent promotions and a higher consumer demand throughout the summer months,” says Spath. “As long as the Hass avocado has a good oil content when it is harvested — between 23 and 30 percent — the Peruvian avocado is comparable to a Mexican/ Californian piece of fruit. The fruit is being promoted as the “Summer Avocado,” as its season is from May to August.”

All Peruvian avocados are typically Hass avocados. As Mexico

supplies fruit to the U.S. year-round and Chile can start as early as late August, Spath adds, there can potentially be three different countries of origin in the market at once.

According to Spath, “excellent promotions” involve food truck wraps with attractive pictures from Peru on the sides, promoting Peruvian avocados at baseball stadiums as a hotdog topping, as the “summer avocado,” and as in-store promotions at various clubs. “Anyone that shops at major retail stores throughout the summer months will most likely be a consumer of Peruvian avocados.”

All Hass avocados taste great, notes Xavier Equihua, chief executive of the Washington, D.C.-based Peruvian Avocado Commission, but each country of origin has its own personality. Avocados from Peru are “special because they are at their peak in the summer, which of course is when consumption is at its greatest.”

Because avocados from Peru are grown near the equator, they only bloom once a year, he adds, “so the quality is consistent and they all ripen in the same short period.”

Peru’s growing regions are fed by pure water brought down from the Andes, because there is no rain where they are grown. The weather in Peru’s growing regions features consistently mild temperatures year-round, so the quality is uniquely consistent also.

“Naturally sheltered as it is from heavy rain or freezing temperatures, Peru is an almost perfect climate for the cultivation of avocados,” says Equihua. “Some tropical avocados bloom multiple times a year and are subject to the vagaries of rainfall.”



Mission Produce began shipping avocados from Peru in May. The company has various facilities throughout California, Chile, Mexico, and Peru — including this facility in Arato, Peru (pictured above).

EXOTIC ORIGIN APPEAL

“Peruvian avocados are Hass, and are very similar to the fruit grown in California and Mexico,” says Robb Bertels, vice president of marketing for Mission Produce, Inc. in Oxnard, CA. “However, Peru tends to produce larger fruit than is typical in California and Mexico even though Mexico’s size curve this season has skewed larger.” In addition, Peruvian fruit tends to have a thicker, more pebbly skin, and sometimes stays a brighter shade of green even after ripening.

In North America, Peru overlaps with California as well as Mexico during the summer months. Whether or not Peruvian avocados should be promoted separately from other countries’ avocados is “a tricky question,” according to Bertels.

“Each country of origin has a unique season, quality characteristics and geographic advantages,” he says. “The trade definitely cares about those attributes because of logistics, ripening characteristics and velocity in the store. Getting that message to consumers while pushing consumption to higher levels is the real trick. All of the promotional effort put forth by various chief operating officers is good for awareness and consumption.”

“The first arrivals should start in North America in late May, but the expectation is that the promotional efforts by the Peruvian Avocado Commission will have a positive influence on sales,” says Bertels. Overall, he and his colleagues expect volume similar to last season to arrive in this market.

Gradually during the past 15 years, avocados have gone from becoming an exotic fruit to one that is widely considered more mainstream, says Equihua. “They are being consumed by all ages and demographics. Case in point: avocados are now a popular baby food staple. Why? Because they are easy to eat, and of course they are good for babies.”

Demographics also favor high-quality avocados. To the surprise of many, Equihua says, Millennials have “completely embraced avocados like no other group has done in the past. They use them in many ways, from salads to smoothies. They are why avocados will eventually become as commonly used as tomatoes.”

IN-STORE MARKETING

This eating usage, he adds, is on top of the traditional, consistent base of Baby Boomers “and the senior community for the simple reasons that avocados taste great and are excellent for your health.” More Americans than ever are watching what they are eating, “and they know that avocados are one of the most perfect superfoods available in the produce section.”

Retailers all over the country have been doing a “fantastic” job of promoting avocados to consumers, Equihua has found, which he feels is why the category has been growing so fast. “We definitely thank them for that. Wal-Mart, Costco, Ahold and Wakefern, all had a strong year with avocados from Peru last year. This year it looks like six or seven additional chains

will be taking advantage of the strong avocados from Peru marketing efforts.”

From a marketing perspective, Equihua argues, much still remains to be done, especially with consumers located in the Midwest and the South. “We also need to create traction in the East Coast similar to the traction that we have in the West Coast.” The collective promotions by the avocado category have a simple objective in common, he says: to make avocados a mainstream super food for all Americans.

“Mexico and California complement the avocados from Peru season, which runs from mid-May to mid-September,” explains Equihua. Consumption of avocados keeps growing, he says, “because there is supply coming from all different areas of the world, giving consumers a plentiful supply.”

Peruvian avocados are at their flavor peak during the summer, because unlike other regions, Peru has only a single bloom, which guarantees that the product will be consistent in flavor and maturity.

Sales as a result of the promotional efforts this year should be roughly the same as those last year, says Equihua at approximately 100-million pounds. “We will complement the summer window in markets primarily east of the Mississippi by supplying peak season fruit during the summer. That’s why we call avocados from Peru the “Summer Avocado.” It’s a challenging market this year, but it should be good for avocados from Peru.”

Equihua says he still sees over-ripe avocados in produce departments. “We need to work

“The romance of exotic origins like Peru makes the fruit all the more appealing.”

— Xavier Equihua, Peruvian Avocado Commission

with our retailer partners on the issue in order to provide consumers with a consistent and perfect avocado experience.”

He also believes that Peruvian avocados should, indeed, be promoted separately from other countries’ avocados. “Consumers, especially Millennials, want to know where their products come from. The romance of exotic origins like Peru makes the fruit all the more appealing. And of course avocados are the perfect super food. They are a super-healthy food rich in 20 vitamins and minerals with zero cholesterol.”

‘LOVE ONE TODAY’

A prime example of a highly effective program is the Mission Viejo, CA-based Hass Avocado Board’s (HAB’s) “Love One Today” program.

“What the Hass Avocado Board does is focus on nutrition and nutrition marketing through the ‘Love One Today’ program,” explains Emiliano Escobedo, its executive director. The program’s goal is to raise awareness of the nutritional benefits of consuming Hass avocados. To do so, it leverages “a couple of key insights that we gathered through our consumer research.” One is that consumers love avocados for their taste, and another is that “they are also not fully aware of all the nutritional benefits.”

What “Love One Today” does is “give consumers permission to enjoy them and love them by communicating two key benefits that they consider relevant: avocados contain naturally good (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated) fats and are cholesterol-free,” says Escobedo. The program targets health professionals and both general and Hispanic consumers.

In 2014, Escobedo says, Peru shipped 141 million of the 1.85 billion pounds of Hass avocados that came into the U.S., or roughly 7.6 percent. Last year, Peru’s market share dropped to 4.7 percent, with 100 million out of 2.14 billion pounds. The reason for the decline, he says, is that more were shipped to markets outside the U.S. For 2016, Peru’s volume is projected to remain relatively unchanged.

Year-to-year comparisons for January and February 2015 and 2016 show retail pricing in the U.S. down 10.4 percent, according to Escobedo, which he attributes to higher

volumes coming from Mexico and lower pricing at FOB level in the avocado market. “That has given the retailer the opportunity to be more aggressive, not only in their promotions but also in day-to-day pricing.”

Country of origin, says Escobedo, is not a

driving factor for purchases. Last year for the first time avocado consumers told his group that nutritional benefit was more important than taste. “That is a direct result of the nutrition research program we launched.”

Going forward, HAB will continue to trumpet health benefits, with a heavier investment in nutritional research. To leverage that at retail, the group developed a study called “Shopper Purchase Decisions and Influences,” which Escobedo calls “a quick path-to-purchase action guide.” **pb**

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New Jersey Produce Increases Exposure

From retail to foodservice, this state's fruit and vegetable bounty goes beyond its borders and traditional outlets.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Much has changed over the past 100 years since the founding of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA). In 1916, dairy farms dominated the agricultural landscape, the modern-day cultivated blueberry was just taking root, and tomatoes by the wagonload headed to soup makers and canneries. Today, fresh fruits and vegetables are key commodities.

In 2012, the latest data available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service's New Jersey Field Office in Trenton, the food and agriculture sector contributed cash receipts totaling \$1.14 billion, making it the third largest industry in the Garden State. This boom, driven especially now by consumer demand for produce grown locally, does not appear to bust anytime soon.

"While consumer demand for locally grown continues to increase each year, we've been


Continued on page 94



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■ JERSEY FRESH PRODUCE ON THE MENU

Restaurants and schools, as well as hospitals and ball parks, are part of the broad range of foodservice operations in New Jersey featuring Garden State-grown produce on menus. It's a sector driven by consumer demand and fed by farmers eager to support the "locally grown" movement.

Jersey Fresh Dinner

Nearly 100 diners, including the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's (NJDA) secretary and assistant secretary, drive to the Jersey Shore destination of Lavallette each fall, but it isn't for the sun, sand and sea. Instead, it's to experience the Jersey Fresh-themed dinner served by Craig Korb, executive chef at The Crab's Claw Inn. Menu offerings in the past include a butternut squash soup; arugula, green apple and shaved fennel salad; and cauliflower puree with pickled beets and chive oil that sided up to an equally locally sourced duck breast. Jersey grown produce isn't a once-a-year happening on the Crab's Claw menu.

"The Jersey Caprese Salad is a staple on the menu for as long as I can get Jersey tomatoes, including from the guys here who are growing them in greenhouses in the spring," says Korb, who holds a degree in Culinary Arts and Food Service Management from Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI. "I also use Jersey tomatoes in sandwiches and salads. Basically, when I'm ordering, I look for Jersey first."

Korb says it's getting much easier to source Jersey grown produce. For example, his main foodservice suppliers, Baldor and Sysco, both email weekly availability with a section that specifically calls out what is from New Jersey. In addition, he makes use of a small independent distributor who drives out to area farms in a refrigerated van and picks up just-picked such as herbs, greens like parsley and cilantro, bell peppers and eggplant.

"Customers come in here looking for local. It makes sense. Why have something shipped in from the West Coast when it's available in our backyard," says Korb, who also sources Jersey meats, seafood, cheeses and wines, signature items along with produce in his annual Jersey Fresh dinner.

Farm-To-School

The NJDA's Food and Nutrition Division does not purchase the produce that goes into school meals. However, it, rather

than the state's Department of Education, runs all of the USDA-funded child nutrition programs.

"Our Farm-to-School initiative is a resource for all of these programs to learn about sourcing local produce, to find New Jersey farms to partner with and to create connections to agriculture through school garden and agriculture education directly connecting to curriculum already taught in the classroom," explains Beth Feehan, farm-to-school program coordinator.

Anything that grows commercially in New Jersey can be served in schools, either through simple taste tests (like the ones used for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program that over 100 schools in the state are eligible for) or through recipes used in the cafeteria, according to Feehan. Some school districts have very strong programs that promote local produce, while others use Jersey Fresh Farm to School Week or National Farm to School Month to celebrate local produce and incorporate it into their cafeteria menus. Still, others connect their school garden to a crop that grows in New Jersey to entice kids to eat it.

"We have a multifaceted approach to teaching children. Our role is to run the school lunch programs but by helping train foodservice professionals to use more fresh produce in school meals, we encourage all schools to use their cafeteria as an extension of the classroom, helping students make the right choice to eat healthy," says Feehan.

RX: Garden State Produce

The Robert Wood Johnson Hospital, a 965-bed medical facility with locations in Somerset and New Brunswick, is the first Jersey Fresh hospital in the state. The impetus to this impressive designation started six years ago when executive chef, Peter Pascale, joined the Eastern Produce Council. Today, Jersey Fresh produce is incorporated into some of the 1 million meals a year served to visitors, employees and patients.

"Corn, blueberries and greens, we use anything and everything we can get from New Jersey," says Pascale, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY. "In our cafeteria, we put a Jersey Fresh sticker next to the selection on the menu board if its ingredients are 50 percent or more sourced from in-state.

That means sometimes it's the tomato in the tomato-cucumber salad that's from New Jersey and other times it may be the cucumber."

The patients' menu changes seasonally. Pascale works with the hospital's clinical nutrition manager to create the selections. Menu items might include roasted asparagus or roasted zucchini or a massaged kale salad seasoned with lemon juice and olive oil. When the locally grown program began one of the challenges, according to Pascale, was teaching staff how to utilize right-from-the-field produce such as how to thoroughly wash and clean a fresh head of kale.

Take Me Out To The Ball Park

The Healthy Plate Concession Stand, a collaborative effort of Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey and the Somerset Patriots baseball team, opened for business at the TD Bank Ballpark in Bridgewater, NJ, in April for its third season. The stand will stay open until September.

"Horizon works with the State Department of Health on initiatives that raise awareness of nutrition and fitness," says Dave Marek, senior vice president of marketing for the Somerset Patriots, a minor league ball club. "Over the past four years, we surveyed fans, and they told us they want the parks to offer healthier food options. It was a natural fit to partner with Horizon and the NJDA's Jersey Fresh program."

The Somerset Patriots contracts its foodservice with Centerplate, a global leader in live event hospitality headquartered in Stamford, CT.

"We work with the NJDA, and they let us know what's available and when," explains Centerplate's general manager, Mike McDermott. "For example, we incorporated Jersey strawberries in May in the fresh fruit cup. We'll also serve veggies in a bowl like sugar snap peas with a raspberry vinaigrette. In July and August, we'll easily sell up to 50 ears of fresh corn on a stick per game. Come late summer and early fall, there will be a nice big basket of fresh peaches or apples on the counter."

Jersey Fresh produce is also incorporated into other healthy choice menu selections served at the stand such as a black bean veggie burger, grilled chicken sandwich, turkey burger and garden salad. **pb**



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Continued from page 90

working with and sourcing local produce from New Jersey family farms for nearly 40 years," says Derrick Jenkins, vice president of produce and floral for Wakefern Food Corp. Headquartered in Edison, NJ, Wakefern is the nation's largest retailer-owned cooperative. Its subsidiary, ShopRite Supermarkets, Inc., operates more than 30 stores in New York and New Jersey.

"ShopRite supports the communities where our stores operate and the family farms oper-

ating in those communities. Many of our stores are run by families of third and fourth generation grocers who work with third and fourth generation local farmers, so locally grown is really in our DNA. Supplying local produce in our stores makes good business sense, and it's also the right thing to do," says Jenkins.

AG SNAPSHOT

In 2012, according to USDA-NASS data, New Jersey's 9,000-plus farms covered some 715,000 acres, or 15 percent of the land area

in the 47th smallest state. Fresh produce is the leading agricultural sector at \$462.9 million. In 2014, New Jersey was a national Top 10 producer of 11 fruits and vegetables. These were, in descending order, cranberries, bell peppers, spinach, peaches, blueberries, cucumbers, sweet corn, squash, tomatoes, snap beans and cabbage.

"With the help of Rutgers University, we have some of the most flavor-producing seeds to start with and we end up with high quality products," says Jeff Shilling, vice president of procurement for FreshPro Food Distributors in West Caldwell, NJ. "In the southern part of the state, the sandy soil allows for excellent drainage so the crops get just enough water. In the north, the 'muck' soil helps to form healthy plants. Throughout the state, growing conditions help produce premium products with great flavor."

New Jersey farmers use modern farming methods while still being able to maintain that small-farm feel. For example, third and fourth generations of the Tedesco family are owners and operators of Sunnyside Farms, where they grow crops like various grains and corn, and also own The Safeway Group, LLC, in Vineland, NJ. Here, value is added to Jersey-grown asparagus, leaf items like Iceberg, Romaine and green leaf lettuce, blueberries, zucchini, yellow squash, cilantro, herbs and peppers in an SQF Certified 50,000-square-foot facility dedicated to fresh and frozen value-added products. Customers include ShopRite, Wawa, QuickChek, Sheetz and Costco.

"The farm emulates Tedesco's passion for food and whenever possible it is a core mission of Safeway to source locally grown produce," says Amy Erienne, vice president of business development. "Since we are a large produce manufacturer and process a lot of different produce items, we do source year-round from all over the world."

Sustainability endeavors, both social and environmental, are core values of many New Jersey farmers. For example, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., the Philadelphia-headquartered grower of fresh tomatoes in New Jersey, is establishing a scholarship fund for Hispanic students attending Camden Catholic High School in Cherry Hill, NJ. The new scholarship is funded in a fun way: \$100 for every home run the Philadelphia Phillies professional baseball team hits during a season.

On the environmental front, Newark, NJ-headquartered AeroFarms, the world's largest indoor vertical farm at 70,000-square feet with the capability to grow up to 2 million pounds of leafy greens annually, started

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production in May. The company's goal is to provide locally grown healthy produce to customers year-round. Interestingly, the facility was built in a former steel mill.

"Our proprietary growing system enables us to use less than 1 percent of the land needed for conventional growing to achieve the same harvest volume," explains co-founder and chief marketing officer, Marc Oshima. "In other words, we can grow roughly 10 times the amount of a 1,300-acre farm (or more than 6 million, 5-ounce packages). Our biggest seller at retail is Spring Mix. We also grow baby arugula, baby kale and watercress and will be expanding into Asian greens."

AeroFarm's environmentally-friendly advantages include using 95 percent less water than conventional agriculture, 50 percent less fertilizer and no pesticides.

"The ShopRite of Newark and the ShopRite of Bloomfield carry produce from AeroFarms and we are looking at expanding that relationship by bringing AeroFarms produce to more stores this year," says Wakefern's Jenkins.

TOP CROPS

New Jersey farmers grow more than 100 different kinds of fruits and vegetables over a nine-month season. These crops are consumed either fresh or processed in-state as well as along the Eastern Seaboard and Eastern Canada.

"Herbs, chard and all the lettuces start in the spring," says Ryan Flaim of Vineland, NJ-based R&R Flaim Next Generation Produce, which sells its produce under the Panther brand. "Then in the summer, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers and squash are strong. In the fall, we come right back with all the greens like kale, chard and collards. We grow about 45 items now so we can supply more of what the chain stores want."

New Jersey produce is sold in-state as well as to retailers throughout the Eastern Seaboard states and Eastern Canadian provinces. Much of this is picked, packed and delivered the same day or overnight. One of the biggest hubs for fresh produce transactions is the Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction Association, in Vineland, NJ. Over 6.5 million packages of fresh produce are sold during a season to distributors and brokers, who in turn sell to restaurants and retail stores.

"Last year we had approximately 130 different commodities go through the auction, and those commodities were packaged and sold in approximately 363 different manners to meet the needs of the growers and brokers," says office manager, Carol DeFoor, who adds

that the 85-year-old auction is now run electronically and offers member-farmers some 130,000 square feet of loading docks as well as state-of-the-art cooling facilities.

PEACHES. "New Jersey's peach season runs from early July through the end of September," says Bob Von Rohr, director of customer relations for Sunny Valley International in Glassboro, NJ, the exclusive marketer of Jersey Fruit.

The New Jersey Peach Promotion Council's spokesperson Pegi Adam orchestrates promo-

tions with retailers, chefs and farmers markets.

"These will be tailored to supply this year as some grower/shippers had spring freeze damage and their fruit volume may be down," says Jerome Frecon, horticultural consultant for the NJPPC and professor emeritus at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ.

BLUEBERRIES. "There was some weather damage earlier in the year, but we're still looking at an average 50 million pounds, starting in early June through mid-August," says Art Galletta, owner and president of the



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largest blueberry farm in the state, Atlantic Blueberry in Hammonton, NJ, which packs for the Naturipe label.

“Over half the crop sells during the Fourth of July holiday. Bigger packs, like 18-ounces to 2 and 2.5-pounder, are becoming more popular. Retailers like these because it helps move volume at a higher ring,” he says.

Blueberries are hand-picked and labor intensive. “There’s innovation now in mechanical harvesting for fresh pack,” says Tim Wetherbee, sales manager for Diamond Blueberries in Hammonton, NJ, and chairman of the New Jersey Blueberry Industry Advisory Council. “The limiting factor right now is the number of machines and the fact that some varieties do better than others with mechanical harvesting.”

TOMATOES. The Fourth of July through September and sometimes into October, depending on early cold snaps, is the state’s window for tomatoes.

“We are hyper-focused on our Santa Sweet grape tomatoes, UglyRipe heirloom-type tomatoes, vine ripens and Romas in New Jersey,” says Rick Feighery, director of sales for Plant City, FL-based Santa Sweets, which is part of Procacci Brothers. “The mix has changed over the years. There’s an increased demand for heirlooms and less on grapes.”

ORGANICS. “The next phase we’re seeing is locally grown and organic, two hot buttons with consumers today,” says Vic Savanello, director of produce and floral for Allegiance Retail Services, an Iselin, NJ-headquartered company that supports more than 80 independent supermarkets in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania under banners that include Foodtown, Freshtown, D’Agostino, Market Fresh and Uncle Giuseppe’s Marketplace. Savanello is also the president of the Eastern Produce Council.

More New Jersey farmers are realizing that the organic consumer is not going away and that segment of the business continues to grow, says FreshPro’s Shilling. “This is helping to push more farmers to grow more organic crops to meet the demand.”

Jersey Legacy Farms, in Cedarville, NJ, grows more than two dozen vegetables organically. “The volume is doubling on yellow grape tomatoes this season due to retail demand. We also increased plantings of niche items like leeks and beets,” says Fran Hancock, sales manager for organics at Eastern Fresh Growers, which markets for Jersey Legacy.

ETHNIC PRODUCE. “New Jersey’s strength and why agriculture has stayed vibrant so long is that our farmers have the pulse of the market and an incredible ability to adapt

product lines to the needs and tastes of the public,” explains the NJDA’s assistant secretary of agriculture, Al Murray.

Latin items such as chili peppers and cilantro are two items being considered for planting in New Jersey by Frank Donio Inc., a grower-shipper in Hammonton, NJ, that sells under the Top Crop brand.

“Mainstream retailers are looking for these items because they want to offer a complete line for their customers,” says Lauren Del Rosario, business development and marketing manager for the third-generation company, which operates a 150,000-square-foot temperature-controlled warehouse, cooler, freezer and production space facility.

RETAIL PROMOTION

Locally grown produce isn’t a novelty in New Jersey, it’s a way of life, says Murray of the NJDA. “You’re not going to be successful as a retailer unless you carry it.”

Jersey Fresh is an advertising, promotional and quality grading program launched in 1984 by the NJDA to help farmers get the word out to consumers about the availability and variety of fruits and vegetables grown in the state. Today, the brand enjoys an 80 percent positive consumer recognition, according to the NJDA, and the department helps retailers to capitalize on this by providing free Jersey Fresh branded point of purchase materials.

“We focus a lot on getting the word out about local family farms and our locally grown program with signage and promotions in store. Many of our ShopRite stores set up a farm stand in late May in the produce department that names the local farms they work with in the community. We also run commercials highlighting the family farms who supply ShopRite, and this year we will run a commercial focusing on the special relationship between some of our ShopRite family owners and local family farms. Some ShopRite stores even sponsor farm tours for customers. We also tell the story of local grown through social media and our ShopRite store Facebook pages, where we often feature produce picks and healthy recipes,” explains Wakefern’s Jenkins.

Jersey Fresh signage calls out close to 100 different fruits, vegetables and herbs that Allegiance Retail Services procures for its retailers during the Garden State’s season. In addition, the company puts together Jersey Fresh feature ads with about seven items at a time.

“Local, like Jersey Fresh, is a marketing program that is one of the best tools in our toolbox,” says Savanello.

pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF BROOKS TROPICALS

TRACEABILITY Remains A Complex Challenge

Despite tremendous progress, there is still much work to do.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Four years after the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) target date set by the Produce Marketing Association, United Fresh Produce Association, Canadian Produce Marketing Association and other industry leaders, the industry is still not close to 100 percent compliance when it comes to universal case labeling.

Tremendous progress has been made toward the lofty goal of being able to quickly trace contaminated produce back to its field of origin, but there is still work to be done in meeting this challenge.

"We are not at 100 percent compliance with PTI, and I expect it will be quite a while before we even get close to 100 percent," says Charles Waud, president of WaudWare in Brampton, Ontario. "In my view, the move to PTI is somewhat stalled right now."

On the whole, most major grower-shippers are putting traceability labels on their cases, but many smaller farmers are not.

"Certain small farms are complying, but like the rest of the industry, some are also waiting

to see what is actually required of them before doing anything," says Waud.

Even if the pace is glacial, the produce industry is moving toward the goal of being able, in cases of food safety problems, to track produce back to harvest from a particular field on a certain day.

"In some respects, it's better today than it was when people started talking about it," says Steve Dean, owner of ProWare Services in Plant City, FL. "I don't think we're close to 100 percent, and I don't think we ever will be unless it's mandated. People aren't going to do something they don't have to do."

We may be some distance from the goal of universal compliance but enough shippers are already using the PTI label to appreciate the benefits, and to see where the technology must be improved.

INFORMATION PLEASE

The next step in advancing the PTI will be developing a system that lets everyone in the supply chain access not just the label, but also

the information it signifies.

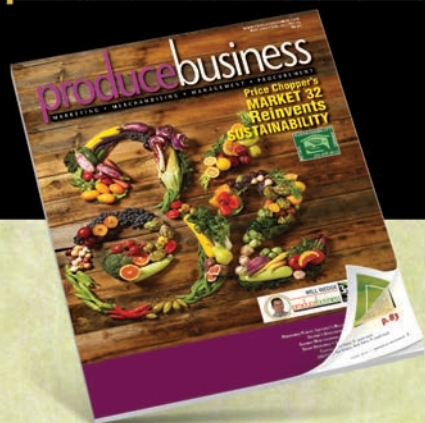
"There are many companies today that are labeling their product; it's at least 50 percent of the industry," says Ray Connelly, vice president of traceability and merchandising at iTradeNetwork in Dublin, CA. "Some retailers and foodservice organizations are starting to request that data be shared via the Advanced Ship Notice (ASN), but we have a ways to go. There is a technical component, but it is more accurate and timelier with an ASN."

"Most of the supermarket and foodservice companies are not requiring the data yet. Wal-Mart and Whole Foods Market are two retailers that have requested a label on every case," says Connelly.

Without access to the data, produce retailers would still have to make phone calls to track down the field where contaminated produce was harvested.

In order to share the information, the industry needs a universally accepted way of transmitting, storing and accessing it.

"We need to be able to transmit the data



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“When there is a recall, you want to provide the USDA all the information necessary, quickly, and move on. This will lower the risk to your company of further scrutiny. You want the USDA to see how organized you are.”

— Dave Donat, Produce Pro

electronically,” says Connelly. “Some companies are already working on it. I know Associated Wholesale Grocers is working on it. I know Wal-Mart is taking steps in that direction too.”

This second generation PTI will require a cloud-based system used by everyone in the supply chain.

“It has to move more toward technology taking it over a little bit,” says Dean. “There is not a cloud for everyone to publish information to, and everyone to retrieve it from. Just putting a code on the case doesn’t tell you anything. You would basically have to call the shipper to find out what the label meant in terms of which field the produce came from on what day.”

Another element to consider: there could be side effects from such a cloud-based system, — not the least of which could be giving the consumer access to previously unheard of information through their smartphones as they stroll through the produce department.

“The next step to me has always been to be really transparent to the consumer,” says Charles Shafae, president of dProduce Man in Half Moon Bay, CA. “I would like to be able to have a G-10 number on the produce, so the consumer could go to the website and really see where it is from.

(G-10 is a 10-digit number used internationally, and each digit tells you information about the location.)

“You can not only take it back to the field, you can take it back to the picker of that particular item,” says Shafae.

But the greatest advantage from sharing the information will be the ability to move with great speed and accuracy in the event of a food safety problem.

“It is one thing to track all of this information,” says Dave Donat, president of Produce Pro in Woodridge, IL. “It is quite another to be able to quickly generate this information on demand. When there is a recall, you want to provide the USDA all the information necessary, quickly, and move on. This will lower the risk to your company of further scrutiny. You want the USDA to see how organized you are.”

made in a short time in adopting traceability labels, there are still loose ends, and some of them will be difficult to tie up.

While many customers of the small farmers not using case labels already know where their produce originated, there are situations where produce enters the mainstream and is difficult, if not impossible, to trace.

“Once it’s put in a box and shipped to retailers, they could trace it back to the lot,” says Ron Myers, executive vice president of LinkFresh in Ventura, CA. “But they mix batches or lots, and then put a label on *that* lot. All of the larger packers are using traceability programs. My opinion, based on what I see, once produce is in cases it could be traced back. They’re putting labels on the cases. The problem is there are mixed lots in those cases, so if there is a recall, we could go overboard and recall more product than actually necessary.”

Traceability becomes even more complex when a truck is rolling down the road loaded with pallets of tomatoes, and each pallet contains more than one lot.

“Each one of the companies that handles the product needs to be able to receive and send the data,” says Connelly. “If I receive a truck with 22 pallets of tomatoes, but those pallets come from 45 different lots, it explodes the complexity of the data.”

The data becomes staggering once you try to track produce that has been cut and washed back to a particular field.

“A lot of companies do value-added,” says John Carpenter, president of Silver Creek Software in Boise, ID. “They’ll take cases and process it. Following that is difficult. The Produce Traceability Initiative was supposed to go from the farm to the fork.”

As partners in the U.S. produce supply chain work to tie up loose ends, there is also work to be done bringing imported produce up to the traceability standards already established in the U.S.

“What we can hope for is better relations with international farmers,” says Myers. “What I have seen is there is more of a problem tracing back to a particular farm or field location on produce imported from Mexico, Chile or Australia. They do know what lot the produce



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TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

As much progress as the produce industry



Compliance with universal traceability standards will only approach 100 percent as shippers feel greater pressure to adopt them.

came from, but the lot could be one field to 100, depending on the commodity and operation.”

The list of undone work may be daunting, but the produce industry is making undeniable progress on a project essential to improving safety and efficiency.

“We need traceability,” says Carpenter. “It’s taken longer than we expected, and [the process] is expensive, but we definitely need it.”

Then there is the question of small farmers who may never adopt labels, because their produce never travels far from home.

“Small farms are generally not complying; we don’t see evidence of it,” says Donat.

Many small farmers do not feel pressure to adopt PTI, because they are selling directly to the consumers.

“The only area we don’t see traceability is the small direct-to-customers at farmers markets, CSAs, or to restaurants,” says Link-Fresh’s Myers. “We’re now focusing on the bottom 20 percent; it’s getting down to the last bit. The industry has done a pretty good job.”

COST IS KING

Among shippers who do enter the mainstream, many will be more likely to adopt PTI as the cost goes down and it becomes more practical and beneficial in numerous ways.

“The real reason for moving slow is the cost,” says Shafae. “As the cost of the technology comes down, more people will convert.”

Associated with lower cost will be integration with newer computer devices, and the younger workers who grew up with them.

“The other thing is the devices,” says Shafae. “As more devices are being used for traceability and other data, more people will use it because

the information is easier to get to. Sales of PCs and laptops are decreasing, while sales of smartphones and other mobile devices are increasing. It is easier for the younger employees to use the technology. We are increasing the use of traceability; we are moving faster.”

Tech firms are already making progress in developing more economical traceability systems.

“The cost has already come down around 25 percent from a couple years ago,” says Carpenter. “The cost of going to a lotted system is holding some smaller companies back. Getting barcodes on some kinds of packages is a problem for some people. From where I’m sitting, we’re still at around 60 percent participation in PTI.”

An important part of improving the bottomline will be developing the other business benefits of produce tracking — not the least of which will be improved inventory control.

“I think that the next step, or perhaps a step to take in conjunction with implementing traceability, would be to ensure you can get other business benefits out of its implementation,” says Waud.

“For example, if you implement traceability in conjunction with inventory transactions (like how our solution is designed) then by having more accurate inventory quantities and sales data, you can make better business decisions, reduce mistakes and overselling, etc. This helps you cost justify the implementation of traceability,” explains Waud.

This part of the process will involve tech firms developing better products that are more economical, easier to use, and provide more

business benefits, explains Waud.

“I think that for those of us involved in traceability in the produce industry, we will continue to be very busy in the coming years helping our customers implement solutions,” says Waud.

PRESSURE TO COMPLY

Compliance with universal traceability standards will only approach 100 percent as shippers feel greater pressure to adopt them, and some companies are waiting to learn what regulators tell them they must do.

“Many produce companies are waiting to see what happens with the Food Safety Modernization Act in the USA and the Safe Food for Canadians Act in Canada,” says Waud. “If this legislation is clearly seen to be aligned with PTI, then I expect to see PTI start getting adopted more. However, if there is no clear alignment, then we will continue to see different approaches to traceability being adopted.”

Retailers have, so far, played the greatest role in letting suppliers know what they must do in the area of traceability as part of the cost of doing business.

“It is hard to say if we will ever be at 100 percent,” says Donat. “Most suppliers we see are complying with specific customer demands, as opposed to meeting industry-accepted deadlines. So as usual, our customers’ customers will dictate whether this takes off.”

Many major retailers already require the PTI label, and the future depends on how many other supermarkets join them.

“Uneven demand from the customer base is holding the industry back,” says Donat. “Suppliers see it as a cost burden, and only undertake it when their customers tell them they must.”

There is a trickle down effect already in motion, as some major shippers are already requiring that growers who supply them buy into traceability.

“The big brand names, like Taylor Farms or Dole, have grower relations people working with their growers so they can trace back to the original grower and farm or field location,” says Myers. “Our customers can trace produce back to areas within the field. We can get right back to geo spots within the field.”

But while the PTI remains a work in progress, the project is already having an impact creating a culture change among produce shippers.

“I think people take a little more care before shipping things, because of the transparency,” says Shafae.

MICHIGAN PRODUCE

Caters To Bevy Of Outlets

The state's farmers serve both national and local markets.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Every summer and fall, Michigan farmers harvest the most squash and pickling cucumbers in the nation, according to the state Farm Bureau, along with 70-plus percent of the tart cherries and 20 percent of the sweet cherries, and nearly a third of the blueberries eaten nationwide, second (barely) behind only Georgia.

The state's farmers also harvest significant tonnage of cabbage, carrots, celery, onions, peaches, pears, plums, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, sweet corn and tomatoes, and the largest crop is potatoes. More than 300 commodities make Michigan second only to California in the diversity of its agriculture.

Michigan farmers serve as an important cog in the national and continental supply system, a supplier to Gerber, Vlasic and other processors, and as a valued source of locally grown fruits and vegetables.

CHICAGO'S LOCAL FLAIR

When Econofoods' produce manager Jim Weber steps out front of the Iron Mountain store, which is in Michigan, he can look to the North, West, and South and see Wisconsin.

The difference of a few blocks matters when Weber sources and merchandises fresh fruits and vegetables for Econofoods, a small chain owned by SpartanNash, with stores in both



TOP PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICHIGAN FARM BUREAU



**Todd Greiner,
owner of Todd
Greiner Farms**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TODD GREINER FARMS

Michigan and Wisconsin.

“We have customers at our Michigan stores who want apples from Michigan, and customers at our Wisconsin stores who want apples from Wisconsin,” says Weber.

According to the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michigan produces nearly a billion pounds of apples, worth more than \$140 million, on nearly 40,000 acres owned or leased by 900

farmers. [This is the farm gate price, which is much lower than wholesale; and the figures include apples for processing, which are much cheaper than fresh market].

“The fresh market apples have been strong,” says Kevin Robson, horticulture specialist for the Michigan Farm Bureau in Lansing, MI. “The almighty Honeycrisp has taken hold here, as it has elsewhere.”

Apples and some other tree fruits are almost

all the way back in their recovery from the devastating freeze of 2012.

“There was a very warm March, and then it froze in May,” says Robson. “We had about 10 percent of a normal apple crop. Cherries were very similar. The specialty crop markets the last three years have continued to recover, but we’re still recovering.”

Regional pride and a desire to support local farmers run strong in this area with the rich agricultural tradition of the Midwest, as evidenced by the state ranking third in the country in the number of Farmers’ Markets, according to the Farm Bureau.

For some crops, like asparagus, local extends at least as far as Chicago and a little beyond.

“Historically we shipped to Michigan and the surrounding states,” says John Baker, executive director of the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board in Dewitt, MI. “Chicago is a big market, and Cleveland. We think it helps to use the Michigan name at least in the surrounding states. Chicago certainly sees us as local.”

Michigan asparagus farmers have slowly increased their acreage and harvest tonnage to reach the coveted No. 2 spot nationally.

“We get about 22 million pounds of asparagus now,” says Baker. “We’re now No. 2 in

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(L-R) Todd DeWaard and Tyler Hodges of Superior Sales



(L-R) Dave Cook and Rick Sible of Rice Lake Farms

“I think the retailers consider 200 to 250 miles from us here in Hart Township to be local; it’s not a hard and fast rule.”

— Aaron Fletcher, Todd Greiner Farms

Vegetable production in general has remained generally stable over the past five years, according to USDA statistics. “It appears, from an acreage standpoint, that production has been pretty stable among the main vegetable commodities,” says Kif Hurlbut, deputy regional director of the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service-Great Lakes Regional Office in East Lansing, MI.

Superior Sales of Hudsonville, MI, ships a full line of vegetables — from acorn squash and asparagus to turban squash and turnips — and enjoys support from customers close to home.

“Anything within a two or three state area the locally grown appeal really helps,” says Randy Vande Guchte, president of Superior Sales. “We get good support. It’s really gotten stronger the last five years, but some retailers always carried the local produce. We have a number of things we get local support for; we ship just about every vegetable.”

Michigan farmers and shippers find support as the local providers of fruits and vegetables that are gaining favor through national trendsetters.

“Anything you see on the Food Channel, you get a little bump in sales,” says Vande Guchte. “Right now Butternut and Spaghetti squash are very much in demand. Right now it’s an item like kale.”

Another trendy produce item out of California that has taken root in this Midwestern agricultural powerhouse is locally grown organic greens.

“We carry local organic from small farmers, like spring mix and other vegetables,” says Weber. “We will have a special section for our local farmers. We’ll put a sign out, and maybe pictures of them. Definitely, customers like that.”

Farmers and shippers find that the Michigan name matters to consumers over an area that extends into neighboring states.

“We build the Michigan name into what we are selling,” sales Rick Sible, sales and business development manager at Rice Lake Farms in Grant, MI. “We are located within 500 to 600 miles of a large part of the population of the

the nation, just ahead of Washington and behind California. We have been on a very slight increase.”

Much of the state’s asparagus harvest, which comes in May and June, never travels more than a few miles beyond the state lines.

“I think the retailers consider 200 to 250 miles from us here in Hart Township to be local; it’s not a hard and fast rule,” says Aaron Fletcher, sales and logistics associate at Todd Greiner Farms in Hart Township, MI. “Asparagus is a large item for us, and pumpkins.” Greiner’s other major fresh market items include zucchini, hard squash, corn and apples.

This asparagus is also considered local at the Michigan and Wisconsin stores of Econofoods.

“We do get Michigan asparagus, and we get Michigan apples now that Spartan has taken over,” says Weber. “It’s all about trucking.”

For some crops, however, like apples and potatoes, Weber sources from different farmers in different states depending on the location of the store.

“We have our own local potato guys,” says Weber. “On my ads for 10-pound Russet potatoes it will say Michigan or Wisconsin on the ad. Our three Wisconsin stores will have Wisconsin potatoes, and our three Michigan stores will have Michigan potatoes.”

Potatoes are the No. 1 produce item in the state, at more than \$160 million in farm gate value, according to Michigan Department of Agriculture statistics.



Superior Sales of Hudsonville, MI, ships a full line of vegetables — from acorn squash and asparagus to turban squash and turnips — and enjoys support from customers close to home.

U.S. We do a lot in Chicago.”

There is, in the heart of the industrial Midwest, an appeal that comes with driving by the farms that hug the Great Lakes.

“I was at the Pure Michigan Ag event in Kalamazoo and it is huge,” says Sible. “People drive by and see beauty, and they see farms. We are close to Lake Michigan and that’s a huge plus because of the moisture we get, and because we don’t get the frigid temperatures. Thanks to advanced farming methods, we’re able to get good yields.”

MICHIGAN AS A REGIONAL HUB

While much of the summer fruit and vegetable harvest is merchandised within the state, or nearby urban areas, Michigan farmers also play a key role serving markets in most of the

“There are companies in Michigan that ship fresh apple slices from Las Vegas to New York. We definitely export a lot out of the state.”

— Kevin Robson, The Michigan Farm Bureau

country and across the border in Canada.

“The distance it gets shipped depends on market conditions and quality,” says Todd Van Solkema, chief executive of Van Solkema Produce in Byron Center, MI. “We have shipped as far west as California. I would say more consistently as far west as western Texas.”

This family farm that began when Dutch immigrant Gerrit Van Solkema rented a piece of ground to farm in Western Michigan in

1896 — he would purchase his first 300 acres seven years later — grows and ships a full range of vegetable crops.

“We do some packaging and repacking here at our Michigan facility,” says Van Solkema. “Also, our growers pack for us. We distribute from Michigan during the summer season.”

Van Solkema experiences a general uptick in demand for many of the key produce items

■ MICHIGAN’S FRESH PRODUCE GAINS TRACTION

Much of the Michigan fruit and vegetable harvest is canned, jarred or frozen before it ever reaches the supermarket.

“We are home to Gerber, Vlassic and all the other pickle companies,” says Kevin Robson, horticulture specialist for the Michigan Farm Bureau in Lansing, MI. “A lot of our specialty crops go into processing.”

The state’s farmers harvest 177,000 tons of pickling cucumbers, which leads the nation.

A significant amount of the early summer asparagus harvest, too, is processed, rather than sold as fresh.

“Last year was the first year fresh asparagus, for example, outperformed the processing asparagus,” says Robson. “Our fresh market continues to be strong.”

Michigan is, by far, the largest producer

of tart cherries in the country, and nearly all of these are processed before they are shipped to supermarkets.

“The cherries, the Montmorency tarts, don’t go to the fresh market,” says Jeff Manning, chief marketing officer at the Cherry Marketing Institute in Lansing, MI.

“Michigan produces 60 percent of the tart cherries, and less than one percent are sold fresh,” says Manning. “The majority go first to frozen. They are picked in June or July and frozen. Then they go to dry, juice or stay frozen.”

Even the very small portion of tart cherries that are sold fresh are usually not merchandised as coming from Michigan.

“Very seldom will you see the name of any state on the display of tart cherries,” says Manning.

The Michigan farmers who grow tart cherries have deftly pivoted toward new markets as consumer preferences have changed from wanting pies, which used to use most of the crop, to looking for healthier snack options.

“When the Cherry Marketing Institute was formed a decade ago, most of the cherries went into cans, and most of them later went into pies,” says Manning, who has been with the institute since its inception.

“Americans’ diets changed. We are eating less sugary desserts like pies, so the Michigan cherry growers repositioned from pie cherries to a superfood,” says Manning. “Pie cherry is probably less than 20 percent of the tart cherries. Cherries are one of the top superfoods.” **pb**

coming out of Michigan this time of year.

“Do we have higher volume on some fruits and vegetables? Yes,” he says. “Corn, cukes, squash, celery, cabbage, and pepper are a few of the major staples. Coming from a company that distributes and consolidates the full line of fruits and vegetables from Michigan, they are all important to us.”

Most of the larger grower-shippers send much of their produce to the East Coast, Canada, or other markets beyond the state line.

“We do more outside of Michigan than inside, and that’s generally true of the larger operations,” says Sible from Rice Lake Farms.

Rice Lake Farms finds markets nationwide for specialty root vegetables grown near Lake Michigan.

“We ship from coast to coast,” says Dave Cook, sales manager at Rice Lake Farms. “Once in a while we go to L.A. and Portland; it’s usually to the Bronx, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland. Root vegetables are our mainstay. Parsnips are our No. 1 product. We’ve been doing well with gold beets and candy stripe beets. We get a better margin because not everybody grows them.”

Some of the state’s fresh produce is lightly processed and then shipped around the country.

“There are companies in Michigan that ship fresh apple slices from Las Vegas to New York,” says Robson. “We definitely export a lot out of the state.”

Some Michigan growers have a wide distribution network that covers everywhere north of the equator in the Western Hemisphere.

“Our apples are shipped throughout North and Central America including the Atlantic islands,” says Dave Distel, chief executive and president of produce distribution operations at Heeren Brothers in Comstock Park, MI. “Our general produce and distribution businesses distribute in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin. It is marketed as from Michigan when applicable.”

There are expanding regional markets for organic produce coming out of Michigan.

“Apples are definitely important, but so are lettuce, tomatoes, onions, peppers, potatoes, citrus, berries, and organics,” says Distel. “Apples, organics, tomatoes and lettuce are increasing for us. Organics is a key area for growth.”

One-third of Michigan’s agricultural production is shipped out of the country, according to the Michigan State Farm Bureau, and most of that goes across the border to

One-third of Michigan’s agricultural production is shipped out of the country, according to the Michigan State Farm Bureau, and most of that goes across the border to Canada.

Canada. Even grower-shippers who rely on strong support from the local population also find important markets in most of the rest of the country.

“We ship to the eastern half of the United States,” says Vande Guchte from Superior Sales.

The state’s asparagus growers, while enjoying a strong locally grown market, also find their harvest in demand over an even larger area than before.

“We are going out east and further south,” says Baker. “This year we will go to pretty much every state east of the Mississippi.” **pb**



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RETROSPECTIVE

DAN SLEEP, CHIEF OF STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT,
 MARKETING FOR THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
 AGRICULTURE, REVELS IN TODAY'S PRODUCE
 AND INDUSTRY ADVANCEMENTS

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Dan Sleep spent more than 10 years in the retail produce business and worked at two major chains, Jewel-Osco and Food Lion. During his tenure at Jewel from 1978 to 1986, he worked in every aspect of the business — from produce clerk to store manager and everything in between. During 1991 to 1993, he was perishable manager at Food Lion before joining the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in 1993.

Where were you in 1985?

In Portage, MI, with Jewel Food Stores [known today as Jewel-Osco].

What was the produce department like in 1985?

We were just beginning to see seasonality diminish somewhat; a few items were beginning to be maintained year-round. We still bought local apples right off the truck, but that was dying out. Kiwi was introduced right about then, as well as cut melons (which we all thought was a flop) and then packaged salads (which we simply threw away every other day). One of our vice presidents told me, "This will be an 8-foot section one day."

How was the overall retail environment then?

We were always watching customers, talking to them, selling, trying to build interesting displays and maintaining perfect looking produce. We began to draw customers away from smaller IGAs.

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

Lighting was one of the first big changes. Better table displays, cold storage and protecting items, like bananas, from open receiving doors during the winter emerged



Dan Sleep

It is truly an awesome sight when you see the industry get better every year in so many areas.

as critical factors in avoiding unnecessary shrink. Profit, we were told, was made at the distribution center, we were a loss-prevention center — that didn't go over well. We still thought of ourselves as a sales center.

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

Handling procedures, quality and inventory control were central to success. Although many new items were being carried, these first three [categories] never changed as far as how critical they are to success. Enhancements to these continue to play a crucial role.

How would you describe the produce department today?

Amazing! There is rich diversity and quality, international selections, and our ability to be seamless as seasons change. It is rare someone is out of any item. Before, when seasons changed, we were always telling shoppers, "That's it on Idaho potatoes, oranges or berries." Today, that never occurs.

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

Take pride in your presentation, and the sales will take care of themselves.

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

Uniform cultivars. We're seeing that now to some degree where customers can purchase strawberries all year long. Soon it'll be one or two cultivars, perhaps even unique to particular chains.

What are the challenges holding us back?

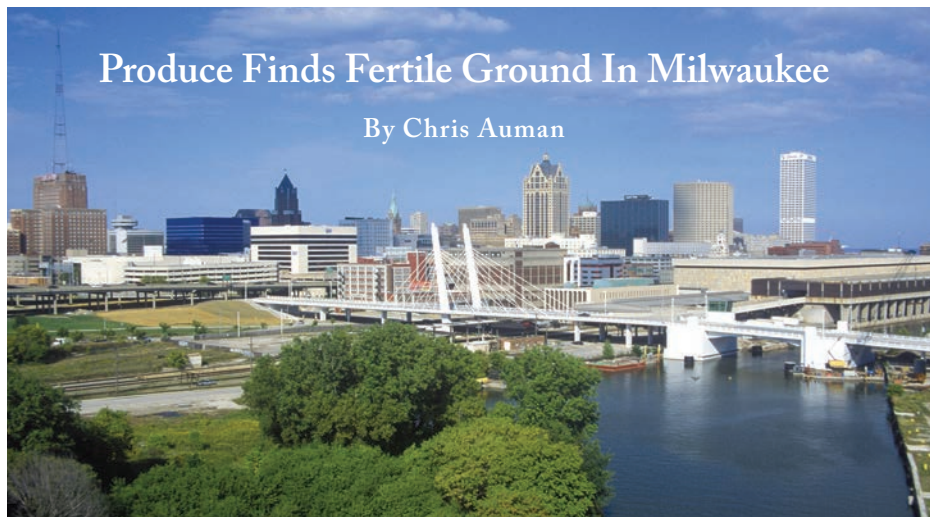
Nothing. I see progress on all fronts. It is truly an awesome sight when you see the industry get better every year in so many areas. I have the great advantage of seeing that progress around the world.

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

Marketing brings me into contact with certain aspects of retail; however, there is nothing better than setting a perfect department, facing the challenges of the day or being able for a few seconds to watch customers buy what you put out.

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

Quality still sells.



Produce Finds Fertile Ground In Milwaukee

By Chris Auman

On the western shore of Lake Michigan, two hours south of Green Bay and an hour and a half east of the state capitol of Madison, you'll find the city of Milwaukee, WI. Milwaukee is uniquely positioned to take advantage of the best of both urban and rural environments. There's the natural beauty of Door County three hours north and the vast expanse of the Great Lake on the city's eastern doorstep. Milwaukee is also home to many attractions such as the Milwaukee Art Museum and Milwaukee County Zoo. The city is the host of the annual Wisconsin State Fair as well as one of the largest music festivals in the world, SummerFest, which attracts nearly 1 million people annually.

Milwaukeeans love their sports teams too. NBA's Bucks and MLB's Brewers play in town, and the NFL's Packers, just up the road

in Green Bay, are revered among "Sconies," or Cheeseheads as they are also known.

Milwaukee is known as Brew Town. Its history with beer goes as deep as its German roots. Today Milwaukee is home to both small and independent breweries as well as one of the largest breweries in the country, the joint venture of MillerCoors.

According to the *Chain Store Guide's* 2015 "Market Share" data, the population for Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha counties totals close to 1.6 million. The average household income for these cities is about \$74,000 per year, and 5 percent of that household income is devoted to food and beverage. Drug store outlets are most prominent in the area with a total of 252 stores, and supermarkets are next in line with 164 retailers, followed by dollar stores (74) and mass merchandisers (44).

Local is good, of course, but in a global economy, with a diverse population and changing tastes, consumers want mangos and avocados in addition to sweet corn and potatoes. Milwaukee has a reach from coast to coast and south to buyers in McAllen, TX, where the city's wholesalers source fresh produce and bring it to retail and foodservice locations throughout Milwaukee County and beyond. The city's close proximity to Chicago (which is less than two hours south) further bolsters its ability to source in-demand commodities year-round.

In addition to the Germans, Italians, Irish and Polish, Milwaukee's diverse population, today, includes: Balkans, Southeast Asians, Middle Easterns, Africans, Mexicans, and African-Americans. Milwaukee's many restaurants and ethnic groceries reflect this diversity. **pb**

Milwaukee's Wholesalers Have Deep Roots In The City

FAMILY BUSINESSES CAN TRACE ORIGINS BACK MANY GENERATIONS.

By Chris Auman

Maglio Companies in Glendale, WI, has a story similar to many other companies in Milwaukee's wholesale produce business. Company president Sam Maglio Jr. tells the story, "In 1902, my great grandfather came from Sicily and landed in Chicago with my grandfather. Great Grandpa had a pushcart

and Grandpa had a truck. Dad went off to WWI, came back and went to work for a produce company on the market." As his father's friends also returned from the war they got their own trucks and Sam's father provided the warehouse for them. Sam attributes the success of Maglio Companies since then to a very simple concept, "Focus on what you know,

and don't try to be everything to everybody."

Maglio's recently developed packaging for fresh-cut watermelon prevents melon slices from breaking in transit and from leaking in the store. Maglio came up with the idea after a trip with his son to Florida. He had an encounter with a dripping watermelon slice at a convenience store and that sparked the idea

for a more protective bag. Maglio's has also recently constructed 11 hoop houses behind its Glendale facility to offer customers locally grown kale and tomatoes. "If you don't listen to your customers, you're foolish," says Maglio. "They're going to tell you what they want."

Garden-Fresh Foods is another Milwaukee-based company with an established presence in town. Started in 1978 by husband and wife team, Tom and Vicki Hughes, the company now occupies a 170,000-square-foot facility with more than 100 employees and has seen the second generation enter the business.

Sales director Jim Gawronski attributes the success of Garden-Fresh to the quality of their products, which has always included the freshest produce available. "One of the biggest attributes to our product line is we follow the crop throughout the country ensuring the freshest product. Nothing we bring in is ever frozen."

Garden-Fresh Foods offers a line of fresh salad kits as well as potato-based and cabbage-based salads and coleslaws. Developing new products is not without difficulties, however, as Gawronski explains, "One of the retail challenges of course is competition, but the bigger one is how we lure in the Millennial?"

Every business wants to attract this younger demographic, and Garden-Fresh is no exception. "That's a big task for us right now. We're in the process of understanding Millennials' purchasing habits and flavor trends for regions around the country and developing products

around that information, so we can start luring in new customers."


Kleen Pak Foods is a family-owned and -operated outfit on Milwaukee's south side. The company focuses on two commodities: onions and spinach, which it supplies to retailers throughout the area. Kleen Pak sources Wisconsin produce when possible, but the company also relies on growers in Idaho, Washington, Texas and Colorado.

Kleen Pak's clientele includes area retailers like Pick 'N Save, Roundy's Supermarkets, Piggly Wiggly and Sendik's Food Market, but the company serves Chicago as well. Two trucks are available for deliveries, which mostly service smaller independent retailers.

"It's all supply and demand," says Jerry Kowaleski, president at Kleen Pak Foods about Milwaukee's challenges. "There are less and less growers. Truck rates have eased off a bit, but it's not what you'd expect. Fuel is maybe half price of what it was a couple years ago. It helps, but fuel is something you absorb."


El Rey's origin traces back to 1960 when Octavio Villarreal emigrated from Mexico with his son Heriberto. His son Ernesto and the rest of the family followed in 1964, and the family has called Milwaukee home ever since.

Octavio opened a corner grocery store to serve the growing Hispanic population. In 1978, Ernesto and Heriberto opened a larger retail space on Milwaukee's south side. They now have four retail locations and a production facility for tortillas as well as prepackage and



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El Rey's Grocery Store



(L-R) Sam Maglio, Jr. of Maglio Companies and Will Allen of the national nonprofit, Growing Power





Jerry Kowaleski of Kleen Pak Foods



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private label solutions. Three of the four stores feature a Taco Loco taqueria where they also sell fresh juice and smoothies.

"I can buy a lot of things direct," says Ernesto, "but when it gets here, it's not so good. You want good quality. You don't want to deal with a bad product." Tropicals and other fruit sell well in Hispanic markets, says Ernesto. "Mango is one of the biggest items. We always do well with avocados and watermelons. In the summer that's the best varieties; the summer has the best flavors." El Rey sources and distributes produce from Florida and Texas as well as locally in the summer for its own stores and other produce outlets.

Jennaro Brothers is a family-owned wholesaler that got its start on Commission Row (a section of the Third Ward established in the early 1900s that was home to various wholesale grocers).

"We moved to our current location on the north side of the city about ten years ago," says Joe Jennaro. He is the fourth generation in the business and wear many hats in the company. Like the rest of the family, Joe does everything and anything required of him from the time the doors open in the morning until they're locked at night.

The company provides the southeastern Wisconsin area with a large list of produce. "We carry everything," says Joe. "Bananas and berries are the number one thing we're known for, but we do carry just about every fruit and vegetable you can imagine."

Joe has good relationships with local retailers like Sendik's but serves the larger chain stores as well, "No one's too big, no one's too small," he says.

"We're a fruit house predominantly, but we evolved over the years into full-line everything," says Anthony Jennaro. Anthony is a third generation owner and Joe's father.

Anthony explains the history of the company and how it's been passed on over the years. "My great grandfather was a door-to-door fruit peddler and his son, my grandfather, took over. At that time it was a horse and wagon, which lead to a truck. Then my uncles bought a warehouse, and my father took that over, and then I took over, and now my son is taking over."

The wholesale business still provides value even though Milwaukee faces competition from Minneapolis, Cincinnati and St. Louis. "Your competition isn't next door to you anymore," says Anthony. "It's hundreds of miles away." This has inspired many wholesalers to expand their range and seek business further from their respective cities.

pb

Milwaukee's Retail Landscape

A MIX OF SMALL GROCERIES, INDEPENDENTS AND BIG CHAINS

By Chris Auman

The Milwaukee area is home to a mix of retail offerings. From small specialty markets to local independent grocers on up to the big supermarket chains, consumers have many choices for buying produce. Roundy's Supermarkets operates four retail banners in the area, including Metro Market with four Milwaukee locations and Pick 'n Save with multiple outlets throughout the city and state. Piggly Wiggly, Whole Foods Market, Trader Joe's and Aldi are all represented along with the small bodegas and ethnic shops that dot the retail landscape.

Stores like El Rey serve the Hispanic community with four locations as well as a warehouse that distributes Hispanic products to foodservice and smaller shops. El Rey also operates a facility that makes tamales and tortillas, which it distributes throughout the area as well. Larger independents like Sendik's Food Market operate within the city and suburbs. Celebrating 90 years in business this year, Sendik's is well known in town for its produce, which is sourced locally and nationally to ensure fresh products remain available in the summer and throughout the long Wisconsin winters.

From the southeast Asian wares of Anh Chau Oriental Market to the fresh produce and specialty items of one of the oldest Italian shops in the city, G. Groppi's Food Market, Milwaukee's markets serve a diverse population ranging from long-established populations of German, Italian, Russian, Polish, Irish and Mexican to more recent arrivals of Hmong and Ethiopian people. Best Food Store is not just the opinion of customers, it's the name of Milwaukee's best store for Indian and Pakistani foods. In business for 15 years, Best Food Store carries basmati rice, flours, spices as well as beans, lentils and dried fruit and nuts.

The Historic Third Ward is the city's old commercial hub. It experienced a devastating



Sendik's Food Market



El Rey



El Rey

fire in the late 19th Century only to be rebuilt into a thriving district of commerce that features restaurants, galleries and boutiques. It is the site of Milwaukee's RiverWalk, which connects three of the city's riverfront neighborhoods. The Historic Third Ward is now the home of the Milwaukee Public Market. Here visitors can purchase meat, fish, custom-made salads and confections, and of course produce is available from local grocers like Nehring's Family Market.

Every Saturday from June to October, the outdoor urban market is held here on St. Paul Avenue from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. rain or shine.

The market includes artisans and artists who sell their work alongside area growers. The site of the former trading market, Commission Row, was also located across the street making a strong connection to Milwaukee's produce past.

Dozens of farmers markets can be found in and around the city from May to October. Locally grown produce is sold at these markets, which include everything from cucumbers, cabbage and kohlrabi to berries, squash and sweet corn. The Milwaukee County Winter Farmers Market features 50 vendors who all live within 90 miles of their venue at the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory. **pb**

The Restaurant Scene

DIVERSE ETHNICITIES AND AWARD-WINNING CHEFS

By Chris Auman

Wisconsin is more than fisheries and supper clubs, although the importance of those traditions cannot be discounted. Wisconsin just wouldn't be Wisconsin without them, or without an abundance of deep fried cheese curds and brats boiled in beer.

While Milwaukee has a history and a reputation for being a meat and potatoes town, the way residents get their proteins and starches has evolved along with the population. A mix of ethnic restaurants can be found in the city, including Thai, Japanese, Indian as well as Italian, Irish and German eateries and more modern culinary concepts.

Organics gained a foothold too, but haven't quite impressed Milwaukeeans as much as it has for other cities across the country. This isn't to say that you can't find organics here. The casual dining restaurant, Locavore, located in the Potawatomi Hotel & Casino, has a simple three-word tagline: Eat. Local. Organic. The restaurant's seasonal menu offers small and large plates of local products with many items changing daily as supply and harvests dictate.

With so many farms in the area, eating local has been a preference long before it became a movement in food production and consumption. The farm-to-table concept caught on however, with places like Wolf Peach, which draws on area growers and vendors to source local produce. The restaurant, located in the Beerline neighborhood, also grows produce in a 1,000 square foot urban garden located on-site.

Parkside 23 in Brookfield has 10 times that square footage in an adjacent garden.

The Walker's Point neighborhood on the city's south side is home to Braise, an establishment committed to fresh, seasonal, locally sourced ingredients on a menu created daily and based on supply. Chef/owner David Swanson is a three-time semifinalist for the James Beard Award for Best Chef: Midwest.

The Braise Restaurant Supported Agriculture program sources produce from more than 40 local farms and delivers it to resell to



Parkside 23



Parkside 23

other member restaurants as well as individual homes.

Milwaukee culinary professionals are no strangers to James Beard nominations, and the first Milwaukee chef to get the Best Chef: Midwest honor was Sandy D'Amato in 1996. D'Amato is the former owner of Sanford restaurant, which regularly competes for Outstanding Restaurant.

D'Amato's family has a long history in Milwaukee, having operated a grocery in the city for 80 years. In fact, the Sanford occupies the space of the former family grocery.

The restaurant was purchased by executive chef Justin Aprahamian in 2012. Aprahamian started in the kitchen at age 18 and worked his

way up from prep cook to owner and chef in 10 years. Aprahamian won Best Chef: Midwest in 2014.

The number of food trucks in the city is growing too and offers every imaginable cuisine such as soups and paninis, bahn mi, falafel, tacos, Italian beef, burgers and grilled cheese. Residents can track these seasonally operated trucks during lunch or find them at any number of city festivals and concerts.

Visiting foodies can take the Milwaukee Food & City Tour by foot or by bus. Participants get a tour of the city's cultural and dining attractions as they sample food from area restaurants while learning about the history of the city and its people.

pb

Chicago: The Heart Of The Midwest



THIS PRODUCE MARKET FOLLOWS GROWING SEASONS, LINKS TO FARAWAY SUPPLY NETWORKS AND DOES IT BETTER, FASTER, CHEAPER.

By Chris Auman

Chicago is many things. It is both cosmopolitan and working class, blue and white collar. Here you will find some of the best restaurants in the world along with the tastiest Polish sausage, Italians beef, tacos and tamales.

It's a city of culture with museums, opera, ballet and live theater, but it's also a town that loves its Bears, Bulls, Blackhawks, White Sox and Cubs. Chicago has every type of weather you'd care to experience — sometimes all in one day. It has a population of 3 million in the city and 7 million in the surrounding Chicagoland area. That's a lot of people to feed, and that's why Chicago has so many restaurants, cafete-

rias, taquerias, hotdog stands and grocery stores from corner bodegas, to independents, to the largest chains. These outlets rely on a steady stream of products to feed the city.

Chicago is a transportation hub for the Midwest and an important produce distribution center for the metropolitan area and the upper Midwest. The market follows the growing seasons around the country and links to supply networks in a web of transportation, cartage and logistics. The real people who work on the docks, cover the phones, buy, sell, deal with food safety issues, and tackle trends, find new ways to do all of the above — only better, faster and cheaper.

OFF-MARKET WHOLESALE ENVIRONMENT

The old Water Street days are over. The pushcarts and horse-drawn carts of the last century make good black-and-white photos to hang on office walls, but the market has moved on. "If we're not updating things, we're not happy," says Damon Marano at wholesaler Anthony Marano Company in Chicago outside the terminal market. Like much of the wholesale business, the Marano's company is family run with ownership passed down from one generation to the next. It's up to each new generation to not just learn the business but move it forward.



Terminal markets are a rarity in most American cities. Wholesalers are just as likely to exist off the market as on. In addition, wholesalers report some West Coast and Texas-based shippers setting up satellite offices in the Chicagoland area — in these cases, effectively eliminating the middlemen. This is a fact that Adolfo Vega, president of La Hacienda Brands, Inc. can personally attest to. “It’s gotten worse,” says Vega. “Many [shippers] are now setting up shop here in Chicago and going direct to the stores.”

That move prompted La Hacienda to find its own shippers to compete in both quality and price. According to his sister and general manager, Rocio Vega, this has inspired the company to create new product lines. “Right now, we’re promoting our in-house cheese, which has been doing very well. We received



“We’ve been spending a lot of time educating and bringing up the next generation of produce salespeople and trying to find the 30- to 35-year-olds who are willing to make a career out of this.”

— Damon Marano, Anthony Marano Company

a good response from our customers. We’re selling it here in the Chicago area as well as Wisconsin and Indiana.”

This family-run wholesaler has operated across five decades. “My grandfather started the company in 1973,” says Rocio. “My dad took

over in 1993, and now my brother and I are here.” La Hacienda is a one-stop, pickup service supplying foodservice and retailers throughout the area and locally to stores such as Cermak Fresh Market and Pete’s Fresh Market.

The third generation of the Marano family has been making investments in both their staff and the infrastructure of the facility. “We’ve been spending a lot of time educating and bringing up the next generation of produce salespeople and trying to find the 30- to 35-year-olds who are willing to make a career out of this,” says Marano.

The Anthony Marano facility covers more than 10 acres just a stone’s throw from the terminal market. It houses seven separate departments dedicated to different commodities and provides repacking, delivery and ripening services as well as marketing and support for foodservice both on and off-site.

As for future innovations and development, Marano is keeping his cards close to the chest for now. An increase in the Marano fleet is in the works, however. “We are reinvesting in our fleet and updating to about 40 new trailers. We have nine tractors on order this year, and we ordered 16 last year.”

Organics is still growing. “It’s definitely going to keep going up,” says Marano. “From



“We pride ourselves on the fact that we do a lot of specialty packages. We were one of the first to introduce 24-ounce, petite-sized potatoes.”

— Ed Romanelli, Agrow Fresh Produce, Inc.

the shipper end, organics has become more mainstream. The consumers said they wanted it, but it's taken time for the lifecycle to evolve and now from the shipper end, it's become mainstream so they can produce things for the right price.”

Agrow Fresh Produce, Inc. is a wholesaler located on the city's south side. The company mostly services retail but also some cooperatives throughout the Midwest. “It's a mix of both,” says Ed Romanelli, vice president of sales for the company. “When you look at co-ops, the product that we ship to those guys does go into mostly independent retailers, but we do a lot with the large chains in the Midwest, the Chicagoland area, the Indianapolis area, and into Iowa as well as Pennsylvania.”

Agrow sources its products from North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin, but follows the seasons to Florida, California and Arizona. “We try to source the freshest product available,” says Romanelli. “Ninety-seven to 98 percent of the stuff we deliver gets there next day.”

One change Romanelli has seen in the market in recent years is retailer preference for private labels. “There's more private label

product than in the past. The retailers are putting their names out there, and if they do a good job at it, the customers gravitate

toward it.”

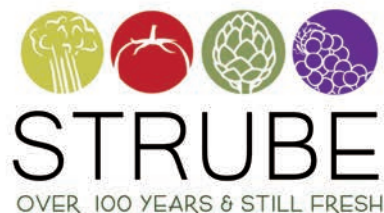
Another trend is a preference for smaller sized bags. “We pride ourselves on the fact that we do a lot of specialty packages,” says Romanelli. “We were one of the first to introduce 24-ounce, petite-sized potatoes.”

“We buy produce from all the growing areas and sell all over the country,” says Sarah Miller, chief operations officer of Muller Trading Company, Inc., which employs 17 brokers working out of a state-of-the-art facility in the North Chicago suburb of Libertyville.



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Muller supplies retail and foodservice with fruits, vegetables and fresh-cut products. “We sell a lot of watermelon in the summer along with steady business in all other commodities such as tomatoes, peppers, avocados.”

One of the challenges Muller Trading faces is sourcing enough product to meet customer demand. “We are currently adding staff to meet those demands,” says Miller. To further aid in that process and to streamline operations, “we created our own home grown software



program and have it up and running to help better service our customers.”

WHOLESALE TERMINAL MARKET

If you're not careful on the docks of the

Chicago International Produce Market (CIPM) you could get run over by one of the dozens of pallet trucks that zip back and forth from wholesaler to truck and back again. It takes mere seconds for these guys to position the forks of their trucks under a pallet stacked

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high with spinach, bananas or ice-covered broccoli. They can sense when another truck is approaching and react immediately. Their horns help alert other drivers and truck loaders to moving targets. The horns sound so frequently as if to create the song of the market.

The CIPM is more than 450,000 square feet of state-of-the-art storage facility on the city's south side. While terminal markets are disappearing throughout the U.S., this market sees plenty of action on nearly 100 loading docks. Recent improvements to the building

include the addition of doors to all stalls. This helps keep frigid temperatures from damaging commodities. Protecting the cold chain against freezing paid dividends with better produce, happier customers and employees. "The doors got done a year ago for the winter," explains



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CHICAGO MARKET PROFILE

Rob Strube, the president of Strube Celery and Vegetable Company. “We didn’t have the worst winter, but it did help because we had no snow this year, and there was a big difference going up and down the docks.”

It was Rob’s uncle Tim Fleming Sr., who spearheaded the move of the market from South Water Street to its current location. Future projects for the facility are mainly general maintenance, as Strube explains, “We had a few years where we kind of left the building alone, and it’s creeping back up on us, we have to fix a few things here and there.”

Strube offers a full product line from apples to zucchini and is also supplying an increasing number of produce to the growing Hispanic market. The company will be adding a salesperson soon to handle these accounts. “It’s a matter of having the quality, the right price and good service,” says Strube.

Strube sources throughout the United States and Mexico and distributes roughly 100 miles around Chicago, north to Milwaukee, and around the southern tip of Lake Michigan into Indiana, and up into the state of Michigan. While its current delivery capacity is limited, one of Strube’s biggest customers drives from



Ohio to pick up. “That’s one of things we’re working on. We have some opportunities for growth moving away from the city.”

Strube also brought in two new salespeople with Tony Battista working the vegetable department and Breck Grigas bringing in

tropical, which will focus more on the mangos, papayas and avocado deal.

Panama Banana is another wholesaler with a long history in Chicago. “We’re a full-line fruit house,” says Tom Durante, salesman and produce buyer for Panama Banana.

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Nick Balsamo



For more than 80 years, Panama Banana has been serving the Chicagoland area as well as Southeastern Wisconsin and Northwest Indiana. Despite the name, the company does more than just tropicals, sourcing peaches from Florida, nectarines from California and plums

from South America.

“Our bread and butter is still the local chains,” says Durante. This includes Cermak Fresh Market and Pete’s Fresh Market, but Panama also works with Jewel Osco and Roundy’s and supplies several hispanic markets with

produce on a daily basis.

Durante hasn’t seen much change in the business as far as selling, but on the flipside he says, “the buying end has changed considerably. Shippers consolidated to the point where pricing is fairly consistent across the board. It’s hard to find deals like we used to. There’s not as many consignments from the shipper.”

“Everyone is concerned right now about food safety,” says Greg Mandolini, president of fresh fruit house, Mandolini Company. Mandolini has taken steps to satisfy customers’ concerns. “We’re maintaining our cold chain better,” he says, “and everyone right now is taking extra care that when you’re hiring a truck you have all the right documentation, and they’re not mixing the produce with any food product that might be a detriment to the produce.”

It is also the responsibility of wholesalers to ensure shippers are performing their due diligence with sanitation. Mandolini is focusing on using clean pallets instead of exchanging old ones. “We’re buying brand new pallets for every commodity that we take in, so there’s nothing that is going to be transmitted to the produce that may harm someone down the road.”

There have been other changes to address



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specifically food safety issues and to streamline operation in general. Mandolini notes, “Our computers are updated, our facility is where we want it to be in terms of having the ability to receive and ship. We upgraded the phone system last year. We closed our docks, which made it a lot more user-friendly for

our customers and employees and protects the product better.”

Beside food safety concerns, competition from brokers is always a challenge. According to Nick Doumouras, president of Olympic Wholesale Produce, “There’s more competition on the retail end, so sales are good, but

the profits keep getting smaller and smaller.” Competition is nothing new to the market. It’s just another challenge that must be met. “I’m looking to add a couple more salespeople to focus on the Asian and Hispanic markets,” says Doumouras, which will help Olympic sell to the city’s many ethnic retail outlets. **pb**



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World-Class Restaurants

Chicago is a food town, but in recent decades, the foodservice scene has come to include world-class restaurants such as Alinea and Blackbird. The passing of culinary giants Charlie Trotter in 2013, and more recently Homaro Cantu of Moto in 2015 and John-Claude Poilevey of Le Bouchon in early 2016, is a great loss to Chicago's culinary community, but the

next generation is already working in prep kitchens throughout the city.

While the rise in popularity of molecular gastronomy and chefs like Alinea's owner, Grant Achatz, may have "Grabowskis" (a general term for the average working Chicagoan) scratching their heads, institutions like Al's Beef and Manny's are there to serve "real" food to the people.

Chicago is home to a large and growing Hispanic population, and taquerias can be found on almost every block of many neighborhoods. Southeast Asian, African, Indian, Chinese and any other ethnic or region you can imagine are represented across the city and draw in foodies from around the city to neighborhoods they may not otherwise ever get a chance to visit.

The Chicago Diner

CLASSIC AMERICAN DINER DISHES GO VEGGIE.

By Chris Auman

Quality produce is important for the success of any restaurant, but for a vegetarian concept it's everything. The Chicago Diner, located in the Lakeview neighborhood on the city's northside, has been a fixture here since it opened in 1983. That may be surprising to some as the veggie diner concept was met with a good deal of skepticism initially. Combining the allure of the American diner with the healthy and humane aspects of a vegetarian menu was a no brainer for founders Mickey Hornick and Chef Jo Kaucher. The idea has endured, and the regulars of The Chicago Diner routinely order Reubens piled high with seitan (which is derived from the protein portion of wheat) instead of corn beef, and breakfasts of eggs, seitan "bacūn" and potato hash.

Hornick came from the financial world originally, working for the Board of Options as a trader. He "traded" that job for a gig washing dishes at a natural food spot located just down the street from the diner's Halsted location. Kaucher was working as a baker there. Hornick moved up from the dish pit and started learning the business, but it would be several years



ROASTED VEGGIE SANDWICH:

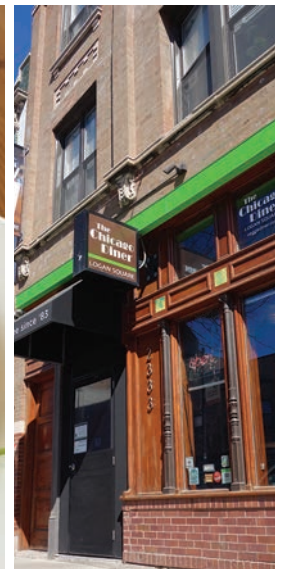
Roasted eggplant, zucchini, squash, red bell pepper, portabella, topped with arugula, red onions, vegan or dairy feta, roasted garlic aioli on a ciabatta bun.



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CHICAGO DINER



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CHICAGO FOODSERVICE PROFILE

before he would team up with Kaucher to open The Chicago Diner.

Since those early days, The Chicago Diner has seen the publication of two cookbooks and the opening of a second location in 2012 in the Logan Square neighborhood on Chicago's northwest side. The restaurant's line of baked goods sells at Whole Foods Markets throughout the Midwest as well as six locations in Ontario, Canada.

Michael Hornick, Mickey's nephew, has been involved with the restaurant since 1991. He started in the kitchen, moved to the dining room, and even though he took time off for college and lived out of state for a while, he has always returned to the restaurant. He has served as vice president of the company for going on five years.

Getting the best produce hasn't always been easy. "We were using a produce company that wasn't delivering on every aspect," explains Hornick. "Being in the industry for 20-something years, I got to work with a lot of different produce vendors from around the Midwest. One of the groups I was really happy with at other restaurants was Testa Produce."

The relationship he developed with the produce supplier has been a boon to the diner. "They not only deliver great quality as far as the actual produce," says Hornick, "their whole brand is fantastic. It's top quality and the price is right, but even better, our service rep is absolutely a partner. She's looking at things that we're doing, looking at our menu and sharing different ideas we might not be aware of. It's the freshest quality produce I can find anywhere. On top of that, they are extremely eco-conscious. This is important to our long commitment to sustainability."

While there have been times in the past when a personal trip to the market may have been necessary, an increase in volume leaves little time. "We're going through so much [produce], and we're so busy, to take the time to handpick is not feasible anymore," says Hornick.

The two locations combined go through roughly 200 cases of produce every week. The Lakeview location seats 54 in the dining room and another 32 on a seasonal patio. The Logan Square location seats 82 in its dining room.

The Chicago Diner fare is immediately recognizable, but the taste and textures may be new to many. Mac and cheese, gyros, burgers, chili and vegan milkshakes make up a menu that relies on wheat gluten as a meat substitute. A gluten-free menu is also available. And of course there's tofu, which comes from a local suppliers as well. "It's Illinois grown,



CRAB CAKES: Hearts of palm, herbed bread crumbs, Veganaise dressing, corn, red bell peppers, and onions, lightly grilled and served with tartar sauce and remoulade.



THE TITANIC BLT BURGER: Veggie seitan patty topped with seitan bacon & french fried onions, lettuce, tomato and Chipotle Fire sauce.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CHICAGO DINER

non-GMO, it's organic, and you can buy it in a couple local markets around town," according to Hornick.

In addition to their wholesale supplier, the diner sources from farmers markets whenever possible. "During the summer time, for a handful of years we were at the Logan Square Farmers Market, so we were able to connect with some local farmers. What we really do, instead of going to them to source what we need, we look at what they have. So at the end of a Sunday at a farmers market, we will take off their hands whatever they were unable to sell."

Food waste is also a concern and since the

diner's menus offers a vegetable of the day side dish, they can capitalize on the unsold excess from the market and serve it at their restaurants that day or the next without having to reprint menus.

With more than 30 years in the business, The Chicago Diner's original concept has proven sound. With all the Michelin Guide recommendations, Zagat ratings, nods from Vegetarian Times, and local papers (like the Chicago Reader) put aside, The Chicago Diner is known throughout the city and the Midwest as a destination spot for its creativity and pro-produce meals.

pb

Competitive Retail

North Side, South Side, East Side, West Side and out into the collar suburbs, this is a city of neighborhoods, and everyone has their favorite grocery store. Locals will tell you with pride where they shop and defend the produce they buy, while defying you to find better produce anywhere else.

Arlington Heights, IL-based Mariano's, owned by Milwaukee, WI-based Roundy's Supermarkets, Inc., has only been around for a half a dozen years, but the store experienced aggressive growth with 36 stores in the city.

Smaller independent chains with long histories in the city, like Treasure Island,

Angelo Caputo's Fresh Market, Pete's Fresh Market and Tony's Finer Foods compete with Trader Joe's, Aldi, Whole Foods Market and Jewel Osco. Neighborhood markets like Stanley's Fruits and Vegetables, HarvestTime Foods and Edgewater Produce do brisk business with their own loyal customers.

Treasure Island

**FAST TO MARKET
MEANS FRESH.**

By Chris Auman

It was in a north side lakefront neighborhood that a Chicago retail institution was born in 1963. That's when brothers Christ and Frank Kamberos opened the first Treasure Island Foods. The intent was to not only offer a quality selection of competitively priced goods, but to offer imports and specialty items that couldn't be found anywhere else in the city. The population of this active neighborhood at the time featured a mix of ethnicities and the store's concept was inspired by European markets.

In the early 1960s, European-style groceries were not just unique to Chicago and the Midwest, "It was unique to the entire country," says vice president of development, Christ Kamberos Jr. "Treasure Island is European in the sense of freshness. European markets are more regional, but Treasure Island can offer freshness as well as abundance of variety. Things we carry year-round (like dandelions, lemongrass and wheatgrass) are unique items that people don't necessarily see at an H-E-B or a Kroger."

The original store on Broadway is the site of the company's headquarters. The chain has grown to a total of seven retail locations including four northside locations, one on the south side in Hyde Park, and one in the north shore suburb of Wilmette. The layout of each store differs by location and is determined

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by the space available as well as the concept of each store. That concept is determined by the customer base, the demographics of the neighborhood and how they will use the store.

The size of the produce department is not uniform across the chain. “It varies a lot between stores,” says Kamberos. “Our stores range from 17,000 square feet to 40,000. About 35 percent of each store is devoted to the produce department.”

The produce department at each location features organics, freshly squeezed juices and fresh fruit smoothies.

Treasure Island produce buyer, Jim Bilbrey, is at the Chicago International Produce Market every day at 6:30 a.m. with a mission. “Every Monday we decide what we’re going to do according to the sales plan for that week,” says Bilbrey. This gives him an idea of what to look for, and this close involvement with vendors gives independents like Treasure Island an edge over more mainstream outlets when sourcing the best produce. “Because we’re on the market buying every day, we can react a lot faster. I can go to the market every day and pick out from six or seven different vendors. I know which one is the better one, and it can be in the store in four hours. Because we’re small, that’s a big advantage for us.”

Additionally, the store uses other methods for sourcing produce, as Kamberos explains, “In the summer, we buy a lot from local farmers. We have a woman who grows us special heirloom tomatoes, so we buy from the smallest sized to the largest mainstream companies



— depending on the product.”

Bilbrey has good relationships with these growers throughout the area including Scheeringa Farms & Produce, a northwest Indiana grower who provides heirloom tomatoes specifically for the store. “Scheeringa has been growing my heirloom tomatoes for me for seven years,” says Bilbrey. “All summer long we have the most fabulous heirlooms in the world.”

Scheeringa Farms also provides cucumbers, onions, peppers and pumpkins in the fall, which they deliver to Chicago. Last year, Treasure Island experimented with an urban farmers market and invited local growers, artisans and craftspeople to sell their wares in their Lakeview and Lincoln Park locations.

As for display, Bilbrey says, “Produce is

bought by appeal, so we definitely break up the color.” The departments also try to mix categories together. “We put avocados together with tomatoes and lemons. We try to get every sale we can out of each display.”

To promote in store, Treasure Island gives its stores plenty of help by advertising in local papers as well as using social media and online marketing. In the departments, they use signage to let customers know which products are organic and locally grown. Over the years the retailer built a reputation for produce that its customers have come to rely on. “We’re known for our vegetables,” says Bilbrey. “We take special care to ensure they’re washed and crisp. They’re much better than your average store.”

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Tips On Growing Grape Sales



Clean displays of good quality in three colors still captivate.

BY BOB JOHNSON

There is a handful of new proprietary grape varieties worth noticing, like the large Red Globe Holiday Seedless, which promises good mouth appeal. And retailers agree there is evidence some consumers in upscale neighborhoods, in particular, are actively seeking out new eating experiences in their grapes.

But merchandising table grapes still requires the maintenance of good-looking displays of tasty grapes in three colors.

"I think it comes down to doing basics well," says John Pandol, director of special projects at Pandol Brothers in Delano, CA. "You need to have a good quality grape, and you need to make sure it stays that way. One of the most underused tools in the produce department is the garbage can."

While the new varieties are worth watching, a relative handful of familiar red, green and

black varieties out of California continue to dominate the fresh grape category.

"The Top 15 varieties accounted for 87 percent of the crop total in 2015," says Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing at the California Table Grape Commission in Fresno, CA.

BALANCE THE COLORS

A large, visible, clean display with good tasting grapes in three colors will work wonders in driving sales.

"Displays are very important for grapes as consumers buy with their eyes," says Plummer. "Beautiful and well-stocked grape displays will attract attention. Make sure the display includes promotion of all three colors of grapes, that the display is refreshed frequently and is large enough."

This is one instance where size matters, and you can even put a number on it. "In order to obtain optimum sales results, target an average of at least 25 square feet of space devoted to grapes during May through August," advises Plummer. "Space allocation of more than 25 feet can generate up to 63 percent more dollars per store per year than sets under 18 feet."

Shippers confirm the conclusion that larger displays drive grape sales. "The retailer makes the decisions about display," says Atomic Torosian, managing member of Crown Jewels Marketing & Distribution in Fresno, CA. "There is data, though, that shows the larger a properly designed display, the larger volume sold."

Prominent placement is as important as



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the size of the display in driving grape sales. “Not just the size, but also the location of the display is a big part of driving sales,” says Brian Crettol, sales manager at Jasmine Vineyards in Delano, CA. “I like to see big grape displays located prominently in the produce section right up front. Many times grapes are an impulse buy, and the more exposure we get the better. Product placement is key to driving sales. If the grapes are in the back corner of the produce section, sales will suffer.”

Opinions vary on the correct mix of colors in the display of fall grapes. Torosian suggests 50 percent red, 25 percent black and 25 percent green, but emphasizes color is not the most important factor.

“Color is secondary,” says Torosian. “In my experience, the consumer looks for grapes that are firm to crunchy, and that ‘pop’ of sweetness and subtle flavor.”

Nick Dulcich, owner of Sunlight International Sales in McFarland, CA, advises a similar ratio of 50 percent red, 40 percent green and 10 percent black in the display of fall grapes, and underscores the look of the display.

You may even do just fine with two colors well displayed, rather than three, because black grapes are a distant third.

“It’s not even three colors, it might be two, because black is not that popular,” says Pandol. “Red grapes are in the high 40 percents, green or white are in the low 40s, and everything else is four to 7 percent.”

If black grapes are to be merchandised,

they should be next to the more popular red and green varieties. “Consumers typically seek colors of grapes based on their flavor preferences,” says Megan Schulz, director of communications at The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles. “They are more open to trying black seedless varieties when they are merchandised with red and green seedless.”

Signage can add a final touch to the ample display of good-looking grapes in three colors.

“Keep product refrigerated, displays full, and utilize POS materials,” says Dulcich. “Four to 6 feet is an eye-catching display and adequate to maintain a busy day’s sales.”

The large display can be enhanced even further with information about the grapes, or the people who grew them.

“Building large colorful displays of three colors of conventional and organic grapes close together at a fair price point, and telling the story of the grape variety, company, or grower tends to drive the consumers to purchase,” says Torosian. “The larger the display the more you sell if done properly.”

A good display will seal the deal once, but only good grapes will bring them back for more. “If you want repeat sales you have to protect your customers with good eating fruit regardless of variety,” advises Ron Wikum, category manager for table grapes at Bravante Produce in Reedley, CA. “Keep the fruit fresh. Rotate the stock and restock during the sales cycle. We all need to do whatever we can to get good eating fruit into the hands of the

“Not just the size, but also the location of the display is a big part of driving sales. I like to see big grape displays located prominently in the produce section right up front.”

— Brian Crettol, Jasmine Vineyards

consumer.”

Build the display well and they will buy, as grapes are popular among virtually every demographic.

“Grapes have ranked as the third most-popular fruit among consumers in the U.S. for 10 straight years,” says Plummer. “All income levels, ethnicities and ages report buying grapes during the California grape season on a regular basis regardless of economic climate.”

Table grapes sell every month of the year, as well as to all groups of people, but there is a trend toward greater sales when fresh fruit is available from North America, and slower sales the rest of the year.

“The overall grape category is steady but in the months when they are fresh from May to November it is growing, and in the months when they are coming out of storage or from outside North America, it is decreasing,” says Pandol.

That means the “peak” season is when grapes are harvested from different regions in California, with a little help from our friends in Mexico.

“Since California produces 99 percent of the fresh grapes in the U.S., California grapes are America’s local grapes,” says Plummer. “The harvest starts in the southernmost Coachella Valley in early May and moves northward into the San Joaquin Valley, where grapes can be harvested into December. Grapes from California are available from May to January.”

SOMETHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

Over the course of the 12-month season, it takes more than a dozen varieties to satisfy the appetite for three colors of grapes.

“We pride ourselves on offering our customers variety throughout the store, and in our produce department, and grape selection is no exception,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix Super

“We pride ourselves on offering our customers variety throughout the store and in our produce department ... We offered our customers more than 15 different varieties of grapes last year.”

— Maria Brous, Publix Super Markets



Markets, Inc., Lakeland, FL. “We offered our customers more than 15 different varieties of grapes last year.”

While different varieties are largely a matter of maintaining freshness, specialty grapes that account for a relatively small share of sales are increasing in importance in some markets.

“There’s the conventional or generic varieties like Royal, Thompson and Red Globe;

everybody sells those,” says Anthony Stetson, sales manager at Columbine Vineyards, Delano, CA. “For the most part, grape varieties are generic.”

Columbine, however, is among the grower-shippers finding success with a specialty variety.

“We have a proprietary variety called Holiday Seedless that we sell based on the

name and reputation,” says Stetson. “It’s like a seedless Red Globe. It has good flavor, size and eating quality. Sun World has their own proprietary varieties, too. You get a premium for the proprietary varieties; it’s definitely an upscale market.”

In some locales there is a relatively small, but definitely growing market for specialty grape varieties sold at a premium.



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"I think consumers are beginning to look to varieties with the different flavors being offered but they need to be educated about the varieties," says Bravante's Wikum. "The buyers are getting pretty good at recognizing the varieties but that has not been passed on to consumers yet. Sun World is doing that with their variety mix."

There is considerable work yet to be done by shippers and retailers in educating consumers about these newer varieties.

"I think some consumers actually do look for specific varieties as long as they are aware of the variety name," says Sunlight's Dulcich.

In the right markets, it might be worth the trouble to give consumers a taste of one or more of these specialty grapes.

"Sampling can be a good way to introduce consumers to new and/or proprietary varieties," says Giumarra's Schulz.

The market for specialty varieties may be small, but it is a large part of the continuing sales hikes in the fully mature grape category.

"Grapes have increased the last five to seven years," says Columbine's Stetson. "A lot of it is driven by varieties with eating quality or uniqueness."

In addition to always having three colors of grapes, some retailers do well by including new varieties in the mix.

"While we carry our traditional offerings year-round of red, green and black from California, Chile, Peru and/or Mexico, we also offer short season grapes," says Publix's Brous. "These varieties include Cotton Candy, Witch Fingers (Moon Drops), Sweet Celebration, Stella Bella, Sweeties, Scarlotta, and Sugar Crunch just to name a few. These short season grape offerings can be in and out of stores within two to six weeks, but provide a flavor-packed grape option."

As a Southern retailer, Publix does carry the

"Consumers are beginning to look to varieties [of grapes], with the different flavors being offered, but they need to be educated about the varieties."

— Ron Wikum, Bravante Produce

regional favorite when it's in season.

"We do carry Muscadines, but that variety is not as popular as some of the others," says Brous.

The model for some in the grape business is the tremendous number of apple varieties that have developed markets in recent years.

"We look at the apple industry and see how they are marketing many varieties at one time while gaining shelf space in the supermarkets," says Bravante's Wikum. "I think that is something that could help the table grape category but I also think it will be very difficult to implement and educate both consumers and buyers. Apples are dominant in linear feet of display in the marketplace."

It may be easy to get carried away, because there are only a few markets where consumers want something more than grapes that look and taste good in three colors.

"In the specialty category, there's a lot of activity that's not adding up to huge numbers," says Pandol. "If we include organic in specialty grapes, it's seven or eight percent. If we take out organic, it's probably three or four percent. Stores that would sell specialty grapes are the

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The top sellers that still make up nearly 90 percent of all the table grapes shipped out of California, according to Plummer, include Autumn King, Autumn Royal, Crimson Seedless, Flame Seedless, Princess, Red Globe, Scarlet Royal, Summer Royal, Thompson Seedless, and the six trademarked varieties Holiday, Pristine or Blanc Seedless, Vintage Red, Sweet Celebration, Sugarineteen or Scarlotta Seedless, and Sugarone or Superior Seedless.

“Research shows that for the spring and summer grape season, retailers need to promote

“Packaging ‘talks’ to the consumer. Consumers learn to recognize brands, colors and logos of excellent products when they are presented consistently at the department level.”

— Nick Dulcich, Sunlight International Sales

grapes from California three to five times per month, and doing so can increase sales by 30 to 57 percent,” says Plummer. “Front page ads create the greatest impact on the grape category

followed by front page ads coupled with in-store price reductions. Make sure the grape ads include two or more varieties of grapes as that will help increase grape sales as well.” **pb**

THE PACKAGE CAN SEAL THE DEAL

The package plays a role in selling the grapes, as well as keeping the product safe and in good condition.

“Packaging does have an impact at the retail level; we have recently switched over to a stand-up handle bag which has been well received by our retail customers as well as the end consumer,” says Brian Crettol, sales manager at Jasmine Vineyards in Delano, CA.

Bags have become the standard with grapes because they are relatively economical, offer some product protection, and provide a combination of space for a logo or message and a view of the product.

“The stand-up handle bag is the new hot ticket item in many produce categories,” says Crettol. “I can’t speak for the entire industry, but at Jasmine, 90 percent is in this new bag. Bulk is almost nonexistent in the States and in decline in foreign markets as well.”

Almost 85 percent of all the table grapes shipped out of California are in bags, according to Plummer, and only two percent are shipped loose.

“Convenient stand-up, handle pouch bags arranged on a display are a perfect ‘grab and go’ solution for busy consumers who want to eat healthy,” says Megan Schulz, director of communications at The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles. “The majority of our fruit is packed in these bags. The benefits of various packaging styles will depend on retailer. Bulk grapes can look beautiful and give a farmers-market feel to a grape display, but may require more attention and labor to maintain.”

The one exception to the popularity of the bags is with the club stores, which frequently choose to



display their grapes in clamshells.

“Clams in club stores are an advantage because of the type of shopping being done,” says Ron Wikum, category manager for table grapes at Bravante Produce in Reedley, CA. “The rigid container takes better care of the fruit in a full basket alongside a selection of items from a club store. Handle pouch is 95 percent of the market and takes very good care of the product.”

Table grapes shipped to certain export markets are also frequently shipped in clamshells. “Clamshells have been on the decline the past few years with a few exceptions like Costco and Sam’s Club, at least in the domestic market, but some export markets see strong demand for clamshells like New Zealand and the UK,” says Crettol.

California Table Grape Commission statistics show that, all told, around 13 percent of the grapes are in clamshells.

“Bags and clamshells both have a place in the produce department,” says Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing at the California Table Grape Commission in Fresno, CA. “While

there are some pouch bags sold as fixed weight, the majority of bagged grapes are sold as random weight whereas clamshells are all sold as fixed weight. 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.”

Whether it is bags, most likely, or clamshells the grape package delivers a sales message.

“Packaging ‘talks’ to the consumer,” says Nick Dulcich, owner of Sunlight International Sales in McFarland, CA. “Consumers learn to recognize brands, colors and logos of excellent products when they are presented consistently at the department level.

“Rigid packaging is more expensive to produce and bulk has increased shrink disadvantages, but stand-up pouch bags are an all-around solution. Pouch bags are the trend,” he says.

Because they are relatively inexpensive, and always available, this message finds consumers who see grapes as a staple fruit snack.

“Changes in the economy may have an effect on what the produce industry considers ‘luxury items,’” says Atomic Torosian, managing member of Crown Jewels Marketing & Distribution in Fresno, CA. “Typically though, grapes do not fall into this category because they are reasonably priced and readily available year-round. For these reasons, and because grapes are easy to eat and highly nutritious, consumers’ year-round demand for grapes is usually consistent regardless of changes in the economy.” **pb**

Build Stone Fruit Sales With Summer Delight



PHOTO COURTESY OF K-VA-T

A few focal areas in stone fruit convert summertime excitement into year-long profits.

BY JANEL LEITNER

With the approaching summertime, the produce department eagerly anticipates the arrival of the stone fruit season. “When you start thinking about season specialties, you have citrus in the winter, apples in fall, and peaches and other stone fruit in summertime,” states Duke Lane, president of the Georgia Peach Council located in Fort Valley, GA. “The summertime leader is the stone fruit.”

Stone fruit plays an extremely important role in the produce department at George’s Market at Dreshertown, a single, upscale independent grocer located in Dresher, PA. Nancy Grace, produce manager, says, “There are several counters that are designated just for stone fruit, and peaches are given the prime spotlight.”

A steady flow of commitment from shoppers keeps this category popular. “It is one of the few categories in the produce department

that gets a certain excitement and anticipation when the season begins each year,” explains Jeff Simonian, sales manager with Simonian Fruit Company, located in Fowler, CA. “I don’t think there is a variance with this year to year.”

Retailers, such as K-VA-T Food Stores, with 133 stores and headquartered in Abingdon, VA, consider stone fruit sales a central factor to overall success.

“The stone fruit category can play a crucial role in having a successful or unsuccessful year in both sales and units,” says Keith Cox, produce category manager for K-VA-T. “Of course Mother Nature plays a huge role in this also; for example, missing a cherry ad due to weather-related issues can cost several dollars in sales that can be hard to make up.”

The window of opportunity for summer fruit is relatively small, so retailers note the importance of effective promotion. “It is important to promote stone fruit often at the beginning of the season and throughout the end of season,” says Cox.

The Georgia Peach Council recommends a “first of season” program. “People are excited when Georgia peaches are here,” says Lane. “Our season carries us through August.”

New Jersey peach season starts early July with peak product mid-July through end of August as reported by Sunny Valley International in Glassboro, NJ. “We also represent

a peach grower out of South Carolina, and these are available from mid-May through early August,” reports Bob Von Rohr, director of customer relations. “This allows us to have good supplies with great varieties through most of September.”

LOVE THE VARIETY

The stone fruit category covers a range of succulent pitted fruits, but traditional top sellers still remain competitive. “Peaches and nectarines are the two largest volume leaders,” reports Cox. “In our region, the largest volume fruit sold is Southeastern-grown peaches, and consumers prefer the Freestone varieties.”

The cherry lovers at George’s Market at Dreshertown start asking about cherries long before their arrival. “When they do arrive, it seems customers can’t get enough, and the



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season seems never long enough,” says Grace.

The many choices afforded to retailers assist in boosting sales. “The more types of stone fruit you carry, the better,” reports Simonian with Simonian Fruit Company. “These include white- and yellow-fleshed peaches and nectarines along with two or three colors of plums or Pluots.”

Knowing your customer coincides with what sells. “Each market must determine what is needed for its particular area,” explains Cox. “The display space given to stone fruit plays a role in the varieties carried. It is important to display each variety with an ample selection for the customer.”

Customers at George’s Market have a particular preference for black plums. “Everyone has their favorite, but when it comes to California plums, the black plum is often on the shopping list with the red-fleshed Black Splendor being the ultimate find,” says Grace.

Variety awareness fluctuates within the stone fruit category. “In a commodity like Plumcots, each variety is very unique in its appearance and flavor, so it’s more likely that consumers will take note of the variety name,” states Dovey Plain, marketing coordinator with Family Tree Farms located in Reedley, CA. “With regard to a peach or nectarine, we actually strive for consistency from variety to variety.”

LOOK TO FUTURE STARS

To keep the category competitive, industry suppliers such as Dayka and Hackett, located in Reedley, CA, continue to develop and test new varieties.

“We have great success with red-fleshed plums and continue to push in that direction,” states Monty Robison, product manager. “A few shippers developed multiple varieties of Pluots and introduced different PLU numbers.”

Growers for Sunny Valley International work closely with Rutgers University’s Department of Agriculture for recommendations on new varieties optimal for the New Jersey growing area.

“While many consumers think the red-colored variety peaches have the better flavor, in truth, exterior skin color has little to do with the flavor of a peach,” says Von Rohr. “There are many varieties of peaches with a yellowish-red skin that eat exceptional.”

Retailers can introduce new varieties to add excitement to the stone fruit category. “The Prince variety of peaches in Georgia are a collection of a series of varieties consumers are becoming familiar with,” explains Lane of



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNNY VALLEY INTERNATIONAL

the Georgia Peach Council.

HMC Farms, located in Kingsburg, CA, suggests retailers keep their eye on the plum category for future fame. “New plum varieties will breathe new life into a category that has provided some consumers with disappointment in the past,” explains Chelsea McClarty Ketelsen, vice president.

Although not a brand new product, the white-fleshed peach continues growing in popularity. “Representing about 10 percent of the total stone fruit volume, the white-fleshed peaches grown in New Jersey are low in acidity and high in brix,” states Von Rohr. “There is a following of customers who enjoy this sweet peach.”

Family Tree Farms offers a Peach Pie Donut peach described as a flat, yellow-fleshed peach with no blush whatsoever. “We describe it as ‘heirloom style’ and as having ‘backyard-peach tree’ flavor,” explains Plain. “The parentage of this variety is largely canning-style Cling peaches, so it has a dense flesh with a perfect peach flavor.”

MAKE IT VISIBLE

The excitement of the stone fruit season leads to great promotional opportunities. K-VA-T Food Stores merchandises large displays of stone fruit at the entrance of the store or department.

“This will move much more volume,” explains Cox. “Yes, there will be more shrink, but the sales will greatly outweigh the cost of shrink.”

Location plays a large role in whether or not the produce finds its way into the shopping cart. “Obviously, the customer has to be able to find the display,” says Simonian with Simonian Fruit Company. “A large-sized display will capture their attention more easily.”

Von Rohr suggests displays be front-and-center and well stocked. “Emphasize to shoppers that size and color does not guarantee how good a peach is going to taste,” he adds.

Allowing the shopper to taste for themselves maximizes sales. “Sampling works great, because if they try the fruit and like it, they will most likely purchase it,” states Simonian.

K-VA-T agrees sampling stone fruit at the peak of the season is a sure win. “Especially when you sample an item that is not the core of the category, for example white-fleshed nectarines, peaches or raspberry Plumcots,” explains Cox. “This type of sampling will move the consumers to other stone fruit items to go along with the core items.”

KNOW WHAT YOU’RE SELLING

Retailers must have a “first-hand” experience. Robison of Dayka and Hackett suggests staff should be involved in sampling the fruit. “You cannot tell a customer how the fruit is if you have not tried it yourself,” Robison emphasizes.

Appropriate training of retail staff better delivers a good product. “Everyone working within the department should be educated on the proper handling of peaches,” states Von Rohr of Sunny Valley International. “How the peach is handled from harvest to packing to shipping, at store level and at consumer level are all important elements of how good the peach will be.”

According to George’s Market at Dresher-town, rotation and culling are vital and are a daily ritual. “We are also very careful not to break the cold chain or fluctuate temperatures as it seems to help prevent dehydration and mushy flesh,” adds Grace.

Educating the shopper on the characteristics of a good fruit will also benefit sales. “Many consumers think ripeness is the softness of the peach, yet a soft peach does not always guarantee a flavorful sweet-eating peach,” says Von Rohr. “A peach picked too early off the tree and left to get soft will not have the flavor or sweetness of a peach left longer on the tree to mature naturally to its peak flavor.”

Stores can utilize online resources to find information to share with consumers. “In today’s age, the Internet is an excellent resource to learn about stone fruit care, handling and recipes,” explains Von Rohr. “The New Jersey Peach Council is also an excellent resource for peaches.”

K-VA-T Food Stores provides point-of-sale material to help teach consumers key points. “This includes how to select and how to ripen,” says Cox. “It also tells them what not to

do, for example, never refrigerate, unless the fruit is cherries."

The right flavor profile considers brix as well as other factors. "All peaches have a certain amount of sugar and acidity at harvest, and as a peach ripens/softens, the acidity dissipates and more sweetness is evident," explains Von Rohr. "It is important to understand once a peach is picked from a tree it cannot get any more brix since the tree helps provide the level of brix within the peach. We pick the peaches closer to maturity to allow more brix to develop within the peach."

While brix level is important, so is acidity. "Consumers should also understand how the acid level in the fruit also determines the flavor profile," says Robison of Dayka and Hackett. "Some customers like lower acid fruit, and yet others like a more acidic taste for stone fruit. Generally speaking, white-fleshed fruit is lower in acid than most yellow flesh."

"Sweet fruit is important, but high brix alone is not the sole determining factor of a successful variety," explains Jeannine Martin, director of sales for Giumarra/Reedley with Los Angeles-based Giumarra Companies. "It is important to offer varieties that are high in flavor and aroma qualities, as well as sweetness, to bring the consumer a complete eating experience."

PROMOTE ORIGIN

Promoting the fruit's origin provides another way to create excitement for purchase. "It is important to promote stone fruit as California grown or wherever the locale is, because the consumer will remember the next time they purchase to look again for California fruit if they enjoyed their previous purchase," says Simonian of Simonian Fruit Company.

As a store located in Southeast Pennsylvania, George's Market at Dreshertown considers itself fortunate to be neighbors with not only New Jersey and its wonderful fruits, peaches and nectarines, but they are also within distance to source from T.S. Smith & Sons orchards of Bridgeville, DE.

Grace explains, "T.S. Smith offers the most amazing 'juice-runs-down-your-chin' yellow peaches. They arrive in wooden crates where they were packed when harvested in the orchard, sometimes with leaves still attached! Customers familiar with them can't wait for their arrival. By far, both Jersey stone fruit and Smith's fruit are a customer favorite."

K-VA-T Food Stores agrees to the importance of calling attention to where the fruit is grown. "For example, consumers know Georgia as the peach state," says Cox.

Lane of the Georgia Peach Council adds, "The brand value in Georgia is huge, and we see consumers respond to it as far west as Montana and as far north as New York."

A superior product conveys quality throughout the process from farm to the store level. Grace of George's Market at Dreshertown had the opportunity to visit Family Tree Farms in California. "I was very impressed with the care and pride they took in everything from their orchards (mostly plums and Pluot varieties and peaches) to their packing house," says Grace.

PUT PACKAGING TO WORK

The addition of new packaging techniques stimulate greater sales opportunities. "Incorporating packaged fruit in a display is a way to offer a variety of sizes or showcase a certain variety/commodity unique to a specific time frame," says McClarty Ketelsen with HMC Farms.

According to Simonian, clamshells and fixed-weight bags are some of the new packaging to be introduced the past few years. "Usually they offer advantages, because the fruit doesn't get bruised, helping shelf life,"

he explains. "And, there is typically space for recipes, nutritional information, and fruit facts to engage the customer."

Dayka and Hackett is promoting its new 2-pound, fixed-weight bag. "There are '10 bags in a box consisting of peach, plum, nectarine and Pluot,'" explains Robison.

"We have seen an increase of incremental sales. It runs well if you have a two-tier program."

Stores can also take advantage of packaging to easily make displays. George's Market at Dreshertown is proud of its creative displays thanks to the suggestion of one of its growers. "We use the original decorative boxes from Family Tree Farms that sport a drawing of one of their family homes making their fruit not only delicious but fun to display," says Grace.

Packaging specialty items draws attention to the shopper. "Our Donut peaches are packed in a three- or four-count clamshell that nicely shows off their shape and color," explains Plain of Family Tree Farms. "Retailers love these because they tend to bring a larger purchase than the consumer might have otherwise picked up." **pb**

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Balancing Dried Plums In Produce



Retailers and marketers provide insights to the sales scale.

BY, CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Say the word “prune” and you’ll often hear a snicker. The fruits’ association with seniors and digestive regularity is well known. A U.S. industry-led move to change the name to dried plums in 2001 — a moniker thought to be easier for younger consumers to swallow — helped the fruit’s reputation.

However, what is really sweetening sales is overwhelming interest by consumers in healthful snacking. This trend has been matched by the industry’s response — think dark chocolate covered prunes and single-serve packaging — which is driving sales and demand by new prune consumers.

In fact, out of the 26 dried fruits and snack mixed tracked by the Nielsen Perishables Group, a Chicago-based fresh food consulting firm, prunes ranked third in terms of dollar

sales for the 52 weeks ending February 27, 2016. What’s more, during this same time period, prunes totaled \$34.5 million in sales, up 31.7 percent from the prior year.

THE HEALTHY SNACK

“The healthy eating trend has helped sales of dried fruits,” says Rick Hogan, produce education director at Hugo’s Family Marketplace, a 10-store chain headquartered in Grand Forks, ND. “As for prunes, the words dried plum are the way to go.”

Technically, all prunes are plums, but not all plums are prunes, according to the Sacramento, CA-based California Dried Plum Board (CDPB). Prune plum varieties are those that have an exceedingly high sugar content enabling them to be dried without fermenting and still containing the pits.

The impetus for a name change from prune to dried plum occurred after results of research conducted by the then California Prune Board (now the CDPB), revealed that the target audience for prunes, women ages 25 to 54, responded more favorably to the name dried plums.

“Many manufacturers have since found that

some consumers don’t connect with the name dried plums,” says Joe Tamble, vice president of retail sales execution for Sun-Maid Growers of California, headquartered in Kingsburg, CA, regarding the name change. “Therefore, we have both names on pack. This way, it doesn’t exclude older core users and entices younger consumers.”

The trends toward greater snacking and choosing nutritious snacks are drawing a younger demographic of customer to products such as dried plums. In fact, research presented in the *2016 Snacking Occasion Consumer Trend Report*, published March 30, 2016 by Chicago-based market research firm, Technomic, Inc., shows two important facts in this regard. First, snacking between meals up from 41 percent in 2014 to 53 percent in 2016. Second, consumers are seeking more nutritious snacks with 33 percent saying they would purchase snacks more often if healthier options were available.

“Increased communication on the nutritional benefits of dried plums on packaging has helped to boost sales,” says Miranda Ackerman, director of innovation and business development for the Mariani Packing Co. Inc., in

Vacaville, CA. “By emphasizing some of these additional benefits, this helps to bring new consumers to the category as well as position dried plums against other healthy snacks within the store.”

Dried plums serve up essential nutrients such as potassium, iron and vitamin A, soluble and insoluble fiber, and phytochemicals that function as antioxidants. One-ounce (or 3 pitted dried plums) contains 70 calories. Recent research points to dried plums as beneficial to bone health. In fact, the National Osteoporosis Foundation lists dried plums on its “Good-for-Your-Bones Foods” list. However, this fruit is most associated with improved digestive health. Mariani Packaging built on this benefit with its 2015-launched product, Probiotic Prunes.

“With the onset of ‘pill fatigue,’ consumers are turning to their food choices to support their nutritional supplementation. Our Probiotic Prunes are an item that is focused on addressing this trend. In addition to providing consumers with fruit that is known for its digestive health benefits, we are also providing them with added vitamins, minerals and a shelf stable probiotic in one daily serving. This allows the consumer to get multiple nutritional benefits out of one product and increase the value of their dried fruit purchase,” explains Ackerman.

Mariani’s Probiotic Prunes come in a 7-ounce gusseted bags with a re-closable top. Sunsweet Growers, based in Yuba City, CA, previously addressed the need for easy portability in snacking with its 8-count, 60-calorie packs of Amaz!n-brand prunes and 6-ounce canisters and 12-ounce value packs of individually-wrapped Ones.

“The Ones is our top-seller and have helped bring in a new consumer for us, across all ages and demographics,” says Stephanie Harralson, senior product manager. “The second best is our D’Noir prunes. They have a loyal following and continue to grow in repeat sales, because they are not only larger, but preservative free. Third is our diced prunes sold in a 7-ounce pouch. Young moms like them, because it’s a real fruit snack for their children.”

GETTING THE PRODUCE ‘RING’

As more fresh produce SKU’s become



“We suggest placement of prunes in produce. IRI data suggests that sales of dried fruit in general can increase in volume as much as 30 percent annually when merchandised in produce.”

— Joe Tamble, Sun-Maid

available, causing limited shelf space, and a “fresh” or “green-and-growing” philosophy takes root, dried fruits (such as prunes) are being pushed out of the produce department and into the bulk foods or grocery aisle. This placement shift is according to retailer executives nationwide, specifically those asked at Northwest Grocers in Seattle, WA; B&R Stores Inc., in Lincoln, NE; and Allegiance Retail Services LLC, in Iselin, NJ, (which supports the banners such as Foodtown, Freshtown, Freshco, D’Agostino, Market Fresh and Uncle Giuseppe’s Marketplace).

“As a manufacturer, we follow a retailer’s lead,” says Sun-Maid’s Tamble. “However, if we had a recommendation, we suggest placement of prunes in produce. IRI (Information Resources, Inc.) data suggests that sales of dried fruits in general can increase in volume as much as 30 percent annually when merchandised in produce.”

Dried plums are indeed an excellent item to merchandise in the produce department as they are shelf stable, have a very long shelf

life, and help retail to offset the incredibly high shrink losses that are attributed to fresh produce, according to Mariani’s Ackerman. “Fresh fruit is one of the main categories that compete with, as well as complement, dried fruit as a part of the consumer purchase. By merchandising these items in adjacent location, retailers are able to capture the shopper who may bring their healthy snacking purchases to center store if they are not finding dried fruit snack items in produce.”

Prunes tend to sell better in retailers that support the entire dried fruit category, says Jane Asmar, senior vice president of sales and marketing for the Fowler, CA-headquartered National Raisin Company, speaking on behalf of the CDPB. “And, in those who authorize complete lines of high-velocity SKUs such as the top-selling 9-ounce and 18-ounce sizes. Flavored prunes account for approximately 5 percent of sales, and organics sum to about 1 percent. Additionally, while most prunes are sold pitted, some are sold whole.”

Pack style may play a crucial role in getting prunes back into produce.

“Of course you want that ring in produce, but maybe if there was a fresher format for prunes we would take a look at it,” says Jason Kazmirski, produce merchandiser at Tukwila, WA-based Northwest Grocers, which represents 60-stores under the Family Grocer, IGA, Payless Foods, Red Apple and Thriftway banners.

PROMOTION & PRICING

One of the biggest challenges for dried plums in produce is dedicated space.

“As retailers move more toward clean floor policies, having dedicated racks or display placements for dried plums are becoming more of a challenge. One way we had success

dried fruits & nuts ► dried plums

with retailers on this challenge is targeting placement of temporary modular displays — especially during high volume promotional periods. This allows retailers to capitalize on the volume sell through of a dried plum promotion while also creating a dedicated space to merchandise our dried plums, even if only for a temporary time frame,” explains Mariani’s Ackerman.

Dried plums are most popularly eaten out of hand, according to various growers.

However, there are many other usages, and educating shoppers can add rings.

“Our shipper displays have healthy lifestyle imagery rather than a certain holiday or time of year,” says Sunsweet’s Harralson. “However, we can adapt to the seasons with tear pads affixed to the shipper. For example, we offer tear pads that give shoppers ideas how to incorporate prunes in dishes for holiday entertaining and in snacks for back-to-school time. Social media is also a way we communicate usages. For

“We posted a 3-ingredient recipe for prune cookies and received more than 3,000 hits in two days. The recipe was developed by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist.”

— Stephanie Harralson, Sunsweet Growers



“It’s great to finally have an industry specific marketing event! The more, good marketers we have in produce, the better the industry will become.”

Karen Caplan, President & CEO, Frieda’s, Inc.

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example, we posted a 3-ingredient recipe for prune cookies and received more than 3,000 hits in two days. The recipe was developed by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and calls for dried prunes, oatmeal and walnuts.”

Call out prunes in produce via promotions.

“Dried plums are a great item to promote during the return to healthy eating period in January as consumers tend to refocus on health and nutrition during this time,” recommends Mariani’s Ackerman.

For Valentine’s Day, Sunsweet Growers offers tear-pad affixed retail display shippers with coupons that promote the grower’s PlumSweets, dark chocolate- and Greek Yogurt coated Amaz!n Prunes.

The November-December holiday time is also a perfect time to promote.

“We bring dried fruit like dried cranberries, apricots, dates and prunes into the produce department in the fall for the baking season,” says Randy Bohaty, produce director at B&R Stores, an 18-store chain based in Lincoln, NE that operates under the Russ’s Markets, Super Saver, Apple Market and Save Best Foods banners.

Promotional support can even be more effective than specific placement when it comes to selling prunes in produce, according to Mariani’s Ackerman. “Prunes tend to have a higher incremental sales bump to price reduction than many other dried fruit segments,” she says. “If you want to sell more prunes, leverage lower retail prices. Key price-points include ‘99s’ where the product is priced at \$1.99, \$2.99 or \$3.99.

“Additionally, multiple prices such as 2-for \$5 also tend to generate more incremental sales than a single unit promotion at the same consumer value,” says Ackerman. “The most successful retailers promote prunes consistently throughout the year in a manner that includes the entire line.”

pb



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*Not only is this company giving to the CPS Campaign for Produce Safety, but it also has supported CPS in past fundraising efforts.



The Art Of Produce

BY DON HARRIS

At this time of year, discussions in the boardroom turn to the upcoming summer season and how to best drive sales throughout the store — especially in the produce department. In summer, produce will often ask for additional time to train personnel on how best to handle and display the seasonal items, especially highlighting soft fruits and melons. Management often balks at the suggestion — not realizing the sales potential to the overall operation. As a response to the produce representative’s request, management says, “They don’t need additional training; they just need to perform their assigned tasks — after all, it’s not art.” Once again this proves management “just doesn’t get it!”

These requests from produce for additional training and direction on merchandising are not new for the summer selling season. These requests were made by produce people since the beginning of organized retailing. Over the years, these wishes have been met with acceptance and rejection — depending on the organization and the timing. It doesn’t matter whether they have been designated as training sessions, show and tells, merchandising seminars, or sales generation sessions — it all is the same effort. They are simply a designed session providing information and education on how best to display and promote the key summer items.

Summer is one of the most exciting times for consumers to experience the available produce varieties. The essence and taste of the season is available in one place. Peak-of-the-season product requires “peak-of-the-season” merchandising. To do the best possible job in this area requires demonstration and clear direction. Specific instructions on how to accomplish these types of displays to generate sales are vital for the inherent potential of these new seasonal items. This is not something that can be accomplished by simply reading the requirements of the task or following directions in a manual. To capitalize on summer produce properly requires tactile involvement of all the senses.

How much time does it take to accomplish this instruction? A well thought out, organized presentation (utilizing your most experienced produce personnel) could be accomplished in basic training and education during the morning set-up. The method also establishes

a routine to follow each day during this key selling season. This plan of action highlights the displays and the correct merchandising techniques for the key summer items to ensure maximum sales.

The great benefit with this education is that by learning these techniques for these key seasonal items, the knowledge from this activity passes over to the building of displays in the department. Granted, this has to be done in every store within the chain (and in the case of a very inexperienced crew, you might have to be repeat sessions), but it still seems like a very small investment that has a

huge upside in terms of sales impact for, not only the produce department, but the entire store. The investment required in additional personnel and hours to conduct this training will prove to be a minimal cost compared to the sales that will be driven by this activity.

Efficiency and controlling of labor costs are good in theory, but often don’t prove as valuable in practice when applied to something as personal to the consumer as fresh produce. And make no mistake, buying produce is indeed a personal choice. By providing additional time to train the produce personnel to present the best of summertime fruits and vegetables, you not only set the stage for increased sales, but you also communicate the value, selection, and variety offered to your customers.

When you look at this activity, it really could be considered “creating art.” This protocol allows the creativity of each employee to be expressed in the building, merchandising and maintenance of these displays. It allows for communication between the personnel to their consumers. By presenting customers with fresh and abundant displays of key

seasonal items, produce personnel can inform customers about the best items offered at peak-of-the-season quality and taste. It seems such a small price to pay for the ability to “create art” in the produce department.

pb

The great benefit with this education is that by learning these techniques for these key seasonal items, the knowledge from this activity passes over to the building of displays in the department.

Don Harris is a 41-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting and is director of produce for the Chicago-based food charity organization, Feeding America. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.



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The Changing Face of Fresh Produce Retailing & Opportunities for US Suppliers

BY EMMA GOUGH

Greater advances and access to technology mean that an increasing number of consumers around the world, but not least in Europe and the U.S., are venturing online to purchase their weekly shop. This is further helped by the modern consumer's need to utilize technology for greater convenience and time efficiencies. As an example, in the U.K., all the major supermarkets — such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, and Waitrose — have their own online sites allowing consumers to shop 24 hours a day. This is beginning to present serious implications for the fresh produce sector.

In the U.K., the online grocery market grew at an annual rate of 13 percent during the past five years to reach a value of £8.6 billion in 2015. There is a forecasted 12 percent yearly growth during the next five years to £15 billion in 2020. Of this value, currently brick-and-mortar grocery retailers (with their own online site) account for 74 percent of sales with the remaining 26 percent accounted for by “online-only” retailers, such as Ocado and AmazonFresh.

In the European online grocery sector, France is the pioneer. Dominant retailers such as AuchanDirect, E.Leclerc, Casino Supermarket and Système U operate their own online sales channel. As a result, France produces a route to market, which other European countries look to for ideas and inspiration. A good example of this is the “click and collect” format, which many other European retailers now invested in and is a growing trend popular with time-pressured consumers.

The retailer's drive-through-service stores, E.Leclerc DRIVE, are also commonplace in France, whereby consumers can collect their online grocery order without actually entering the supermarket. For the French retailer, E.Leclerc DRIVE contributed to around a third of its total online market share growth. By the end of 2016, the retailer aims to have 800 DRIVE stores open across France, including its first on a motorway.

Retailers are seeing an ever-increasing growth in the volume and value of sales on their online channels. Online grocery sales at Tesco now account for 7 percent of total sales at £2.9 billion. The retailer currently operates from six fully dedicated dot-com stores and in-store picking from larger U.K. stores as a direct result of greater consumption demand for online groceries. Taking the lead from French retailers, Tesco invested in 1,750 Click & Collect points as well as more than 260 grocery drive-throughs.

Online Only

In addition to online supermarket websites, new platforms are emerging whereby no physical stores are present. The *digital only* presence gives these retailers a competitive advantage in terms of lower operating costs. Typically, a number of these formats launched successfully in the U.S., such as FreshDirect and Instacart, but now these are entering the wider European marketplace.

AmazonFresh was launched in the U.S. in 2007, and last year opened in the U.K., with further reports indicating that it will also

begin operations in France and Germany this year. A feature on the U.S. site allows consumers to select fresh produce items that will be hand selected and purchased by Amazon employees from a consumers' local market. The aim is to provide busy working professionals the opportunity to source food from local suppliers. In the U.K., a deal recently manifested that will result in products from Morrisons supermarket being available for purchase online via Amazon.

Further development within the sector occurred with the launch of Natoora in the U.K. and France. This platform focuses only on selling fresh produce to consumers and businesses such as restaurants and smaller retailers on a wholesale basis. The operation has seen strong growth since its launch, and it currently supplies more than 400 London restaurants. The business itself is focused around the fact that it sources all of its products from a number of European wholesale markets and directly from a set of core growers. This presents opportunities for produce suppliers to work directly with online trading platforms to supply products in the European market.

Impact On US Suppliers

This continuing development of the online grocery channel in the U.K. and rest of the EU means that there are a number of key factors U.S. suppliers must consider in order to take advantage of the opportunity in this route to market:

- **Product Range** – Suppliers need to be able to provide online channels with the variety and choice their consumers require.
- **Consistency** – Suppliers need to ensure retailers receive consistently high-quality items with adequate shelf life dates.
- **Competitive Price** – With the sensory aspect of purchasing fresh produce eliminated online, the price of products becomes a leading purchasing decision factor.
- **Promotion of Country of Origin (COO)** – U.S. suppliers can work with retailers to actively promote the COO and boost the awareness of U.S. fresh produce.
- **Local Competitiveness** – U.S. suppliers must consider the competitive advantages they can offer the consumer over local sources, such as innovative and additional varieties, seasonality, and competitive prices.

With the online grocery market set to grow by 73 percent over the five years in the U.K. alone, there still remains plenty of room for new produce suppliers to gain a slice of the action. Those suppliers that consider their offering for the market; how it can best be presented online; pricing; and working directly with retailers will be the ones that have the potential for success.

pb

Emma Gough is a senior consultant at Promar International, a leading value chain consulting firm and a subsidiary of Genus plc. Gough has worked on a range of international fresh produce projects across Europe, as well as in Southeast Asia. She is a committee member of the UK Chartered Institute of Marketing Food, Drink and Agriculture Group.



360 Customer Service

BY ALAN SIGER

A wise friend once told me that whenever you get a notice from a service provider beginning with “In order to serve you better ...,” it really means they are taking something away from you. Think about it: the letter from the bank states, “In order to serve you better, we are closing some branches”; or the notice from the utility company explains how serving you better equates to you reading the meter for them. The consumer loses a service in both of these cases.

Let’s face it, with escalating costs, businesses are always looking for ways to save money. To preserve public perception, big corporations have large public relations departments charged with putting the best spin on these cost-cutting strategies. Though a mega-bank may realize that combining branches will cost them some customers in the short term, the business will often move ahead with the consolidation, determining the long-term savings are worth it. The bank’s business strategists pre-calculate potential customer loss and monitor the actual results. A major deviation from the model might result in a slight tweak, but once implemented, these changes rarely go away.

However, a danger to companies of all sizes is when customers are lost by failures in the company’s operations, breakdowns that can go undetected by management. Let me give you two examples of poor customer service that I recently encountered.

I had the privilege to spend a few months in the California desert this past winter. I changed the delivery address of my Sunday *New York Times* subscription to my California residence without a problem, but when I returned home to Pittsburgh in mid-February, my requested delivery transfer did not occur. First Sunday: No newspaper, called the circulation department, and received a nice apology and a promise to remedy the situation. Second Sunday: No newspaper, called the circulation department, and received the same apology and promise as the previous week. Third Sunday: No newspaper, called the circulation department, and cancelled my subscription.

While in California, I also subscribed to the local newspaper, *The Desert Sun*, a division of Gannett Company, Inc., the United States’ largest newspaper publisher. I put a hold on my subscription when I went home to Pittsburgh in mid-February with no problem, but when I attempted to restart delivery upon my return to California in March, it was a different story. First day: No newspaper, called the circulation department, received a nice apology and a promise to remedy the situation. Second day: No newspaper, called the circulation department and cancelled my subscription.

Some say the print newspaper industry is dying a slow death. Circulation numbers are falling, some newspapers have gone out

of business, others cut frequency of print or resorted to online-only distribution. Members of senior management are pulling their hair out trying to survive, while their companies are losing subscribers like me because they can’t handle a simple address change or vacation stop/start.

Think about your business. Are you unaware of lost existing or potential new business? Where are the “touch points” in your business where your company contacts your customers? Look past your sales force and customer service. Who else is talking to your customers?

Your delivery drivers contact your customers at their place of business each time you ship an order; considering online, fax, or automated ordering, your driver may be the only contact your company has with a customer for weeks at a time. Your drivers are more than truckers — they are ambassadors for your brand. It’s important for them to understand this factor and for you to ensure they are well-prepared to be in a customer-facing environment.

Do you train your drivers on how to interact with customers, and how to handle problems that might arise? Do your drivers understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality regarding your business and customers? Consider providing uniforms

to your drivers so they look professional, or at the very least, enforce a dress code. Your warehouse staff should have similar training for interacting with will-call customers. Let your operation’s team members know that their job is more than handling produce, it’s also helping to maintain and grow your customer base.

Administrative staff also can have critical touch points with customers. An abrasive or condescending cashier may cause a C.O.D. customer to take their business down the street rather than subject themselves to being mistreated. Accounts-receivable personnel interact with customers as a regular course of business. It’s important that they too understand they are representing you, and that their interactions with a customer must remain courteous and respectful.

Your best efforts to grow your customer base and drive revenue may not be enough if every level of your organization doesn’t understand the importance of customer service, and it’s up to senior management to make sure each individual recognizes how essential they are to the company’s success.

pb

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.

Where are the “touch points” in your business where your company contacts your customers?



Cranberry Products Stir Up Sales In Produce

BY MICHELLE HOGAN

Creating a shift in customs, traditions and rituals is no overnight task — it takes planning, time and resources. The Cranberry Marketing Committee USA (CMC) has firsthand experience in working to transform the way American shoppers think about, and use, cranberries throughout the year.

Cranberries are a classic fall favorite; however, cranberries (or “America’s Original Superfruit” as we call them) are perfectly poised to add flavor to Fourth of July celebrations and the summer grilling season in versatile recipes and refreshing cocktails. We recently tested this concept — using a mix of dried and frozen cranberries along with cranberry juice cocktails sold in produce — in key regions in 2014 and 2015 with great success. These positive efforts to break the seasonal barriers are predicting a summer holiday revolution starting at the epicenter of food decisions — the supermarket.

Carving The Way For Summer Cranberries

While they are a versatile fruit with year-round applications, cranberries are most often tied to one particular season. With the drive to break past the seasonality barrier, the CMC set out to create a second sales spike for cranberries during the summer/grilling season — a typically low sales period for cranberries — and help supermarkets sell more. Starting in 2014, the CMC kicked off a pilot program to determine if pairing product sales with in-store promotion and digital marketing would pique shoppers’ interest and drive sales. In short, it did. Building off a successful pilot in 2014, the CMC worked with Big Y Foods, Inc. (Springfield, MA) and Weis Markets, Inc. (Sunbury, PA) to make year-two even bigger.

Sustained Creative Cranberry Promotions Motivate Purchase

By partnering with retail registered dietitians in key locations, we worked together to create a 360-degree promotion aimed at helping shoppers understand the health benefits of cranberries and this produce’s perfect fit for the 2015 summer grilling season. When paired with culinary tips and recipes, in-store magazine and ad circular placements, the cranberry items saw significant sales increases during typically low sales periods compared to the weeks leading up to the promotion. The Big Y effort resulted in an average of a 305 percent sales increase. At Weis, participating brands saw an average of 85 percent sales increase, underscoring the importance of reaching shoppers with trusted in-store registered dietitians, to help drive sales.

On the heels of the successful summer grilling promotions, the

CMC decided to expand its reach to a new generation of cranberry lovers by targeting Millennial shoppers celebrating the “*Friendsgiving*” trend. Friendsgiving is celebrated in the days and weeks before and after Thanksgiving.

The CMC teamed up with the registered dietitian at Redner’s Markets, Inc. (Reading, PA) on a *Healthcents* promotion that connected Millennial shoppers with cranberries and drove them to enter the Cranberry Friendsgiving Photo Contest on social media (which ran from October 26 – December 14, 2015) for a chance to win \$2,000. Cranberry juice and sauce, as well as fresh, frozen and dried cran-

berries, were highlighted in Redner’s *Healthcents* magazine and weekly ad circular. Both included details about how the fruit is a perfect fit for Friendsgiving — including a link to recipes and The Ultimate Friendsgiving Guide, which featured tips for throwing the ultimate Friendsgiving party.

Utilizing the contest hashtag (#Friendsgiving-CranberryContest) gave retailers more ways to engage with social media-savvy shoppers and to reach them where they spend their time — online. Through high-traffic, in-store demonstrations within the produce department as well as other high-traffic areas, cranberry recipes were sampled alongside recipe cards and Friendsgiving guides to raise awareness and provide more cranberry usage ideas while reaching consumers in shopping mode. Through this enhanced, themed promotion, all cranberry products saw sales increases from the previous year (about 11 percent for fresh and 64 percent for dried).

Formula To Drive Cranberry Sales In Produce

The success of the CMC in-store promotions was a case study to be followed for retailers seeking to increase produce sales. We found that tying into larger promotions can help stores engage with shoppers, including Millennials, and give them more reasons and resources to buy and use cranberries. As the CMC gears up for the summer grilling season and Friendsgiving 2016, we are already working to align promotions in the produce department to continue to expand our seasonality and reach — and drive cranberry sales. **pb**

Michelle Hogan is the executive director of the Wareham, MA-based Cranberry Marketing Committee USA, a Federal Marketing Order established in 1962 to ensure a stable, orderly supply of good quality product. For more information about the Cranberry Marketing Committee USA, visit uscranberries.com and follow @USCranberries on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

With the drive to break past the seasonality barrier, the CMC set out to create a second sales spike for cranberries during the summer/grilling season. ...



Is 'Clean' Eating An Opportunity For Produce?

BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER

I've been watching the clean eating trend with great interest lately. While the original meaning focused on home cooking and consuming more whole foods, this trend now focuses on packaged foods with "natural" claims, shorter ingredient lists with ingredient names consumers recognize, and no artificial additives.

New Nutrition Business, a global food business consulting firm based in London, named "free-from" one of the Top 10 trends in food for 2016. Founder Julian Mellentin reminds people, "For consumers, 'clean label' is an aspiration — *but pleasure, taste, price and convenience all come first.*"

So is this trend based on science or hype? It's actually based on consumer beliefs, and beliefs drive consumer need. If they believe "clean" is better for them — regardless of whether or not that is true — that motivates them to seek products that fit that need.

Mintel reports that 59 percent of U.S. shoppers believe fewer ingredients means a healthier product. As product manufacturers for both retail and restaurant use are scrambling to remove artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives, recipe developers are striving to create easy, delicious recipes with as few ingredients as possible. It's a maddening time for both product and recipe developers who have fewer tools in their toolboxes.

The Hartman Group, a Bellevue, WA-based food and beverage marketing agency, reports consumers are avoiding the following ingredients: high fructose corn syrup (56%), saccharin (52%), growth hormones (52%), MSG (51%), aspartame (49%), artificial flavors (49%), artificial colors (49%), artificial preservatives (45%), sucralose (42%), and partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (37%). You may find some of these ingredients in croutons and salad dressings in or near your produce department, but you won't find them in produce.

What are you selling? Fresh produce. You possess clean labels. But this doesn't mean you don't need to be ready to educate shoppers and be advocates for the industry. Fresh-cut produce may contain ascorbic acid to slow the browning reaction. Shoppers need to know this is the same as squeezing lemon juice on your fruit salad at home.

At a recent tour of the Chiquita Fresh Express processing facility in Salinas, CA, I heard the plant manager tell a group of mommy bloggers that the final step in processing apples for McDonald's Happy Meals is to "dip the apple slices in ascorbic acid." A mommy blogger anxiously asked, "You're telling me you're putting acid on apples for children?" The plant manager looked confused for a moment and then said, "Oh, no. Ascorbic acid is the chemical name for vitamin C," to which the mommy blogger said, "So you're putting both acid and chemicals on the apples!" She then turned around and tweeted

that to her followers. We have a lot of basic science education to do in this country if we're going to make any headway on consumer demand for "clean" products.

Consider other Mintel data showing that shoppers who seek "free-from" claims on products are most likely to look for trans-fat free products (78%) and preservative-free products (71%). The produce department has nothing to worry about — except for issues like the "Dirty Dozen" report, a clever marketing device for the Environmental Working Group. Creating consumer fear and confusion is a great way to get more subscribers for newsletters.

So how do you combat the pesticide residue issue? With science. Research shows consumers who eat the most fruits and vegetables — including fresh, frozen, dried, canned, or juiced products produced from both conventional and organic methods — have the lowest risk of heart disease. Shoppers need to know this.

We need to encourage people to buy and eat more produce, and not get swept up in discussions and debates about superfoods, the fruit with the highest antioxidant levels, or the cruciferous vegetable with the most glucoraphanin.

We need to reassure people that the Environmental Protection Agency sets very conservative limits on pesticide residues, and consuming all

types of produce is safe, and making half your plate fruits and vegetables promotes good health.

Carl Winters and colleagues at UC Davis reviewed the "Dirty Dozen" list in 2010, and published a paper in 2011 that concluded:

"(1) Exposures to the most commonly detected pesticides on the 12 commodities pose negligible risks to consumers; (2) Substitution of organic forms of the 12 commodities for conventional forms does not result in any appreciable reduction of consumer risks; and (3) The methodology used by the environmental advocacy group to rank commodities with respect to pesticide risks lacks scientific credibility."

So is "clean" eating really a big opportunity for produce? It is if we can get shoppers to buy and eat more produce. We need to talk about the natural flavors and colors of produce. We need to talk about deliciousness. We need to educate on ways to use the produce, including cooking tips. And we need to remember that produce matters — for your business and for the health of the American public. **pb**

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND is a farmer's daughter from North Dakota, award-winning dietitian, culinary nutrition expert, and founder and president of Farmer's Daughter Consulting, Inc. Learn more about her business at www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com. Follow her insights on food and flavor issues on Twitter @AmyMyrdalMiller.

We have a lot of basic science education to do in this country if we're going to make any headway on consumer demand for "clean" products.

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Phillip Balsamo Company	116	630-575-8000	www.phillipbalsamo.com	Muller Trading Co., Inc.	118	847-549-9511	www.mullertrading.com
Bari Produce	128	559-560-5600	www.bariproduce.com	New Jersey Blueberry			
Baro North America, Inc.	Floral-13	314-692-2270	www.baerousa.com	Industry Council	93	609-292-8853	
Basciani Foods, Inc.	70	610-268-3044	www.bascianifoods.com	New Jersey Department			
Blue Book Services	139	630-668-3500	www.producebluebook.com	of Agriculture	91	609-292-8853	www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov
California Avocado				Olympic Wholesale			
Commission	145	800-344-4333	www.californiaavocado.com	Produce and Foods, Inc.	114	312-421-2889	www.olympicwholesale.ca
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	33	515-981-5111	www.capitalcityfruit.com	Pacific Tomato Growers	51	209-450-9810	www.sunripeproduce.com
Center for Produce Safety	137	530-757-5777	www.cps.ucdavis.edu	Panama Banana Dist Co.	118	773-446-1000	www.panamabanana.com
Cinco Plastics	Floral-19	713-863-7632	www.cincoplastics.com	Penang Nursery	7	407-886-2322	www.penangnursery.com
Country Fresh				Peri & Sons Farms	46	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
Mushroom Co.	69	610-268-3043	www.countryfreshmushrooms.com	Phillips Mushroom Farms	43	800-722-8818	www.phillipsmushroomfarms.com
Del Monte Fresh Produce	148	800-950-3683	www.freshdelmonte.com	Prime Time	53	760-399-4166	www.primetimeproduce.com
Dietz & Kolodenko	117	312-666-6320	www.cipmarketing.com	Produce for Better			
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	800-333-5454	www.dole.com	Health Foundation	83	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	11	800-333-5454	www.dole.com	Produce Marketing Assoc.	123	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
dProduce Man Software	107	888-PRODMAN	www.dproduce.com	Produce Marketing Assoc. Floral-24	302-738-7100		www.pma.com
Dulcinea Farms	131	800-495-1561	www.pacifictrellisfruit.com	Pure Hothouse Foods, Inc.	101	519-326-8444	www.pure-flavor.com
Eastern Fresh				Robinson Fresh	24	855-350-0014	www.chrobinson.com
Growers, Inc.	94	856-447-3563	www.easternfreshgrowers.com	Robinson Fresh	89	855-350-0014	www.chrobinson.com
El Rey Mexican				Sheppard Farms	94	856-447-3563	www.easternfreshgrowers.com
Products, Inc.	108	414-643-1640	www.elreyfoods.com	Shuman Produce, Inc.	73	912-557-4477	www.realsweet.com
Ethylene Control, Inc.	82	800-200-1909	www.ethylenecontrol.com	SIAL Paris	65	704-365-0041	www.sial-group.com
Farmer's Daughter				Silver Creek Software	98	208-388-4555	www.silvercreek.com
Consulting LLC	96	916-564-8086	www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com	SlowFlowers.com	Floral-18	844-756-9356	www.slowflowers.com
Fierman Produce				South Georgia			
Exchange	33	718-893-1640		Produce, Inc.	74	229-559-6071	www.sgproduce.com
Four Seasons				Strube Celery &			
Produce, Inc.	31	800-422-8384	www.fsproduce.com	Vegetable Company	113	312-226-7880	www.strube.com
Fresh Origins, LLC	10	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com	Sun Valley Group	Floral-11	800-747-0396	www.thesunvalleygroup.com
Fresh Produce				Sun World International	125	760-398-9430	www.sun-world.com
& Floral Council	60	714-739-0177	www.fpf.org	Sunkist Growers, Inc.	12	818-986-4800	www.sunkist.com
Fresh Taste Produce				Sunny Valley International/			
Limited Canada	9	416-255-2361	www.freshtasteusa.com	Jersey Fruit	95	856-881-0200	www.sunnyint.com
Generation Farms	75	336-420-2244	www.generationfarms.com	Sunshine Bouquet Co.	Floral-13	305-599-9600	www.sunshinebouquet.com
Georgia-Pacific	49		www.gppackaging.com	Thermal Technologies, Inc.	81	803-691-8000	www.gotarless.com
Giorgio Fresh Co.	69	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofresh.com	To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms, Inc.	68	610-268-8082	www.to-jo.com
Growers Express				Tomorrow's Organics	24	855-350-0014	www.chrobinson.com
/Green Giant	15	855-350-0014	www.greengiantfresh.com	Twist Ease	114	888-623-8390	www.twistease.com
A. Gurda Produce Farms	46	845-258-4422	www.agurdaproduce.com	Uesugi Farms, Inc.	133	408-842-1294	www.uesugifarms.com
Harris Consulting				United Fresh			
Solutions	51	269-903-7481		Produce Assoc.	62	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
Heat And Control	55	800-227-5980	www.heatandcontrol.com	United Fresh			
Highline Mushrooms	70	519-326-8643	www.highlinemushrooms.com	Produce Assoc.	136	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
International				The USA Bouquet Co.	Floral-9	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Floriculture Expo	Floral-23	207-842-5414	www.floriexpo.com	Village Farms	37	888-377-3213	www.villagefarms.com
JAB Produce	116	312-226-7805	www.jabproducecompany.com	Vineland Co-op			
Jasmine Vineyards, Inc.	127	661-792-2141	www.jasminevineyards.com	Produce Auction, Inc.	96	856-691-0721	www.vinelandproduce.com
Jersey Fruit	95	856-881-0200	www.sunnyint.com	Wilson Produce	12	520-375-5755	www.wilsonproduce.com
Kleen-Pak Foods, Inc.	107	414-481-4878	www.kleen-pak.com	Wonderful Company	5	661-720-2500	www.wonderfulcitrus.com
La Hacienda Brands, Inc.	115	312-243-2755	www.lahaciendabrand.com				



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S.S. Tilapa at Avonmouth, England, in December of 1945 with the first cargo of bananas following the end of World War II.

PHOTO CREDIT: TURBANA / FYFFES

THE BANANA PROHIBITION

During World War II, commercial shipping between the Americas and Europe suffered as the theater of war included maritime attacks in the Atlantic Ocean with produce vessels harboring no exception.

From 1939, Fyffes' 21 specialized banana-carrying ships continued to operate normal trade routes — despite the risk of attack from German navy vessels. However, in 1940, four of Fyffes' vessels were requisitioned by the British war office and transferred to war service, and eight company vessels were sunk during that year.

On November 9, 1940, the British Ministry of Food, without any prior consultation, decided upon a total prohibition of banana imports. Lord Woolton, the minister at the time, claimed it was better to have a good supply of one fruit rather than a poor supply of several. The fruit chosen was the orange.

THE DAILY MIRROR

Buy ripe bananas

FYFFES!

Would you eat unripe strawberries? Un-ripe plums you know are bad for you. Therefore, buy ripe bananas. How can you tell? By seeing that the skin is a rich golden-yellow with no green at the tip. To ensure getting them ripe, ask your Fruitster for Fyffes' bananas.

Thousands of miles from the sunny tropics to your home.

Only an organization like Fyffes—the firm to do it—with its own ships and inland transport bringing bananas straight to the special ripening rooms of the leading wholesalers, can deliver perfectly ripe bananas. Over thirty years' experience is behind this claim. So insist on Fyffes' bananas.

FYFFES' BANANAS
THE ALL-FOOD FRUIT

Do you watch the advertisement columns of the "Daily Mirror"? They are both informative and educative. From them you can gather many a useful hint, many an interesting suggestion. And remember, persistently advertised goods are always the best—the makers have a reputation to maintain.

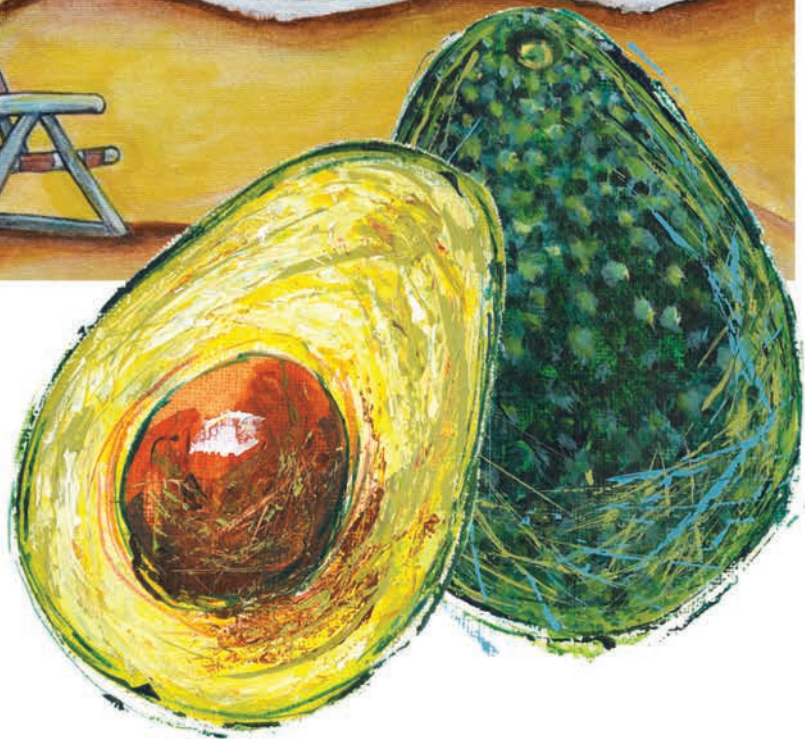
Some of Fyffes' vessels were used to bring refrigerated cargo of meat, eggs and bacon from Halifax and New York while others continued to be requisitioned for war use. The company suffered multiple losses in vessels during the remaining years of war.

The final casualty to the Fyffes' fleet during World War II was the sinking of the Tucurica (a British fruit carrier), which was lost in March 1943. On September 18, 1945, the ban on the import of bananas into the United Kingdom imposed by the Ministry of Food was partially lifted. The first delivery of bananas after the end of World War II arrived in Avonmouth, England, in December 1945 with 10 million bananas on board the Fyffes' ship SS Tilapa. Pathé News (a British producer of newsreels) carried the story in thousands of cinemas all around the world. Children eating the first fruits on arrival had to be shown how to peel a banana and that one did not eat the skin. **pb**

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