

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

29TH ANNUAL
MYSTERY SHOPPER REPORT

Tales *of the* Seasons

EXCLUSIVE



Masters of Merchandising

SUPPLEMENT



Floral Business

INSIDE

PUNDIT EXAMINES CHIPOTLE FOOD SAFETY
SEVANANDA • NEW-AGE BRAND MARKETING • WHOLESALERS
HYDROPONICS • SMART PACKAGING • TRANSPORTATION
SOUTHERN RETAILERS • PEPPERS • AVOCADOS • BERRIES
FAST CASUAL MENU • SAN FRANCISCO • BULK NUTS
CPMA BOOTH REVIEW



Dole is not only one of the world's largest providers of fresh fruits and vegetables — we're experts in science, nutrition and culinary too. Founded by David H. Murdock, the Dole Nutrition Institute (DNI), with labs located at the North Carolina Research Campus, is committed to improving the world's health through groundbreaking fruit and vegetable research, innovative educational programs and health-related findings from renowned scientists around the world.



DNI's team of scientists conducts cutting-edge, nutrition-based research in the Dole Nutrition Lab. Every day they are discovering more about the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables and are collaborating with universities to explore the relationship between food and health.



Our Registered Dietitian

As Dole's official Registered Dietitian (RD), Jenn LaVardera reports the latest health-promoting findings to the public through the Dole Nutrition News, social media, and print brochures. She works closely with Dole's recipe development team to create inspiring, nutritious recipes, and with supermarket RDs to support their in-store educational programs.



Our Culinary Expert

When it comes to exploring the delicious possibilities of fresh produce, Chef Mark Allison is Dole's culinary expert. As DNI's Director of Culinary Nutrition, Mark specializes in preparing fruits and vegetables in ways that maximize flavor and complement additional ingredients, creating exciting recipes founded on the principles of culinary nutrition.

To find out how the Dole Nutrition Institute's world-class fruit and vegetable research can help your customers eat healthier, contact us at DoleNutrition@Dole.com



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LONDON PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE 2016

#celebratingFRESH

JUNE 8-10, 2016

GROSVENOR HOUSE, PARK LANE



Biggest social event
in the UK's fresh
produce calendar

Growers, exporters,
importers & service companies,
representing 36 countries
and 6 continents

LPS15 FACTS

1665 visitors to Europe's
largest 5* produce
exhibition -
50% rise on 2014

Unparalleled presence of UK
and international buyers from
the retail, wholesale
and foodservice sectors

Presented by



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From the publishers of:



produce quiz

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



JOE BELYEA
Quality Assurance
Manager
Delhaize America
Salisbury, NC

What do you want to be when you grow up? For Joe Belyea, a path in quality assurance and sustainability was his entrée into the produce industry and what he has been devoted to for the past 26 years.

“Produce is exciting,” says Belyea. “Mother Nature always keeps you on your toes with every season and new varieties.”

Belyea began working for Portland, ME-based Hannaford as a quality assurance manager in 1990. In 2000 — the same year Delhaize acquired Hannaford — he was a produce buyer for Food Lion when he saw

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

an opportunity to improve the slim quality assurance program.

“I put a proposal together and presented it to Rick Anicetti, who was the president and CEO of Food Lion at the time,” recalls Belyea. The initiative was given a green light, and the quality assurance division went from 14 people to 34 people, of which Belyea now manages.

“All our inspectors receive training from the USDA and the Southeast Produce Council,” says Belyea. “Each person is cross-trained to handle all fresh — including meat and seafood, and we each have our expertise in certain categories.”

Belyea says the key to their success as a team is “looking through the same lens as a customer and to filter the decision making [through that customer lens], because you’ll often be more right than wrong.”

WIN A TRIO OF WINES PLUS TRAVEL TOTE

Use as a gift or take on a weekend getaway, this suede wine tote comes complete with accessories and three bottles of Italian wine. The travel case fits three bottles and has a compartment for a pour spout, opener and topper. The three Italian selections are: Antinori Villa Toscana (red blend), Cecchi Chianti Classico (robust ruby-red) and Benvolio Pino Grigio (floral white). The case also is equipped with a detachable shoulder strap and inner partitions to ensure safe transport.



QUESTIONS FOR THE MARCH ISSUE

- 1) What is the name of the chef who is the Culinary Expert at the Dole Nutrition Institute?

- 2) What directory is linked to the QR code on the ad for New York Apple Association?

- 3) What kind of animal’s face is drawn on the tomato in the NatureSweet ad?

- 4) How many strawberries are shown on the Naturipe ad?

- 5) What type of mango is displayed in the ad for Ciruli Brothers?

- 6) What is the website for Fresh Express organic products?

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:
MARCH QUIZ PRODUCE BUSINESS • P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425



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P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton • FL 33481-0425
 Phone: 561-994-1118 • Fax: 561-994-1610
 producebusiness@phoenixmedianet.com

PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
 James E. Prevor
 JPrevor@phoenixmedianet.com

PUBLISHER/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
 Ken Whitacre
 KWhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

VP EDITORIAL
 Ellen Koteff
 EKoteff@phoenixmedianet.com

SPECIAL PROJECTS EDITOR
 Mira Slott
 MSlott@phoenixmedianet.com

INTEGRATED CONTENT EDITOR
 Michele Sotallaro
 MSotallaro@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
 Diana Levine
 DLevine@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION LEADER
 Jackie Tucker

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT
 Sunshine Gorman
 Freddy Pulido
 Christopher Sizemore

EVENT COORDINATOR
 Jackie LoMonte
 JLoMonte@phoenixmedianet.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
 Chris Auman, Carol Bareuther, Mark Hamstra,
 Mindy Hermann, Bob Johnson, John Lehdorff,
 Janel Leitner, Jodean Robbins, Lisa White

ADVERTISING
 Eric Nieman, Associate Publisher
 Niemaneric@aol.com

Linda Bloomfield
 Linda.Bloomfield@LondonProduceShow.co.uk

Steve Jacobs
 SJacobs@phoenixmedianet.com

Sandy Lee
 Sandypnews@aol.com

Kelsee Loche
 KLoche@phoenixmedianet.com

Ellen Rosenthal
 ERosenthal@phoenixmedianet.com

FLORAL DEPARTMENT MARKETING
 E. Shaunn Alderman
 SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com

Send insertion orders, payments, press releases, photos, letters to the editor, etc., to Produce Business, P.O. Box 810425 Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425
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**CLASS OF 2015
Young And Smart
Leaders On The Rise**



PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Eleventh Annual 40-Under-Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of June 1, 2016 (People born after June 1, 1976).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 15, 2016, and fax back to 561-994-1610 or go to our website at producebusiness.com and look for the 40 Under Forty icon to link to the online application.

Once nominated, the candidate will be interviewed by one of our editors, and will receive forms to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

ABOUT THE NOMINEE:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
 Approximate Age _____
 Company _____
 Position _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____
 Country _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____
 E-mail _____

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:
 (You can use a separate sheet for this)

ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
 Company _____
 Position _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____
 Country _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____
 E-mail _____

Nominator information is for our use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.

For more information email: info@producebusiness.com

APRIL 12-14, 2016

BMO CENTRE
CALGARY, ALBERTA

CPMA BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #629

AMERICAN PEANUT COUNCIL (CANADA)

Mississauga, Ontario

Everyone loves a snack, but not all snacks love us. But it helps if your snack is also healthy and nutritious. Perfectly powerful peanuts is an ideal snack that comes in its own eco-friendly package.



BOOTH #745

ATLAS PRODUCE & DISTRIBUTION, INC.

Bakersfield, CA

Shipper of the popular Caramel Naturel Medjool Dates, Date Coconut Rolls and Almond Rolls. Stop by our booth to taste the amazing flavor of Caramel Naturel!



BOOTH #628

BABÉ FARMS SPECIALTIES

Santa Maria, CA

Innovative, creative, collaborative, and blessed with an ideal growing climate, Babé Farms grows, packs and ships a colorful profusion of high quality specialty vegetables year-round in Santa Maria.



BOOTH #315

BLUE BOOK SERVICES

Carol Stream, IL

Grow sales and manage business risk — whether your sales team needs leads or your credit team needs ratings and predictive scores, Blue Book membership gives you the information needed to grow and protect your business.



BOOTH #626

CHRISTOPHER RANCH

Gilroy, CA

Christopher Ranch is one of the United States' largest grower, packer, shipper of fresh California Garlic, available in a variety of sizes and packs. We also produce peeled and jar garlic, specialty onions, chiles, organic products and more.

We have a full line of bi-lingual label items for the Canadian market.



BOOTH #361

CHURCH BROTHERS

Salinas, CA

Church Brothers Farms will showcase its Kale Color Crunch multi-use vegetable blend that includes Rainbow kale, Brussels sprouts, Napa and red cabbage, Radicchio and carrots.



BOOTH #517

DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE

Coral Gables, FL

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



BOOTH #209

DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS, INC.

Salinas, CA

We will feature our full line of fresh produce — including celery, radishes and citrus, as well as our ever-evolving, fresh-cut value-added line. This year marks Duda Farm Fresh Foods' 90th year in business. We are thrilled to be planning celebrations around this milestone.



BOOTH #631

FLORIDA TOMATO COMMITTEE

Maitland, FL

Nothing is more important than your continued trust and confidence. Florida tomato growers are committed to ensuring the best quality, wholesomeness and safety of every fresh Florida tomato they ship.



BOOTH #227

GIUMARRA COMPANIES

Los Angeles, CA



Experience quality, flavor, and world-class service with the Giumarra and Nature's Partner global line of fruits and vegetables, which includes Fair-Trade certified produce grown in Mexico.

BOOTH #704

HOUWELING'S TOMATOES

Delta, British Columbia

Houweling's Tomatoes is a greenhouse tomato grower with farms in Delta, BC; Camarillo, CA; and Mona, UT. Houweling's grows a wide array of fresh, flavorful, locally grown tomatoes year-round. Led by Casey Houweling, the company is committed to growing great-tasting produce and utilizing industry leading sustainable growing practices.



BOOTH #556

IDAHO EASTERN OREGON ONION COMMITTEE

Parma, ID

Stop by our booth to learn the latest on Idaho-E. Oregon Onions/USA Onions. For a current Shippers Directory, visit USAONIONS.com.



BOOTH #850

IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION

Eagle, ID

The Idaho Potato Commission is the marketing arm for the entire Idaho potato industry. The organization created the well known "Grown in Idaho" seal, which symbolizes quality known around the world.



BOOTH #147

LIMONEIRA

Santa Paula, CA

Limoneira is a global company, founded in 1893. We are one of the largest vertically integrated lemon suppliers in the U.S. Our operations provide greater growing, harvesting and packing efficiencies that afford faster marketplace response.



BOOTH #743

NASH PRODUCE

Nashville, NC

Nash Produce is proud to be a year-round supplier of sweet potatoes. As one of the United States' largest shippers, we specialize in retail and food-service. Come check out our products at the booth.



APRIL 12-14, 2016

BMO CENTRE
CALGARY, ALBERTA

CPMA BOOTH REVIEW

**BOOTH #308
NATIONAL WATERMELON
PROMOTION BOARD**

Winter Springs, FL
The National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) is the marketing arm of the watermelon industry. NWPB's mission is to increase consumer demand for watermelon. NWPB has resources available to promote watermelon year-round.



**BOOTH #300
PEAK OF THE MARKET**

Winnipeg, Manitoba
Peak of the Market's strategically located distribution centers in Winnipeg and Calgary, which enables us to effectively distribute fresh Manitoba-grown vegetables to our customers across Canada and the U.S. Peak of the Market has grown quality produce in Manitoba for 74 years and supplies more than 120 different varieties of Manitoba-grown vegetables.



**BOOTH #130
PRODUCE BUSINESS**

Boca Raton, FL
PRODUCE BUSINESS is where industry leaders turn for information, insight and understanding. Now entering its 31st year, the magazine continues to "Initiate Industry Improvement."



**BOOTH #130
PERISHABLENEWS.COM**

Boca Raton, FL
Visit our booth to sign up for a free subscription to PerishableNews.com, the first news site written exclusively for the entire perishables arena. Be among the growing list of subscribers who get instant, daily or weekly emailed announcements.



**BOOTH #130
PERISHABLE PUNDIT**

Boca Raton, FL
There is nothing quite like Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, winner of the Timothy E. White Award for editorial integrity. Access the Pundit at Perishablepundit.com and see for yourself.



**BOOTH #529
RED SUN FARMS**

Kingsville, ON
From the greenhouses on our very own land in Canada, U.S. and Mexico, Red Sun Farms delivers the fresh produce that your customers expect. Pristine growing conditions mean your customers get the healthy and delicious greenhouse vegetables they're looking for all year long.



**BOOTH #560
SAGE FRUIT COMPANY**

Yakima, WA
Sage Fruit Company is a high-quality grower, packer, shipper of Washington state apples, pears and cherries. We pride ourselves on world-class customer service to meet your needs. We work with you to develop programs that will be effective in your stores, drive sales and bring excitement to your produce departments.



**BOOTH #1110
SILVER CREEK SOFTWARE**

Boise, ID
Silver Creek Software makers of Visual Produce an accounting program targeted for the fresh produce industry, offers unique capabilities to produce wholesalers, distributors, packers, brokers and grower settlements.



**BOOTH #412
STEINBECK COUNTRY PRODUCE**

Spreckels, CA
Welcome to Steinbeck Country Produce — Things Done Right We offer a full line of "Nature's Reward" mixed vegetables year-round and California strawberries in season.



**BOOTH #425
SUNKIST GROWERS, INC.**

Valencia, CA
Like a cherished family recipe handed down through generations, our citrus is nurtured by more than 120 years of experience. At Sunkist, we're deeply committed to tradition, but also to innovation and sustainability, both on the farm and in the marketplace — embracing fresh approaches for citrus lovers.



**BOOTH #750
TOM LANGE COMPANY, INC.**

Springfield, IL
With more than 55 years of servicing the retail, foodservice and wholesale industries in North America, Tom Lange Co. is a logistics provider. Our goal is to provide our customers with the freshest produce and solutions to logistics, marketing and customer satisfaction. With a solid offering of the freshest produce (and shipping to 33 countries across the world), Tom Lange is your Global Produce Network.



**BOOTH #414
TURBANA**

Coral Gables, FL
We are one of the leading premier importers of tropical produce — including bananas, plantains, pineapples and ethnic tropicals. Our mission is to provide healthy tropical foods that transform people's lives.



**BOOTH #144
TWIST-EASE**

Minneapolis, MN
Innovative twist-tie dispensing system designed for use in produce departments to provide customers a no-hassle bag closure. Labor-saving design results in no spilled ties and a positive experience.



**BOOTH #257
WESTMORELAND – TOPLINE FARMS**

Leamington, Ontario
We are a grower/packer/shipper of premium gourmet hothouse produce. We offer U.S. grown cucumbers and TOV, and we will soon offer organic TOV and organic grape tomatoes.



TRANSITION

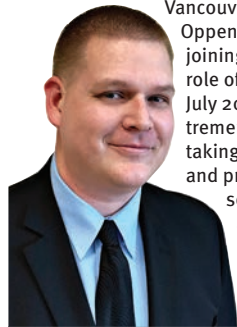
**HOUWELING'S TOMATOES
CAMARILLO, CA**

Houweling's Tomatoes, a greenhouse grower in Camarillo, CA, announces the expansion of its U.S. account management team.

Nic Vallejo is now part of the team, and **Jeremiah Hunsaker** received a promotion.

Reporting to Bill Wilber (Houweling's group vice president of sales), the team's focus is on delivering gold standard service to Houweling's customer base. Vallejo is no stranger to Houweling's, having worked with the company previously as a greenhouse category coordinator for Vancouver, Canada-based The

Oppenheimer Group. Since joining Houweling's in the role of account specialist in July 2014, Hunsaker has shown tremendous progression, taking on added responsibility and providing critical support service to accounts, while also maintaining additional responsibilities as part of the 2015 FPFC Apprentice Class.



TRANSITION

**SEALD SWEET
VERO BEACH, FL**

Seald Sweet International announced a newly appointed position to their management and sales teams, bringing additional talent to the Vero Beach, FL-based corporate headquarters. Industry veteran, **Stu Monaghan** joined the company in the position of sales director, with focus on growth of the company's fresh fruit sales and marketing programs.

Monaghan joined the Seald Sweet team and brings more than 26 years of experience in the produce industry to the company. During his career, he has become well established in Florida and imported citrus programs, with key retail and wholesale accounts. He has also been instrumental in developing Australian citrus programs for more than 17 years.



TRANSITION

**PACTIV FOOD
PACKAGING
LAKE FOREST, IL**

Michelle Allen-Ziegler is appointed to national account manager with Pactiv Food Packaging. She has been in the produce supply chain logistics and food packaging field since 1996. Allen-Ziegler

worked with major growers/shippers and with many top retailers in the U.S. — including Wal-Mart, Kroger, H-E-B, Safeway, Stater Bros. Markets, and Raley's. She will be based out of San Clemente, CA. Allen-Ziegler will be responsible for the Western Agriculture region and Protein Channel. Her new role will be developing new key national accounts as well as managing Pactiv's existing customer base.



**COLUMBINE VINEYARDS
DELANO, CA**

Columbine Vineyards announces **Renee Massey** joins the company's human resources department as the director of human resources. Massey attended California State University, Bakersfield, receiving a bachelor's degree in communications. She has served on the Jim Burke Education Foundation since its inception in 1994 and currently serves as board president. In addition, Massey is the current vice chair of the Golden Empire Gleaners, a local food bank. She is also a graduate of Leadership Bakersfield through the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce.



TRANSITION

TRANSITION

**CHURCH BROTHERS
SALINAS, CA**

Tom Bramers was promoted to sales manager. In his new position, the sales team, commodity managers and appointment loading teams — a total of 20 — now report to Bramers. He has been in the fresh produce industry since 1993 and worked at Church Brothers Farms since 2009.

Prior to joining the company, Bramers worked for Corral De Tierra, CA-based Merrill Farms and Loveland, CO-based River Ranch. He is a graduate of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with a degree in agribusiness.



TRANSITION

**RBEST PRODUCE INC.
PORT WASHINGTON, NY**

James Bonaro is appointed senior vice president with a partnership interest in the company. Bonaro has served RBEST Produce for the past 30 years. He began his career as an assistant buyer on the Hunts Point Produce Market in 1979 and then moved on to his own business for the next few years before joining RBEST in 1985.



TRANSITION

**GERMAINS SEED TECHNOLOGY
GILROY, CA**

Germains Seed Technology announces the appointment of **Ernst van Eeghen** to its North American Horticulture division in Gilroy, CA, in the role of head of sales and marketing, horticulture. Van Eeghen is a marketing, sales, strategic business management and product development professional who brings more than 15 years of experience in the agriculture/food industry. In his role, he will oversee the company's recently expanded horticulture sales and marketing department.



Van Eeghen's career in the agriculture industry includes working directly in the field with growers, processors, distributors/foodservice operators and mass-market retailers that distribute fresh vegetables throughout North America.

**NATIONAL ONION
ASSOCIATION
GREELEY, CO**

The Association announces the retirement of **Monna Canaday** and introduces **Sharla Johnston** as the organization's new administrative assistant/accountant. Canaday began working for the association in February of 1986. In her retirement, she plans to do some volunteer work, get more involved with her church, and maybe find part-time work.



Johnston holds an associate's degree in accounting from Aims Community College. Her experience is comprised of varied accounting capacities in many different ag-related businesses in the Weld County area. Most recently, Johnston was the treasurer for The Town of Severance, Colorado, where she spent the past six years.

TRANSITION



ANNOUNCEMENT



USPB HIRES CHEF TRAVIS HOWARD
The Denver, CO-based United States Potato Board (USPB) announces the hiring of **Travis Howard** as the executive chef of the recently launched Spud Nation Food Truck program. Spud Nation is the first food truck owned by farmers to inspire consumers with a field-to-fork potato adventure. Chef Howard has 18 years of experience in the culinary industry. He most recently served seven years as a Culinary Instructor for Keiser University, Tallahassee, FL. He has also fulfilled chef and executive chef roles for four restaurants in Florida's capital city.

ANNOUNCEMENT



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SHOWCASES NEW POTATO VARIETIES

Eighty-four potato varieties, including fresh market and processing types, were displayed at the Wisconsin Annual Potato Meeting. Project leader Dr. Felix Navarro evaluated these varieties at the Antigo and Hancock, WI, Research Stations. Varieties were tested under contrasting fertilizer rates, irrigation and harvest time. The project was funded by the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association and U.S. Potato Board.

ANNOUNCEMENT



YERICIC LABEL INTRODUCES BACKFLIP!

Yericic Label, New Kensington, PA, launches the BackFlip! Label, which allows you to add full color text and graphics to the back of your label without additional material cost or covering your product. Once customers open the product's clamshell, they are greeted with additional messaging such as recipes, storage tips or delicious finished dish photography. Make shoppers flip when they check out the back of your label!

ANNOUNCEMENT

BRIGHTFARMS CAPITOL GREENHOUSE SUPPLIES AHOLD USA

Located in Culpeper, VA, the 150,000 square-foot BrightFarms Capitol Greenhouse will provide 1MM pounds of tomatoes, basil and baby greens per year exclusively for Ahold USA (Giant, Martins, Peapod), one of the world's largest and most successful food retailers. It will be the most productive and sustainable source of baby greens in VA and DC and the first of its kind in the



greater DC market. It is a cutting-edge, scalable solution to Americans' increasing demand for local and sustainable food and positions BrightFarms as the largest East Coast producer of year-round local baby greens.

ANNOUNCEMENT

A.J. TRUCCO, INC. MARKS BIODYNAMIC KIWIFRUIT SEASON WITH NEW PACKAGING

A.J. Trucco, Inc., Bronx, NY-based, year-round distributor of fresh fruits, dried fruits and nuts, announces the arrival of its Demeter-certified Biodynamic kiwifruit from Italy. Biodynamic kiwifruit is an addition to Trucco's KiwiStar kiwifruit line, which already includes green, gold and organic kiwifruit. This vibrant new 1-pound poly bag highlights key facts about the biodynamic process. Consumers can also learn more about how the product is grown,



how the farms are handled, and the overall positive affect that biodynamic farming has on the environment.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MANN PACKING LAUNCHES NEW ASSORTMENT OF VEGETABLE TRAYS

The Salinas, CA-based company releases a collection of vegetable trays under the Mann's Snacking Favorites brand. The new trays are perfect for consumers looking for healthy snack alternatives: Veggie Ranch – carrots, celery, and broccoli served with ranch dip; Veggies 4 Kidz – carrots, celery, and cheddar crackers served with ranch dip; Cheddar Trail – carrots, celery, cheddar cheese cubes, and trail mix served with ranch dip; Veggie Hummus – carrots, celery, and broccoli served with hummus; Organic Veggies – organic carrots, organic celery, and organic broccoli served with organic ranch dip; Cheddar Pretzel – carrots, celery, broccoli, cheddar cheese cubes, and pretzels served with ranch dip; Honey Turkey Cheddar – carrots, broccoli, cheddar cheese cubes, and honey turkey bites served with ranch dip.



ANNOUNCEMENT

CENTRAL AMERICAN PRODUCE LAUNCHES CAPCO FARMS LABEL MELONS AND HARD SQUASH

Central American Produce of Pompano Beach, FL, gets a new look. Following the success of the CAPCO Farms mango label, the company will now be packing seedless watermelons, honeydews and hard squash in the CAPCO Farms label. With vibrant color and an eye-catching design, the CAPCO Farms image is consistent throughout the product line. The only variable is the color scheme, which changes by item.



ANNOUNCEMENT

BRAGA FRESH ADDS 5 PRODUCTS TO JOSIE'S ORGANICS LINE

Braga Fresh Family Farms, Soledad, CA, adds green and red dandelions, Easter egg radishes, fennel and leeks to its line of premium-quality, USDA-certified organic produce – Josie's Organics. New Josie's Organics products are available immediately. With five new products, the Josie's Organics line expands to 29 varieties of fresh vegetables.



ANNOUNCEMENT

GIUMARRA BRINGS FRENCH FLAVOR TO U.S. WITH ANTARÈS APPLE

Giumarra Wenatchee announces its new apple offering: Antarès, grown in France. Initial trial shipments are taking place.

Antarès is a firm, medium-sized apple developed in a French breeding program. It is a hybrid of the Elstar variety. The variety is naturally disease resistant and boasts a sweet, aromatic taste. Its flesh is juicy and delicately acidic, delivering an excellent flavor balance.



ANNOUNCEMENT

AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO LAUNCHES VIDEO SERIES WITH SESAME STREET

After looking at the state of fresh produce consumption in the U.S., Avocados From Mexico teamed up with Sesame Workshop to encourage healthy diets for all. In a series of educational videos, celebrity Chef Pati Jinich teaches Elmo, Cookie Monster and Rosita the benefits of adding avocados to your diet by highlighting avocados' versatility and containment of good fats, low cholesterol and nearly 20 vitamins. Sesame Street and AFM hope they can spur change in the diets of our youth one avocado at a time. To see the series of videos and learn more about the program, please visit AvoWellnes.org.





Produce Industry Support Needed As Child Nutrition Bill Moves In Congress



BY DR. LORELEI DISOGRA, VICE PRESIDENT NUTRITION AND HEALTH, UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

For many years, the produce industry worked on Capitol Hill and with USDA to ensure that school meals, benefitting more than 30 million children a day, include more fruits and vegetables and are aligned with the Dietary Guidelines. Although landmark child nutrition legislation was passed in 2010 and nutrition standards were updated in 2012 that doubled the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables that must be served every day, our work is not yet finished.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) is once again on Congress' agenda in 2016. Key produce industry goals are to:

- Protect the strong fruit and vegetable standards that were put in place in 2012
- Ensure that every school meal includes at least a half cup of a fruit or a vegetable
- Promote school salad bars as an effective strategy to increase children's fruit and vegetable consumption
- Keep the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) "Fresh"

A strong child nutrition bill is also a priority for the White House, USDA and all of our public health and child nutrition partners.

It is unfortunate that the fruit and vegetable standards in school meals are still under attack by members of the School Nutrition Association, members of Congress, as well as the School Superintendents Association. Furthermore, the processed fruit and vegetable industry is still fighting to change the highly effective Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to "all forms."

Now that Congress started to move forward on the child nutrition bill, it's time for everyone in the produce industry to understand why this legislation is so important to your business and engage.

Children are three markets rolled into one — a primary market, an influence market because they influence their family's purchase decisions, and our future consumers. Also, millions of children eat more than half their daily food intake at school.

Therefore, improving access to fruits and vegetables in the school food environment is critical to helping children develop healthy eating habits that include lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. Since the new school meal rules went into effect in 2012, schools doubled and tripled their produce purchases and children are eating more fruits and vegetables.

To bring you up-to-date on activity in Congress: on January 20, 2016, the Senate Agriculture Committee passed a bi-partisan child nutrition bill. United Fresh supported this bill, which protects fruits and vegetables in school meals and promotes school salad bars. But to our disappointment, the bill made some changes to the FFVP. The Senate AG Committee's CNR bill is expected to go to the Senate floor for a vote and hopefully to pass with unanimous consent.

The House Education and the Workforce Committee (the committee of jurisdiction in the House) is also considering marking up a CNR bill soon. This bill is not expected to be bi-partisan. It is expected to change the FFVP to "all forms." All may call for "flexibilities" around the fruit and vegetable school meal standards. The battle over fruits and vegetables in school meals will continue

to be contentious, and the FFVP, which provides a fresh fruit or vegetable snack to 4 million low-income elementary kids each day, appears to be the most vulnerable.

How can you help?

- Meet with your members of Congress in their local district offices, or in Washington, D.C. and ask for their support. Tell them how you and other produce industry leaders are working successfully to provide schools with the highest quality fresh fruits and vegetables and are committed to solutions and collaboration to ensure school success, which grows business.
- Invite members of Congress to visit successful school districts with you to showcase kids eating "your" fresh fruits and veggies.
- Contact the United Fresh team and offer to help.

Key messages:

- "How can you call it a healthy school meal if it doesn't include at least a half cup of a fruit or a vegetable?"
- "The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends children make half their plate fruits and vegetables at every meal. Shouldn't this start at school lunch?"
- Keep the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program acutally "fresh"!

We know that kids love great-tasting, fresh fruits and vegetables and will eat more when they are provided with produce options every day at school. We all have a passion for produce, and promoting the health of our kids, now is the time to tell Congress.



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4. Promotion objectives.

5. Description of promotion.

6. Promotion results (sales or traffic increases, media attention). What made this program a success?

7. All support materials used in the promotion – such as POP, ads, posters, TV commercials.

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

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Phone: (530) 752-7672 • **Fax:** (530) 754-4326

Email: pstockdale@ucdavis.edu

Website: postharvest.ucdavis.edu/Education/fruitripening

MARCH 3 - 5, 2016

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Conference Management: Southeast Produce Council, Inc., East Ellijay, GA

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Email: info@seproducecouncil.com

Website: seproducecouncil.com

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Phone: (203) 484-8051

Email: atencza@urban-expo.com

Website: internationalrestaurantny.com

MARCH 7 - 9, 2016

MIDWEST FOODSERVICE EXPO 2016

Conference Venue: Wisconsin Center, Milwaukee, WI

Conference Management: Wisconsin Restaurant Association, Madison, WI

Phone: (608) 270-9950 • **Fax:** (608) 270-9960

Email: dfaris@wirerestaurant.org

Website: everythingfoodservice.org

MARCH 8 - 11, 2016

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Conference Management: Imex Management, Charlotte, NC

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

Email: Erich@imexmanagement.com

Website: imexmanagement.com

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Phone: (312) 066-22482 • **Fax:** (312) 067-52326

Email: patricia@hpp.nl • **Website:** worldfloralexpo.com

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Phone: (800) 645-7350 • **Fax:** (503) 682-4455

Email: info@nwfoodserviceshow.com

Website: nwfoodserviceshow.com

MARCH 31 - APRIL 2, 2016

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Conference Venue: JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa, San Antonio, TX

Conference Management: Texas International Produce Association, Mission, TX

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

Email: bret.erickson@texipa.org

Website: texasproduceassociation.com

APRIL 4, 2016

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Conference Venue: Omni Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Montelucia, Scottsdale, AZ

Conference Management: Produce for Better Health Foundation, Hockessin, DE

Phone: (302) 235-2329 • **Fax:** (302) 235-5555

Email: salston@pbhfoundation.org

Website: pbhfoundation.org

APRIL 12 - 14, 2016

CPMA 2016

Conference Venue: BMO Centre, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Conference Management: Canadian Produce Marketing Association, Ottawa, Ontario

Phone: (613) 226-4187 • **Fax:** (613) 226-2984

Email: njeffrey@cpma.ca

Website: cpma.ca

APRIL 20 - 22, 2016

WORLDS OF FLAVOR

Conference Venue: CIA Greystone, Napa Valley, CA

Conference Management: Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, St. Helena, CA

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Email: mark.p.linder@gmail.com

Website: ciaprochef.com

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A 10-Year Transition — Produce Moves From Presumed-Safe To Always-Suspect

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When the Great Spinach Crisis of 2006 broke out, it confused the industry and changed the way the media and regulators thought about fresh produce. Up to that time, produce was mostly seen as an unlikely source of foodborne illness. It was meat, especially used for hamburgers, that was the big issue.

It was not that produce could not carry pathogens — it could, and that fact was well known — but generally, produce deteriorates in such a way that makes it unappealing, and thus not likely to be eaten before it would get consumers sick.

A whole variety of changes in the structure of the produce industry reduced the validity of this argument. Notably various advances in protective films and modified atmosphere packaging made it possible for produce to continue to look appealing, even while deadly pathogens continued to grow.

There were other changes, though, that increased the likelihood of a foodborne illness being traced back to produce. Most pathogens in produce manifest in random small doses. So birds fly over a field and one does its business. But the pathogen stays local. As long as produce was sold in bulk, there was not likely to be a widespread outbreak.

But the development of blends changed the math substantially. Take a small quantity laced with pathogens, blend it with a large amount of clean product and, barring an intervention that effectively kills the pathogen, one winds up with a large amount of contaminated product.

Then, of course, there have been major advances in our ability to detect outbreaks of foodborne illness. If you want to identify one man to hold responsible for the explosion in reported produce-related foodborne illness outbreaks, that man would be Osama bin Laden.

Following the attacks of 9/11, the federal government became deeply concerned about all forms of terrorism, including the use of the food supply to commit terrorist acts. Since the food safety monitoring system in the United States depends heavily on state-level capabilities, and these abilities in 2001 varied wildly, the federal government prioritized making resources available to upgrade the state laboratory infrastructure. Suddenly, the more advanced states that had always been identifying lots of foodborne illnesses, such as Minnesota, were joined by other states that were upgrading their capabilities.

It is almost a decade since the spinach outbreak, and anyone close to the industry knows there has been a dramatic transformation in the attention given to enhancing food safety.

That is not to say there have not been slips. Financial issues still matter significantly. Nobody has really managed to find a way to alter compensation programs and key performance indicators to prioritize food safety, while maintaining a focus on sales and profits.

New priorities, such as sustainability or getting product locally or having things “artisan” have intervened, and companies have

Outbreaks

-  Alfalfa Sprouts - *E.coli*O157
-  Alfalfa Sprouts - *Salmonella* Muenchen
-  Organic Shake and Meal Products - *Salmonella* Virchow
-  Packaged Salads - *Listeria monocytogenes*
-  Cucumbers - *Salmonella* Poona

SOURCE: CDC.GOV

become less focused on food safety. The best way of understanding Wal-Mart’s purchases of southeastern Colorado-based Jensen Farms’ cantaloupes, as opposed to those of larger companies with more sophisticated food safety capabilities, is to see it as prioritizing other things — perhaps cost or local procurement over food safety.

More recently, Chipotle’s travails represent much the same point. Causes are always difficult to discern, but all the changes Chipotle is making were obvious before. They weren’t done because the priority was not the safest way of chopping tomatoes. It was, again, either cost or a desire for a certain artisan quality of “made-in-store” food.

The graphic on this page was taken from the front page of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website on March 1, 2016, and it lists — in its entirety — the outbreaks the CDC sees as most significant as of that moment.

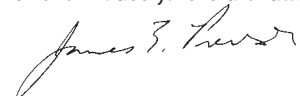
Every single one of these outbreaks is produce-related. So in a decade — although it is fair to say that produce is far safer than it was 10 years ago — we moved from a world where produce was presumed safe by regulators and the media to a world where produce is always suspect.

Changing this is crucial to building consumer confidence, which is crucial if produce consumption is to be increased. It won’t be easy.

Bryan Silbermann is retiring from PMA and our bet is that he will be remembered most for stewarding the creation of the Center for Produce Safety. But funding has to be invested in areas and commodities that don’t have money to support research.

Sprouts are a great example. Forty percent of the key outbreaks on the CDC website highlighted on the chart are sprout-related. Organic shakes and meal products (see chart) are often cottage industries or done in store. Though filled with hope of increasing consumption, when these products are executed poorly, they also are food safety problems waiting to explode.

Progress has been made, but in some ways these outbreaks simply brought to focus the problem for the industry. It is a challenge we can’t afford to ignore.

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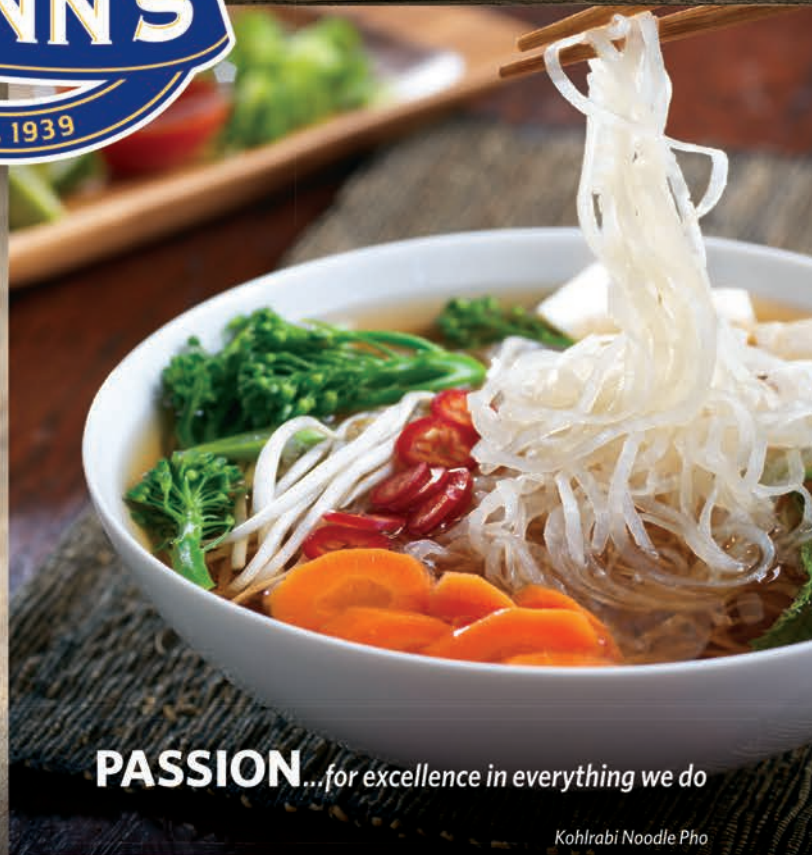


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Produce Consumption And Preparation: Finding Growth In New Meal Occasions

BY ANNE-MARIE ROERINK, PRINCIPAL AT 210 ANALYTICS AND RICK STEIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF FRESH FOODS AT FMI

Produce is big, profitable and growing. In fact, produce sales are growing far ahead of most other departments as well as total edibles and the total store — giving credence to the perimeter outperforming center store. But how do you continue to grow a mature category with a household penetration of 98 percent? One way is finding strategies to move shoppers from lower to higher purchase frequencies by exploring new consumption occasions. These include increased produce snacking, juicing, smoothies and offering convenient solutions through value-added items.

Snacking

For vegetables, the biggest consumption occasion remains dinner, followed by lunch. For fruit, the biggest occasions are snacking and breakfast. But as America is increasingly moving away from three traditional meals to more frequent, smaller meals, produce has an excellent opportunity to grow the number of snack occasions throughout the week. In fact, produce snacking is already ramping up. In 2014, IRI documented robust growth for both snack-size vegetables (with dollar gains of 17-plus percent) and fruit snacks increasing by 9 percent.

Smoothies And Juicing

Other on-the-go produce solutions include juicing and smoothies. Currently, 33 percent of households prepare fruit smoothies at least on occasion, with 13 percent trying their hand at vegetable juicing.

These shares leave ample room for growth, and the industry is responding with convenient ready-to-blend mixes of fresh fruits and vegetables — borrowing a concept from the frozen aisle where these kinds of mixes have been offered for years. Smoothies and juicing are much more popular among families — as an easy way to introduce produce to young children. Organic shoppers are much more likely to prepare fruit and/or vegetable drinks.

Value-Added

Value-added fruit, which includes all items with some level of preparation (such as balled, chopped, chunked, cored, cubed, cut, diced, halved, pitted, shredded, etc.) is growing at a pace far ahead of the total market. In 2014, unprepared fruit gained 3.3 percent — versus 12.5 percent for value-added fruit. It is important to note, however, that value-added fruit makes up a relatively small share of dollars (8.7 percent or \$2.6 billion) and an even smaller share of total pounds sold (4.2 percent or 0.9 billion pounds).

Value-added vegetables (which include chips, chopped, chunk, crowns, cut, hearts, microwave-ready, ready-to-cook, snack pack, sticks and so on) grew 4.5 percent, far ahead of unprepared vegetables, at 0.1 percent. Value-added vegetables make up about one-fifth of dollar (22.3 percent or \$6.4 billion).

In the *Power of Produce* survey, shoppers described their habits regarding value-added vegetable/fruit items. Forty-six percent of shoppers said they purchase value-added produce sometimes or regularly. Shopper groups that are currently more likely to purchase value-added produce are shoppers working full time — particularly those with children, higher-income households, and men. Others said they only purchase value-added produce when in a time crunch (8 percent) or for special occasions (6 percent).

At the same time, about four in 10 shoppers (38 percent) remained on the sidelines for one of two reasons: No. 1 was cost (17 percent). One respondent explained price being a barrier as follows, “I’ve seen the products you talk about, but I’ve also seen the prices. I can usually do it for half as much myself. I prefer spending the money on a good dessert or meat.”

No. 2 was preference to cut or prepare the items themselves (15 percent). The open-ended comments revealed a number of reasons: Several respondents addressed their lack of trust in the quality of the

product. One respondent wrote, “I feel the fruit or vegetables are older. For instance, the pre-sliced mushrooms always look dried out.” Another said, “I occasionally buy the fruit platters for parties and such. But it seems to spoil very quickly.” One last comment in this area was, “I always wonder about the cleanliness! How do I know the employees used good kitchen practices?”

Other shoppers addressed the flavor profiles and preference to their own product choices. “I occasionally check out the bagged salads, but I don’t like the dressing flavors.” Another said, “The vegetable mixes seem handy, but they usually have something in them I don’t like. Since they’re so expensive, I wouldn’t want to toss half of it out.”

With cost being the bigger one of the obstacles among those who do not currently purchase value-added produce, promotions, private-brand offerings or meal BOGOs, there may be alternative ways to introduce these customers to the category.

Continued economic recovery is likely going to place more emphasis on on-the-go solutions, as well as drive the need for increased speed and convenience for the more traditional meal occasions.



Food Marketing Institute is a trade association that advocates on behalf of the food retail industry. FMI's U.S. members operate nearly 40,000 retail food stores and 25,000 pharmacies. Through programs in public affairs, food safety, research, education and industry relations, FMI offers resources and provides valuable benefits to more than 1,225 food retail and wholesale member companies in the United States and around the world.



Source: The Power of Produce 2015 — Shopper research by the Food Marketing Institute, made possible by Yerecic Label and implemented by 210 Analytics.

Dynamic Opportunities To Grow Consumption

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

Produce is an interesting category. It is presented as one department to the consumer but, in fact, is broken up into four very different offers:

1) Traditional Whole Produce

These are items that have always been sold in produce and in varieties that are either traditional or, if new, are not changed in significant ways that consumers recognize. So Red Delicious apples, Iceberg lettuce, baking potatoes, etc., remain constant in shoppers' eyes—even though minor changes in these varieties are always occurring.

2) New Variety Whole Produce

These items look similar to traditional items, but they have different or enhanced flavor profiles or shapes. Examples include everything from Yukon Gold potatoes to Honeycrisp apples to Sun World's Sable Seedless grapes to Driscoll's Victoria blackberry to the Grapery's Witch Fingers grapes.

3) Items that are Unfamiliar to Many Consumers

Even though relatively high-volume items, such as mangos, gain status from great popularity with particular facets of society, the majority of Americans have never purchased a mango. Then, of course, there is a massive range of specialty items available from companies such as Frieda's and Melissa's that the vast majority of Americans have never sampled, much less purchased.

4) Blends, Cuts, Assortments, Flavorings and Packed Items

Each year at The New York Produce Show and Conference, The Joe Nucci Award for Product Innovation in Service of Expanding Consumption of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables is presented at a general session. Winning products have included: Curry & Company's Vidalia Sweet Carrot Program (2011), Ocean Mist Farm's Season & Steam Brussels Sprouts (2012), Kerry Kitchen Gardens Micro

It is possible that the giant opportunity for produce is a more subtle pro-plant-based food movement that could alter consumption trends substantially.

Herbs (2013), Foxy's BroccoLeaf (2014), and Love Beets Smoky-BBQ Shredded Beets (2015). Combine items such as these with other innovations, including from Joe Nucci's company, Mann Packing, where they have released items such as broccoli coleslaw and broccolini, and one sees a whole industry in itself.

Although produce as a category does have 98 percent penetration, as Anne-Marie Roerink and Rick Stein point out in their "Produce Consumption and Preparation" research, if you look at produce through the lens of the four separate offers listed above, the penetration is much lower and thus the opportunity for growth more dynamic.

The snacking, smoothies, juicing and value-added opportunities mentioned by the researchers are certainly real. We would also add that we see a bigger opportunity in culinary changes: The stereotypical American diet is centered around a big chunk of protein, with produce served as side dishes such as a baked potato and green beans. Perhaps some additional produce comes into play if the meal starts off with a salad.

Yet many cultures, such as those in Asia and the Mediterranean, didn't have access to such large servings of protein, so they worked on developing culinary techniques to enhance the taste and flavor of fresh produce. In the end, you have plant-centric dishes where protein was used sparingly as a flavoring—think stir-fry vegetables with a little bit of steak or seafood.

With public health and environmental experts both pushing for more plant-based meals, it is possible that the giant opportunity for produce is not the obvious trends but a more subtle pro-plant-based food movement that could alter consumption

trends substantially.

Roerink and Stein were able to tease out key obstacles to consumers taking this path. One is cost, and just as retailers have to rethink their approach to consumers in light of the four different offers being made simultaneously, the industry needs to rethink its financial offer to consumers. The other issue is quality. Getting consumers to buy fresh-cut items, proprietary varieties, etc., can indeed run into these two obstacles.

Yet, the produce industry is not the only industry to face these issues. California Pizza Kitchen has a diverse menu, and it is in the interest of the restaurant to have consumers try a wide variety of items.

Yet California Pizza Kitchen found a dilemma among consumers who were interested in trying new items but were afraid of wasting money if they didn't like the items. So the chain offers a guarantee: If you try a new item and don't like it, the restaurant will substitute your "old favorite" for free.

As Roerink and Stein point out, one response to consumer concern over price may be to offer more deals (BOGOs, etc.). It also may be that concerns over cost and quality are really expressions of value concerns. Will the fresh-cut fruit be sweet? Will I waste lots of produce because of last-minute plan changes that lead me to eat out?

It would probably make sense for a retailer to do a test in a few stores to see exactly how much produce is returned if a store offers a product replacement guarantee. PMA has funded a number of efforts to enhance produce consumption; perhaps with the help of FMI, both organizations could chip in to help test whether reducing consumer anxiety as to the possible waste of fresh produce would move the needle on consumption.

Chipotle, Bill Marler And Black Swan Events — How Much Money Do We Want To See Spent On Food Safety?



James B. Stewart

JIM PREVOR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

James B. Stewart at *The New York Times* wrote an article that ran under the headline, "Chipotle's New Mantra: Safe Food, Not Just Fresh," and it contained these comments from well-known plaintiff attorney, Bill Marler:

"I've been involved in every food-borne illness outbreak, small and large, since 1993," said Bill Marler, a Seattle-based lawyer who specializes in representing victims of food-borne illnesses and has filed several recent cases against Chipotle. "I can't think of any chain, restaurant or food manufacturer who's ever reported that many outbreaks in just six months. Underlying that has to be a lack of controls."

Marler is smart, knowledgeable and engaged — but, in this case, he is almost certainly wrong.

We have little doubt that in analyzing Chipotle's operation, we would find areas for improvement. Indeed, Chipotle already found these areas on its own. On the production side — just as Natural Selection Foods did in the spinach crisis — Chipotle brought in Mansour Samadpour, chief executive of IEH Laboratories and Consulting Group.

Chipotle is also shifting more food preparation out of the stores into commissaries and utilizing a vaguely identified "sanitary kill step" on lettuce, tomatoes and cilantro. This, however, does not mean Chipotle's controls were any weaker than those of other restau-

rant chains or flawed in some fundamental way.

The problem is that identified food safety outbreaks are extreme outliers, so rare in proportion to the amount of food consumed that there is no way to accurately predict their occurrence. One of the characteristics of so called "black swan events" is that only after the occurrence of such an event can one rationalize it could have been predicted.

Indeed the precise reason why Marler — just one man — could have "been involved in every food-borne illness outbreak, small and large, since 1993" is because, statistically, these outbreaks are virtually nonexistent.

Put into perspective: the chance of winning one of the largest Powerball jackpots was only 1 in 292,201,338 — pretty steep. In contrast, the dietary guidelines call for people to consume roughly 19 servings of food a day. There are more than 322 million Americans. Multiply today's population by 19 servings and one gets about 6,134,226,350 servings of food — and this is per day. Per year, we are talking roughly 2,239,000,000,000 — that is trillions of servings.

If we were to multiply that number by the 23 years that Marler has "been involved in every food-borne illness outbreak, small and large, since 1993," we come up with roughly 51,497,000,000,000 — that is more than

51 trillion servings of food in the USA. One can quibble — the number may be a little high as the population has grown or a little low as people eat more than their recommended serving number, etc.

The key though is that it is an enormous number, and Marler couldn't be involved in all the cases if even a small portion resulted in outbreaks of food-borne illness.

Now this is not to say choices can't be optimized toward one outcome or another. Chipotle is admirable as it is virtually the only large chain that has been willing to pay extra to get product that it believes conforms to its values — others talk the talk but won't pay up.

On the other hand, it is also true that one can only have one top priority at a time. And with its interest in artisanal, local and cooking in store, it is clear Chipotle has not designated food safety as its No. 1 priority.

That sounds shocking, but we could say the same of almost the entire industry. At retail, we know many stores cut fruit in the supermarket. Some do it for economic reasons — wanting an outlet for fruit approaching its useful life.

Some do it because they believe it tastes better or that the theatre of cutting in store will boost sales. There are many reasons.

But nobody who has visited a modern fresh-cut facility can believe any store is cutting fruit in house because it has prioritized food safety. Indeed, it is the opposite. The supermarket chain that is cutting fruit in the store is specifically deciding that something else — money, flavor, theatre, etc. — is more important than safety.

This is less shocking than it seems. When you have a very rare event, the occurrence of which is unpredictable in timetable, the high cost of preventing an incident leads to insufficient investment to prevent a problem.

This is why even in places where tornadoes are common, we still don't build structures to withstand tornadoes. We can, but they are very expensive both in dollars and in design compromises. We just accept that every year roughly 80 people will die in America from tornadoes, with a total of almost 200 people in America dying from other storms.

We specifically do not mandate these steps because of their cost. In contrast, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 3,000 people die annually as a result of foodborne illness — less than a tenth of auto accidents. If we don't do it for autos, are we really going to demand that burrito prices double to have an infinitesimal effect on food safety?

This puts businesses in a very difficult situation. The truth is these are low probability events; they occur unpredictably and therefore Chipotle, or any company, can have five outbreaks this year and then none for 100 years. The numbers are too small to be meaningful.

Which is why a bad year does not indicate a lack of controls, as Marler asserts. Executives don't feel they can talk about the situation realistically with consumers. So, Steve Eells, the founder and co-CEO of Chipotle, makes some unfortunate pronouncements and CNBC uses his comments in this headline: *"Chipotle Execs: There is no E coli in Chipotle Today."*



"I will say though, that we can assure you today that there is no E. coli in Chipotle," Eells said.

This is almost certainly not true, and in any case, certainly nothing he would have any way of knowing to be true.

Escherichia coli, typically abbreviated as *E. coli* is a diverse group of bacteria; some are harmless, and some can lead to kidney failure — but it is not uncommon. It lives in the intestines of humans and animals.

And pathogens are hard to find. It is not uncommon to test a field, get a positive and then retest a field and get no positives. Bob Whitaker, Ph.D., Chief Science & Technology Officer at the Produce Marketing Association, likes to point out that each acre of a spinach field has around 20 million spinach leaves. A typical field test will test 2,000 to 3,000 leaves. If a bird landed on one plant and caused contamination, the odds are not particularly good that bacteria from the bird's feces will be found.

Although consumers may like absolute assurances, humility about our ability to manage food safety, in a consumer's home or a restaurant, would be advisable and Chipotle would be contributing to the public interest by raising consumer literacy on food safety issues, rather than making bold claims it can't substantiate.

Steve Eells also made a pronouncement in the *Chicago Sun-Times* claiming that only Chipotle itself would pay the costs of its new enhanced food safety program:

"Chipotle will not raise prices to cover the cost of new food safety procedures put in place after an E. coli outbreak sickened more than 50 people, the company's founder and CEO said Tuesday during a visit to Seattle.

CEO Steve Eells would not say how much the new testing along its supply chain and safety protocols inside its restaurants are costing the chain of more than 1,900 casual Mexican restaurants. Suppliers also would not be paying for all the new testing requirements started, he said.

'This is a cost that we will bear,' Eells told The Associated Press at the beginning of a day stopping by Seattle restaurants to talk to employees about new food safety rules."

Again, though, this really doesn't make sense. Eells didn't send a letter to shareholders announcing that from now to eternity, they should expect lower returns. These costs are costs of production and will have to be covered by consumers.

Explaining to consumers that there is a cost to food safety would, in fact, be a useful contribution to the public weal.

It is very unclear the degree to which any of Chipotle's efforts will reduce outbreaks of foodborne illness.

If the company has none this year, company executives doubtless will proclaim victory and that this proves the efficacy of its efforts. But it might just prove that Lady Luck decided to visit Chipotle in 2016.



Sevananda Natural Foods Market

The co-op stays relevant by tapping into mainstream health and wellness trend embraced by everyone.

By Carol M. Bareuther, RD



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

The colorful psychedelic farm scene painted on a banner-sized sign at the entrance of the Sevananda Natural Foods Market in Atlanta is reminiscent of a 1970s-era Peter Max painting. True to its origins, this single store, which is one of the largest consumer-owned natural foods co-operatives in the southeastern United States, was founded in 1974.

The retailer's mission is to help members buy natural foods at bulk prices. In the mid-70s, natural foods "fed" a niche demand — primarily by the Flower Power generation. Today, Sevananda stays relevant and successful by tapping into the mainstream health and wellness trend embraced by everyone from Baby Boomers to Millennials. Nowhere is this evident more than in the produce department where organic, locally grown and no-GMO describes the bulk of offerings.

Sevananda is located in the Little Five Points district less than 3 miles east of Atlanta's downtown center. In the 1960s, Little Five Points fell into hard times when a proposed freeway, with a route planned to cut right through the district, drove many residents away. Gentrification started in the early 1970s when a melting pot of Bohemian folks moved in, commenced renovation and restoration, and turned Little Five Points into the East Coast equivalent of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. This is the community in which the Sevananda Natural Foods Market opened and now operates.

Company Culture

Sevananda is owned by more than 4,000 members who live in Atlanta and its surrounding cities. Member-owners purchase an equity share of the business by investing

a total of \$120, which is payable in annual installments of \$20 over six years. This fee entitles them to several discounts such as a quarterly 10 percent off shopping trip and free benefits like entry to store events such as guest speakers and access to a wealth of holistic health educational information.

Non-members are welcome to shop here too. Many do because the co-op has a strict sourcing policy, and customers can be sure of getting foods that are truly organic. In fact, the store employees say the co-op's product sourcing policy is more stringent than national natural food chains such as Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe's.

There is a food-integrity-oriented Food-Watch program, which is led by the in-store education department, to alert staff to ingredient changes as well as legislative changes in food security and safety issues, so the staff can

pass this information to customers.

A few of the signature items known by regular shoppers is local turmeric root and ginger root that the retailer buys from an organic farm. "It's local and organic, and that's what people love," says produce staffer Christopher Smarr. "Customers also come in and ask for GingerVyne juice. It's made locally here in Georgia by a company called GingerVyne. Customers come into the produce department and ask for it by name."

The Sevananda staff makes a huge effort via marketing vehicles such as the store's quarterly newsletter and shelf-level signage identifying items (for example, gluten-free, dairy-free or Fair Trade) to fully disclose information about products.

"Every Saturday and Sunday we'll demo something," says Smarr. "For example, we had the folks from the GingerVyne company in and they sampled for three to four hours. Customers like it because they can put a face to a product and ask questions. It's a family business. This definitely impacts sales. Even when the store does its Wellness Fair in the vitamin section, our demo cooks and chefs will usually set up raw food dishes for sampling in produce, since many of the ingredients come from our department. It's a great way to cross-merchandise."

Inventory Procurement

Sevananda centers around the overarching goal of sourcing high-quality natural foods. Preference is given to local producers, suppliers, growers and further afield to those companies, and even countries, that uphold human rights, non-exploitive business practices and environmental health. It's a business practice that has become more challenging due to an increase in competition.

Fifty-seven employees staff the Sevananda Natural Foods Market. Three work full time in the produce department, including produce manager Jed Davis. He receives orders for fresh fruits and vegetables from Monday through Saturday from two distributors, plus local vendors.

Once produce is received, preventative measures are taken to avoid cross-contamination; for example, keeping each item in its respective boxes on racks in a 20 by 20-square-foot cooler designated for produce.

What's Hot

Sevananda is approximately 10,000-square-foot in size. One tenth (or 1,000-square-foot) on average is devoted to fresh produce; however, this can vary depending on space



Customer service is such that produce employees can tell you what farm local produce comes from (which is also listed on display signage).

used for movable displays, watermelon bins and case stacks.

Produce represents about 10 to 20 percent of the store's total sales. On average, there are 200 to 250 produce SKUs. The Top 5 selling items in this group are avocados, bananas, clamshell salads, apples, grapes/melons. For off-season items, the store buys produce from Swedesboro, NJ-based Albert's Organics and Atlanta-based Royal Food Service.

Fresh-cuts number 15 to 20 total. This includes fruit cut in-house for fruit cups, clamshell-packed salads, loose mushrooms and herbs (such as basil and cilantro). Some 95 percent of sales are from fruits and vegetables that are USDA-Certified organic. Many of these items are also locally grown.

In fact, Sevananda let customers know in December via its Facebook page that carrots and beets from Stockbridge, GA-based Mayflor Farms were available in-store.

Mayflor is a Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) farm. The CNG accreditation, administered by a same-named nonprofit organization based in Bronx, NY, was founded in 2002 as a simpler, cheaper alternative to the USDA's National Organic Program.

Sevananda buys from a number of other nearby Georgia farms such as Georgia's Finest Organic Farms, Crystal Organic Farm and Rise and Shine Organic Farm. The co-op also purchases from Atlanta-headquartered PodPonics, which cultivates a variety of lettuces and other produce items. At Sevananda, 20 percent (or between 15 to 30 SKUs) of produce — depending on the season — is locally-grown.

Signature Sevananda

Customer service is such that the trio of

produce employees can tell you what farm local produce comes from (which is also listed on display signage) and they can share their personal experience from visiting each farm.

In addition to the customer interaction, the Sevananda team finds ways to attract an assortment of shoppers.

"We have local persimmons," says Smarr. "They're an odd fruit. We have a guy who does demos. Kids are really fascinated with persimmons because of their color and uniqueness. They can't tell if they're a tomato or apple. It's a good example of how we reach out to kids."

"We also carry kosher Medjool dates. We have a lot of customers from Israel and they come in to buy these for cooking and baking."

Fresh produce as well as other store offerings are promoted in several ways. There are Manager Specials for members and non-members that include new items that run every other week. Weekly Specials include non-advertised price discounts that run from Wednesday to Tuesday. There are also Member Advantage Deals as well as co-op deals.

Sevananda Natural Foods Market is also part of the National Co-op Grocers Association, and as part of this alliance, the retailer offers bi-monthly fliers and coupon books available for pick up in the store.

Beyond produce, Sevananda features grocery and deli departments. Grocery items include bulk foods ranging from candies to cereals. Almond and peanut butter are ground to order. What you won't find are meat, fish, beer, wines and liquor.

In the deli, there's a vegan bakery where the menu includes cakes, cheesecakes, breads and desserts. There's a large salad bar in the deli as well as a vegetarian and vegan hot bar stocked with in-house prepared dishes, such as scrambled tofu and vegan cheese grits for breakfast.

Sevananda not only prides itself in serving the community but supporting it too. The "Be The Change Program" encourages shoppers to contribute to a local nonprofit either by donating a specific amount of money or rounding the purchase cost up to the nearest dollar.

Twelve nonprofits — selected by the co-op members and showcased each month of the year — benefit from this charitable program. One of these, for example, the Lake Claire Community Land Trust, teaches kids and adults about the environment and growing food through regular shows and workshops. It's a give-back that goes full circle by encouraging the next generation of natural foods and fresh produce shoppers.

pb



Tales *of the* Seasons

OUR MYSTERY SHOPPERS TEST THE LOCAL AND SEASONAL KNOWLEDGE OF PRODUCE EMPLOYEES AND EVALUATE THEIR SHOPPING EXPERIENCES WITH DIFFERENT RETAILERS.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS: BOB JOHNSON, JANEL LEITNER, JODEAN ROBBINS, MICHELE SOTALLARO AND LISA WHITE

Providing *PRODUCE BUSINESS* readers with anecdotal reportage about what goes on in produce departments nationwide is something we take very seriously, and quite frankly, a cover story we never tire of reporting.

Giving the piece a new angle for 2016, we asked our veteran team of journalists to scout out produce departments armed with questions about local and seasonal topics.

We selected produce items that would vary in seasonal availability: sweet onions, grapes, avocados, berries and stone fruit.

We asked reporters to investigate the knowledge and helpfulness of employees, as well as make general observations

about in-store signage and store inventory.

Our aim with these reports is to recreate for readers the one-on-one interaction between our writers and produce personnel inside each retailer.

There is a lot to learn from these reports such as business intelligence that can be applied to training and evaluating employees as well as improving operations.

While we are not identifying the stores, and the employees' names are changed in an effort to protect the innocent, we are not only delving into what retailers want to know, but also what they need to know.



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WEST COAST STORE 1 ARTFULLY LOCAL

I visited an upscale, small, regional chain in a Northern California university town. As I approached the entrance, there was a rare cornucopia of fruits and vegetables on display outside the store.

The oranges, D’Anjou pears and Sumo citrus were next to the displays of mini sweet and Shishito peppers, and the Hass avocados. One-gallon bottles of apple juice were stacked high, next to three different varieties of winter squash. Cauliflower, asparagus, Murcott and Minneola tangerines, yams, and three varieties of berries (black, blue and raspberry) share a wall.

Surprisingly, this bounty is left outside every night, unguarded and unlocked, and no one steals it. This is a university town; almost everyone is associated with the school or moved here because the public schools are as good as it gets, and people just don’t steal from this treasured store.

The produce display, which was large and artfully laid out, was at the entrance of the store. In the dead of winter, the stone fruit pickings were mighty slim. There were apricots that felt soft enough to eat, but did not have an inviting aroma. The nearby nectarines were like a rock.

I approach a young man loading apples onto the display and asked if the apricots, labeled as from Chile, are any good.

“It’s not really the season for stone fruit,” he said candidly. “They are a little less flavorful than in the summer. In late April or early May, we get the local apricots, and they are definitely more flavorful.”

When I asked what the store considered “local,” he said within 100 miles, and pointed to the large sign hanging from the ceiling featuring a map including the numerous agricultural towns that were within that distance of the store.

He assured me the fruit from faraway Chile should be safe to eat, but had no knowledge of whether it would be as nutritious as the late spring harvest from local orchards.

There were four displays of avocados, including the one outside the store, so I asked which was the best fruit.

“The ones on the table are the same as the ones outside,” he said, reducing



my choice to three. “If you get a good one, the organic might be a little better tasting. Avocados aren’t really in season now. It’s not really peak flavor, but it should be pretty good, closer than the apricots or nectarines.”

I headed to the checkout stand, where my wait was short, with my not-quite-aromatic apricots and a small handful of promising organic avocados.

There were plenty of employees around to ask for help and they generally seemed approachable — this store routinely wins awards as among the Top 100 employers in the country.

THE VERDICT

The prices were definitely higher than at the mainstream supermarkets in town, but noticeably lower than at the well-known national upscale organic and natural food chain a couple miles down the road. For the money, customers get a rare consistency in variety, quality and service. The young man’s advice was close to the mark as the apricots proved to be so dry, mealy and flavorless as to be inedible, while the avocados were delicious, despite him saying they were not in season.

WEST COAST STORE 2 TOO BUSY TO HELP

There was no produce outside this

franchise of a slightly upscale national chain, just concrete and shopping carts, but an abundance of floral was just inside the front entrance. First there was a cleverly arranged display of a dozen cut flower varieties, each in its own shiny metal bucket. To the right was the wall of flowers, dozens of flowers, most of them fresh-cut, a few living in soil. All of them looked quite ready for floral party time at the market.

“This looks so cheery,” I hear a young woman say to her companion as I ventured a few steps closer into the produce department.

At the entry to produce was a display of “heirloom” Navel oranges, with the name of the farm on the sign, but nothing about where that farm might be. To the left was a display of Gala apples, and a third of avocados ranging from rock hard to mushy all thrown together in the same pile. All three displays were stacked on waist-high wooden boxes on casters. Tastefully retro.

No one was working in the produce department as I shopped. The checkout lines stretched far back from the registers that Saturday afternoon and were enough to keep the entire staff busy.

First I headed for the apricots. These were from Chile, they looked a little green and they had no aroma. Remembering my recent experience with apricots, I passed. I also decided not to take a flier on the Chilean red grapes, which, though they looked all right through their clamshell, had no aroma.

The berries looked quite a bit more

enticing. I chose some local organic raspberries with a familiar brand and a reasonable price. Next to them were small clamshells of blackberries from Mexico that looked and felt inviting. I took a bite.

When I saw a second, better-looking display of avocados from Mexico, I remembered my good luck at the previous store, and put a small bag in my cart.

Finally someone from the store showed up in the produce department. It was a young woman who was picking up a clamshell salad that spilled onto the floor at least 15 minutes ago — since I've been there that long. She was not wearing sanitary gloves.

The salad was one among a variety of interesting and nutritious offerings that were beside the wraps and microwaveable entrees next to produce. On the other wall facing produce was a nice display of bagged fresh-cut spinach, Spring Mix, herb salad, kale and arugula, which was next to all sorts of value-added, cut vegetables and fruit. Further down this wall was another fine selection of cheese, some sliced and some relatively premium at reasonable prices.

As I finished with my cheese and dry goods, I saw the young lady who cleaned the salad mess off the floor helping an elderly customer find groceries, and even putting a few items into the cart. Did she even have time to wash her hands after the salad caper? It was, as I said, a very busy day at this store.

THE VERDICT

People shop here for the interesting and reasonably priced value-added items that line the walls bordering produce, which seems like an afterthought.

NORTHEAST STORE 1 HALF-HEARTED HELP

I visited an independent co-op grocer on a busy weekday morning, filled with retiree customers. The 850-square-foot department was clean and well lit — though a bit dated. The department advertised Eastern apples, Florida oranges and a small display of locally grown greenhouse basil.

I browsed the department before finally



He looked at me as if I'd just arrived from outer space and replied, "There's nothing local this time of year."

spotting an employee, hidden behind a mobile rack and restocking lettuce. I approached him.

"Do you have any local fruit in stock? I was hoping to buy some local berries or grapes," I asked.

He looked at me as if I'd just arrived from outer space and replied, "There's nothing local this time of year."

"Oh," I persisted. "Well what about just grown in the U.S."

He stepped out from behind the cart and motioned for me to follow.

"The grapes might be from California. Let's see," he said.

I followed him, explaining, "I wanted local because I read online that local means more flavorful."

"That's not necessarily true," he countered. "There are a lot of things that go into getting good produce, mostly seasonality. Here are the grapes."

After perusing the label, he reported, "They're from Peru."

"Oh, Peru!" I winced. "Are they any good? Are they safe?"

"Of course," he assured me. "We won't carry something that isn't safe. I ate some

yesterday. They're good."

I redirected him to the berries and stone fruit, "Are there any U.S. berries or nectarines here?"

He shook his head, informing me, "Not really. It's just not the season. Wait another month or two, and we'll have imported fruit. We have a few packs of berries, but they're not very good. This is just not a good season for those products."

He then promptly turned and retreated to restocking. I followed him, interrupting, "I need some avocados for guacamole. Are there U.S. avocados?"

He pointed me to the avocado display about 5 feet from where he was working, seemingly unwilling to come out from behind the rack again. "They're right there, but I don't think you're going to find any ripe ones," he advised. "They're all from Mexico. They won't be ripe for a few days."

Spying a display of Spanish onions right next to the avocados, I said, "I need onions for the guacamole too. Are these sweet? A friend suggested using sweet onions in guac."

"No," he sighed. "The sweets are Vidalia's. They're in the back of the department."

He then proceeded to explain how the mildness of the sweets and Spanish differ, but I didn't really understand his confusing explanation.

"Can you help me find the sweets?" I asked. He then emerged from his safe-haven and led me to the onions.

"Where are they from?" I queried.

"Peru," he replied.

“Oh, Peru again,” I stated. “I thought all sweet onions were from Georgia.”

“Well, these are the sweets,” he reaffirmed and then retreated back to his work.

THE VERDICT

While the employee started off very friendly, it was obvious he became uncomfortable with my continuous questions. He failed to direct me to potential other fruits that would be considered regional or at least domestic. Whether it was because he was concerned about his restocking or he just ran out of answers remains to be determined. Either way, the experience did not help encourage me as a shopper.



**NORTHEAST
STORE 2
DON'T SHOUT!**

I visited a large regional chain on a busy Sunday afternoon. The store was

filled with families and couples. The 600-square-foot department was bright, clean and well organized with three employees restocking displays. There was no advertisement at all for local or regional produce.

I approached an employee at the wet-rack and asked, “Do you have any local or regional fruit such as berries or

peaches?”

Laughing, he replied, “You’re not going to get anything close at this time of year. Everything is from South America, because it’s summer down there.”

“Oh,” I sighed. “It really comes from that far? Is it safe? I usually only like U.S. produce.”

“Sure, it’s safe,” he said cheerily. “The

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He paused and then shouted across the department, "Hey Ed, are the avocados from Mexico safe?"

South American fruit is good and flavorful, although I'd stay away from the peaches right now. They're not good flavor-wise."

"When will you have better peaches?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," he shrugged. "We don't buy the stuff. We just put out what our distribution center sends us."

"What about grapes?" I asked. "Doesn't California produce grapes?"

"Yes," he replied. "But, not now. The grapes right now are probably from Chile. It will say on the label. Remember, it's summer in South America so they have a good growing climate."

Seemingly satisfied with his attention to me, he returned to his restocking. I eyed a large avocado display, and prodded him again. "What about those avocados," I questioned. "Are they from California?"

"Probably Mexico," he answered.

"Don't they use bad pesticides there?" I asked. "I saw a report on TV that they use stuff not allowed here in the U.S."

He paused and then shouted across the department, "Hey Ed, are the avocados from Mexico safe?"

The guy closer to the avocado display looked up at first a bit stunned, then replied. "Sure, I guess so. We wouldn't carry them if they weren't safe."

The employee I was talking to then added, "There are pretty rigorous import regulations, so all of it should be safe."

THE VERDICT

This employee was open and friendly, and I was encouraged as far as his knowledge and explanation of the South American summer. But, his assurances and explanation of the safety of the product fell a bit short. Yelling about the safety of a product to the other employee could have negatively affected other shoppers — not too professional in my book.



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**NORTHEAST
STORE 3
BRIGHT AND ENERGETIC**

On a late weekday morning, I visited the produce department of a popular chain store. Upon walking into the store, I walked right into the 100-foot by 50-foot large produce department. The area was well lit, open and very bright with neatly displayed produce. I felt like I was walking through a farmers market.

I heard sounds of chopping from behind a fresh fruit counter with an energetic and a visibly happy staff working. I took a few steps toward the grapes and the smell of luscious citrus floated past. What a nice way to begin any shopping experience.

The department was bustling with a few older women and several young mothers with babies suspended from their Bjorn carriers. Signage was easily seen. The origin of the produce was located right beside the price, making it exceptionally easy to spot.

I walked around for a few minutes



taking in this enormous area before I approached an older gentleman who was stocking bananas. I asked him if he could help me with some questions I had. He happily said, "Sure."

I asked if there was any local produce

right now I could buy.

"There is nothing really local right now. When we do have local produce in season, our shoppers know it. They know the town it's from right down to the farm it came from."

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"Our produce is very safe. We inspect every box of produce that comes through our doors."

I asked if the grapes were from California.

"I believe they are from Peru right now."

This led me to the opportunity to ask the gentleman the question, "How safe is produce from other countries?"

"Our produce is very safe. We inspect every box of produce that comes through our doors."

He proceeded to explain how last week, he opened a box of bananas and there were little brown spots all over them. "It was not up to our standards for our produce, so I had to throw them out," he said. "I ended up throwing out three boxes of bananas that day last week. If the produce is not up to our standards, and it is not something I would eat, it is not sold. Our store owners have only the highest standards when it comes to putting produce out for people to buy."

I asked if they had peaches and plums, but he replied they didn't really have much and pointed me to an area with just a handful of peaches and no plums.

Pressing on, I questioned where the sweet onions were located. He pointed me in the direction. I then quizzed what they tasted like. I mentioned how I liked the taste of the Vidalia onion, and I would like something similar to that.

"Right now is not the time for a Vidalia onion, they aren't in season, so you won't find any of those."

I asked if the sweet onion's taste was overpowering, and he said I should be happy with the sweet onions.

THE VERDICT

My overall experience was very good. For the size of the department, it was easily navigable, organized, and every piece of produce looked like it had been carefully placed on display. The produce worker was patient with my questions, appeared happy to help and seemed knowledgeable about his produce.

NORTHEAST STORE 4 LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING

On an early Friday morning, I visited an upscale chain noted for its fresh focus. Upon entering the store, I walked through the small floral area right into the produce department, which spanned about 50 feet by 30 feet. It appeared clean and well kept, yet it was not very bright.

Other shoppers in the department consisted of three middle-aged women and two middle-aged men. A young gentleman was working in produce, appearing very friendly, joking with some shoppers. As I made my way toward him, another young gentleman walked over and asked if he could help me.

I began our conversation by stating this was my first time at the store and I needed sweet onions, but I was not sure

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where they were. I also asked if there was a difference in taste compared to all the other onions.

“There really isn’t much difference with the onions in their taste, a lot of people choose the yellow onion.” He pointed me in the direction of the onion display and said there were a lot I could pick from.

I continued by asking him if they had avocados from California.

“Our avocados are from Mexico right now.”

This led me to ask how safe it was, coming from a different country.

“They are safe ... [and paused a little] as safe as any other produce. If you’re worried about pesticides, I suggest organic. Organic is definitely the safest way to go when it comes to produce. It’s all about what you put in your body and it keeps you healthy. If you’re healthy you have less trips to the doctor. I only buy organic for my family.”

The gentleman explained to me that prices are higher for most organic produce, but it is worth it. “The only downfall with organic is that it doesn’t last long once you get it home, because it hasn’t been treated by anything.”

I commented on how nice everything looked and asked how often they get shipments. He said about every other day they get new produce in and are constantly restocking.

I asked if anything was considered local at this time.

“The only downfall with organic is that it doesn’t last long once you get it home, because it hasn’t been treated by anything.”

“Not much, the grapes are from California, and I believe some onions and maybe some apples too, but most everything else is from Mexico or Latin America. We have a lot of local produce in the summertime because it’s easier to get, and we make sure we display it well — but right now it’s hard to get local produce.”

I made my way over to the grape display to see how the grapes from California looked. The nicely designed sign under the grapes read, “Product of U.S.A.,” alongside their price. I picked up a bag of grapes to look at, and “Product of Chile” was printed on it. Upon looking at all of the other bags of grapes, they all said, “Product of Chile.” Oops.

As I shopped further, I noticed a chalkboard sign below the strawberries labeled, “Product of U.S.A.” There was no specification as to where the strawberries were from, but they were in an attractive display near other berries. Of note, three days after the date of purchase, the strawberries stayed fresh looking and tasted sweet and juicy. Wherever the strawberries were from in the U.S. were good product.

THE VERDICT

The employee approached me again as I was leaving the produce area and asked if I needed anything else and began pointing out other products the store offered. Obviously, he was proud of his store and eager to help customers. Unfortunately there is a resonating theme throughout the produce department consisting of unidentified origin of produce; which then trickles down to the employee misunderstanding and misinterpreting information to the consumer.

MIDWEST STORE 1

THE HALLMARK OF PRODUCE

I visited this national chain, where natural meats, fresh seafood, organic, specialty foods, and healthy meals prepared on site surround the centerpiece of the store, which is the produce department. The store is located in a Midwestern suburb within a strip mall and is smaller than a traditional supermarket at approximately 20,000 square feet.

Walking into the produce department, mid-morning on a weekday, there was a smattering of customers looking through the various produce displays. These were mainly scattered throughout the department, with only a few refrigerated areas around the perimeter. The produce department was very clean, organized and well lit. Displays were full and looked appealing. Standing signs outside the store gave me a heads up on today’s sales, which included blueberries.

When entering this section, it is immediately clear that fruits and vegetables are the hallmark of this retailer’s offerings. Produce was piled high, with the vibrant colors as the focus, as opposed to flashy signage or fancy displays. Signage also was simple, yet clear, with pricing and specials designated above each display.

I noticed a couple produce department employees milling about, and approached one younger gentleman who was working on a kale display in the refrigerated section. I grabbed a sweet onion from a nearby bin.

“Do you know if this onion is a locally

grown product?" I asked.

He answered that he wasn't sure and would go ask someone. He came back a couple minutes later to inform me that the store's signage also included the produce's origin, and pointed to a nearby sign to clarify. I then noticed in smaller lettering at the corner of the signs different countries, such as Chile, USA and Mexico.

I asked if the store carried any local product from the immediate region, and he went to check with his superior again, and he returned to say they didn't have that specific information available for their products.

While he was gone, I grabbed a container of blueberries, which the packaging said originated from Chile. I asked the employee if he thought product from Chile was safe, and he said it definitely was and it was not unusual to source products from other countries during the off season. I inquired whether blueberries were in season now, and he said he didn't think so.

THE VERDICT

I thought it a bit strange that, with the emphasis on locally-grown and sourced product, a store like this that focuses on natural, organic, specialty items with minimal ingredients would not take advantage of the opportunities of local products. I also was not overly impressed with the produce employee's knowledge of the store's fruits and vegetables. The fact that he didn't know the products' origins were already listed on the signs or that there were no products designated as local in the department demonstrated his training was less than adequate in terms of product knowledge.

MIDWEST STORE 2

THE WIZARD OF PRODUCE

I popped into this local Midwestern chain that is situated in a strip mall on a busy thoroughfare in a suburban bedroom community. It is one of the smaller sites that this store has, totaling approximately 15,000 square feet. As such, the produce department is not as extensive as at the chain's other stores, but still includes a

I also was not overly impressed with the produce employee's knowledge of the store's fruits and vegetables.

good mix of conventional and organic produce, in addition to value-added fruit

and vegetable items.

As I entered the store, the produce department was in the front and on the left side of the store and adjacent to both the deli and bakery. In looking at the overall space, all three departments were laid out as one single department, as there were no noticeable barriers, signage or merchandising distinguishing the three areas.

Although there were not as many free-standing displays as in the chain's larger



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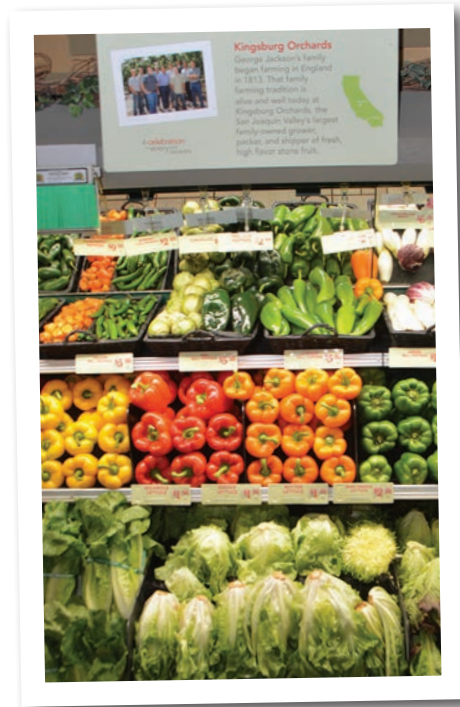
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stores, the fruit in the front was plentiful and seemed to take up more space than the vegetables in the back. There also was a small cooler section with packaged product, such as salads, pre-cut fruit and vegetables and platters.

In looking around, the produce department was well organized, abundantly stocked with clear signage and decent lighting. There were only a couple shoppers milling about, even though it was lunchtime on a weekday.

The only store employee I noticed was by the deli case, arranging some prepackaged salads and sandwiches. I approached her and said I was looking for local produce, and asked if she knew if the nectarines were local. She answered that she didn't work with the produce department, but would ask someone.

She walked to a nearby phone and tried to contact a produce department employee. When she was unsuccessful, she said she would find someone from



the department to ask.

She disappeared for a couple of minutes, then came back and said that the nectarines were from Chile and New Zealand. I asked if there were any locally-grown products in the department, and she said there were not, that it was the off season.

I then inquired if she knew whether the avocados and grapes were currently in season, and she said she did not and didn't offer to find out for me. She then walked away to continue cleaning and organizing the standalone deli case, which was oddly placed in the middle of the produce department.

THE VERDICT

I was a bit disappointed at the service I received at this well-known and popular supermarket chain. Rather than find me an educated produce department staff member, the woman working the deli department instead relayed information from someone unseen. She also didn't go out of her way to answer my other questions regarding what fruits were local, provide insight on alternatives or direct me to products that were more in line with what I was looking for. I would have been better served speaking directly with produce department personnel, but no one was made available to me.



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**SOUTHEAST
STORE 1
AHOY, MATEY!**

After finding a parking space in this small, crowded lot, I was pleasantly surprised to enter the store and find ample room to shop. Typically this retailer is all abuzz as people frantically squeeze through aisles and clear the shelves of quirky-named private label products that have garnered a cult following.

Orchids and colorful tulips in simplistic yet versatile pots lead the way into the small produce department. Organic avocados from Mexico were promoted front-and-center along with California stem-and-leaf Mandarins. I looked around to find the nearest associate, but surprisingly on a Wednesday at 2 p.m., there were no “crew” members in sight.

As I wander a little longer, I took stock

I also wish the store’s buyers would incorporate more local items. We are in a state that can accommodate it, so it’s feasible.

of the stone fruit — only Yellow Punnet (Honey Glaze) nectarines from Chile could be found. I spotted a crew member behind the demo station situated in the back of the produce department.

“Excuse me, are the nectarines the only stone fruit you have right now?” I asked.

“Yes, I believe so,” said the young female staffer.

“When will more be coming in, like peaches and plums?”

“I think that’s more of a summertime item — closer to June or July,” she said.

Before I could ask another question, a customer interrupted to grab a sample of the organic roasted vegetable pizza being demonstrated.

I took my basket filled with two organic avocados for 99 cents each, a 3-pound clamshell of Mandarins for \$3.99, and 1-pound of netted nectarines for \$3.99 and surveyed the décor and signage. Every item was labeled clearly with hand-written interesting information in addition to the name and price of an item. Most labels mentioned: how the fruit or vegetable could be used in a recipe; the item’s flavor profile; and what to pair with the item via beverages, desserts or meals.

There was even a huge hand-drawn chart called the Apple Meter Chart, which rated the sweetness or tartness of each apple variety on a vertical axis and how best to use each variety (fresh, salad, cooking or baking) on a horizontal axis.

As I approached the checkout counter, I asked the cashier if the store ever carried any produce from local farms. She replied a simple no as she quickly set up one paper bag inside another.

Unsatisfied with that answer, once I got into the car, I called the same store and asked the crew member who answered the phone the same question. He had a more specific answer.

“Yes, we do carry regional items from time to time, but those decisions are made by our buyers at our home office. Typically we’ll get cucumbers, tomatoes and mangos from local South Florida vendors.”

THE VERDICT

I typically love this retailer, but don’t usually go to this location, which is in an affluent area and has a more mature-aged clientele. I was surprised with the lack of employees on the sales floor and the basic responses I received from those people on the floor. The gentleman on the phone was very accommodating and willing to thoroughly answer my questions. I also wish the store’s buyers would incorporate more local items. We are in a state that can accommodate it, so it’s feasible. I still appreciate the product selection and prices, so I will continue to shop at my regular location, which also has helpful and friendly crew members.

SOUTHEAST STORE 2 TOP-SHELF SHOPPING

I passed a gentleman sipping a fresh espresso outside this retailer known for accommodating a bougie clientele. As the doors slid open, a gust of prepared foods wafted through the store.

A table was positioned to the right of the entrance. It displayed an array of news items, cooking magazines, fliers, and local periodicals. One brochure offered the retailer's guide to wine and food pairings. The monthly catalog showcased a spread of meals for the Super Bowl, weekly/daily sale items, and biographical-style information about ingredients.

There was a great flier promoting a meal deal. It boasted ingredients from every department of the store where you could essentially taste "food from around the world in four meals." For \$20, all the ingredients make one big meal to feed a family of four. You can follow the specified recipe for that week's meal, or the retailer can provide additional suggestions for



As much as I love the aesthetic of shopping in this store and the classical music, the prices are pricey.

\$4.99 each. Calavo Hass avocados from Mexico were 2 for \$3. Red plums from Chile were \$3.99 a pound.

I did find some tropical items such as coconuts from the Dominican Republic selling for \$2.99 each and papayas from Brazil were \$3.99 each.

An employee passed me on the way to unboxing product and asked if I was finding everything okay.

"I see from the signage that there is a lot of produce from Chile, Peru, Mexico ... does the store have a section dedicated to local or are items mixed in?" I asked.

"Local produce is typically mixed in, but we get very few items on a regular basis," said the employee.

"Okay, and how about stone fruit? I see you have some plums over there, but when is the best time for stone fruit?"

"In the summer we have more stone fruit, and it tastes much better than as well," said the employee.

The black plums were huge and delicious-looking, so I picked up two for a total of \$3.39.

THE VERDICT

I was shocked that there was so much info and sales collateral upon entering the store. I loved that this upscale retailer offered discounted items and proudly promoted them. I always appreciate the dynamic and organized displays of this retailer. Produce is always neatly merchandised and clean.

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ingredient usage.

There was also a sign explaining that due to inclement weather, western-grown vegetables were low in stock. The list consisted of spinach, lettuce, broccoli, celery, cauliflower, berries, and herbs. I asked the nearest associate if I had missed a news event, or if the sign referred to the drought in California?

"It may be referring to the drought or the winter weather up North and in the Midwest. I think we had shipment delays," the employee said uncertainly.

The wet rack and shelves were still beautifully stocked and made great use of the space so as not to appear overly cluttered. The lighting reminded me of a romantic restaurant or museum where soft lighting shines on each individual display.

As much as I love the aesthetic of shopping in this store and the classical music, the prices are pricey. The Interruption Fair Trade organic blueberries were \$3.99 for a 6-ounce clamshell. Strawberries from Tom Lange's Seven Seas Berry Sales and Rincon Fresh were \$5.99 for each 16-ounce clamshell. Driscoll's blackberries in a 12-ounce clamshell were

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New-Age brand Marketing

Marketers from across the produce industry discuss how to strategically use innovative formats to enhance traditional exposure platforms.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD

Today, it's all about marketing to one — reaching a targeted consumer with messaging tailored to that person's interests and needs. New-age brand marketing enables suppliers to do more with less using carefully crafted and integrated marketing campaigns.

SOCIAL MEDIA SPREADS THE WORD

Social media outreach continues to be the must-do strategy for many. Using Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, and sometimes the newer Snapchat, Tumblr, and What's App as the new "contact us," companies talk to one customer at a time with just one posting to all.

"Dr. Frieda Rapoport Caplan, our company founder and my mother, was one of the first in our industry to put company contact information on fresh produce labels so shoppers could reach out with questions and get recipes," says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive, Frieda's Specialty Produce, Los Alamitos, CA. "We continue that tradition of being helpful to

our shoppers via social media, sharing information, recipes and ideas."

Melinda Goodman, managing partner, Full Tilt Marketing, Milwaukee, notes, "Each social media platform has a different audience and a different use, sometimes a different time of day or reason for use. Facebook continues to be the most popular. But a picture is worth a thousand words and quality recipe and image

content on Pinterest provides for a high degree of social sharing. And the rising social darling is the image-driven Instagram."

"Our consumers use Facebook most, then Twitter for news and Pinterest for recipe links," says Matthew Cornwell, agricultural marketing specialist, South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA), Columbia. "We tag our posts with #certifiedsc and monitor what people are



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The Idaho Potato Commission’s social media activity builds awareness, brand equity, and trust, which grew out of the need for transparency when responding to issues, according to Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice. One of the Commission’s priorities is to link social media posts back to its website so customers can be further educated about Idaho potatoes, according to Elyse Perkins, marketing assistant.

saying about us.”

“We balance our sharing on Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest by spanning the spectrum from simple to sophisticated,” says Kathy Stephenson, marketing communications director, Pear Bureau Northwest, Milwaukie, OR. “Our content connects with food trends and delivers the best value for our crop. For instance, the hot summer left us with an abundance of snack-sized pears, so we used our social media channels to highlight the health benefits and satisfaction of snacking on pears.”

“We run a social media and traditional campaign every spring during artichoke season to generate awareness, prompt in-store purchases, and drive consumers to our website,” explains Diana McClean, director of marketing, Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA. “We invite them to join our Ocean Mist Farms Artichoke Club, where they receive Arti-Alerts and a monthly newsletter that encourages further engagement with Ocean Mist Farms artichokes.”

“Social media builds awareness, brand equity, and trust. We grew our social media presence out of the need for transparency when responding to issues,” says Don Odiorne, vice president, foodservice, Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Eagle, ID. Odiorne manages IPC’s Doctor Potato blog, a popular vehicle for answering consumer questions; IPC then posts tags and links on all social media outlets, and those are reposted by consumers.

“One of our priorities is to link social media posts back to our website so we can educate consumers on Idaho potatoes, says Elyse Perkins, marketing assistant at the IPC.

Companies often overlook YouTube as a valuable social media tool. “It is one of the most critical platforms, because it shows consumers how to do things,” says Lisa Hansen, director, business development, McDill Associates,

“We balance our sharing on Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest by spanning the spectrum from simple to sophisticated. Our content connects with food trends and delivers the best value for our crop.”

— Kathy Stephenson, Pear Bureau Northwest

Soquel, CA.

Companies like Chelan Fresh, Chelan, WA, also use videos to build farmer-consumer connections and share farmer stories.

“As social media continues to change and evolve, so does the interaction between brands and consumers,” notes Joan Wickham, manager, advertising and public relations, Sunkist Growers, Valencia, CA. “Highly visual posts resonate best with our fans, so we plan and design our social creative accordingly, but also with ROI in mind. By providing recipe ideas, health benefits, usage tips and flavor profiles on social media, we believe consumers are more likely to purchase our varieties when they see them in store.”

MESSAGE MULTIPLIERS RAMP UP THE VOLUME

Marketing programs directed toward key influencers take advantage of the power of those influencers to spread messaging to their followers. “It is really about shareable content,” says Full Tilt’s Goodman. “High quality images and graphics are the most commonly liked and shared, along with recipe photos, quotes, and

‘hacks’ [hidden features] that help consumers learn about products and brands.”

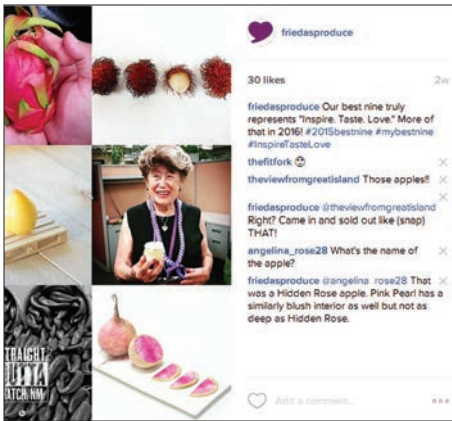
“When we introduced our new cauliflower crumbles, we sent information and recipes to various influencers in the health, fitness, Paleo Diet, recipe makeover, and other arenas,” explains Jennifer Fancher, marketing director, Green Giant Fresh, Salinas, CA. “Others picked up on the product through those influencers and the word spread beyond our expectations.”

“We’ve had major success building trust with dozens of food bloggers who are a trusted resource for millions of Americans,” says IPC’s Odiorne. “We send them information, invite them to the annual potato harvest, sponsor regional events, and add their potato recipes to our website. In turn, they post our Idaho® Potato Heart Badge on their website, share our information with their followers, and communicate back to us about what their audience says.”

Supermarket dietitians (RDs) offer another avenue for promotion. Goodman notes, “they are the trusted advisors for consumers, helping them make educated decisions about new products, nutrition, cooking techniques, recipes and more.”

“Our clients provide tools, toolkits and other assets for supermarket RDs to repurpose for their shoppers,” says Hansen of McDill. “Materials have to be strategic and can’t be over-the-top branded. It’s important to respect that dietitians promote generically, and it’s okay that they’re marketing the whole category.”

Chelan Fresh created a dietitian toolkit that “was the first of its kind in the tree fruit industry. It includes scientific research summaries, ideas for consumer education, kids’ programs, recipes created by other RDs, and much more,” says Kathryn Grandy, marketing manager, Chelan, WA-based Chelan Fresh



Frieda's engages with customers via most social media platforms — including Instagram.

Marketing. “We also host and participate in industry organizations, trade shows, and Twitter parties, for example, to increase awareness of our resources and products.”

GUERRILLA TACTICS DELIVER MORE FOR THE MONEY

Guerrilla marketing campaigns operate in public places such as festivals and sporting events, increasing awareness, building brand recognition, and offering sponsors the opportunity for face-to-face conversations with consumers. As a perk to sponsors, organizers typically name them in on-site and pre- and post-event marketing and publicity.

The National Mango Board (NMB) recently paired mangos with the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL). Throughout the women's soccer season, NMB partnered with teams and athletes for player appearances, giveaways, and social media engagement, with the goal of increasing mango awareness. “Our events promote sampling among our target audience of families and kids,” says Jami Kinney, social media marketing specialist, National Mango Board, Orlando, FL.

MARKETING FOR A CAUSE

Marketing for a cause is a win-win for sponsors and cause. The 2015 Growing Forward campaign brought together an industry team of sponsors to donate and coordinate delivery logistics for 1 million pounds of fresh produce to Feeding America's member food banks. An earlier *Cloudy With A Chance of Meatballs 2* campaign partnered industry members with Sony Pictures and Feeding America.

“These campaigns featured messaging on-pack, on food trucks, at food bank events, and at movie premiere events. Sony promoted our produce partners at no cost,” explains Hansen of McDill Associates. “Nobody has

the resources to make a big splash alone. By bringing produce leaders together and pooling resources, we can make an impact with consumers and against hunger.”

“SCDA's Palmetto Series, a unique promotion with sports teams at Clemson University and University of South Carolina, supports a relief effort to help growers who were hard hit by the 2015 flooding in our state,” says Cornwell from the SCDA. “We use this school rivalry to promote our farming community through social media, grocery displays with

the two team mascots, and a SCDA display at each game with giveaways and materials from retailers. We also feature Farmers of the Month, many of whom played a sport at one of the two schools. Sports fans who may not agree about what's on the field can agree with what's grown in our fields.”

The Big Idaho Potato Truck Tour selects charity partners who help promote the truck tour and in turn benefit from publicity, food donations, and/or funds. Partners in 2016 include 4-H clubs and food banks in Boise, ID.

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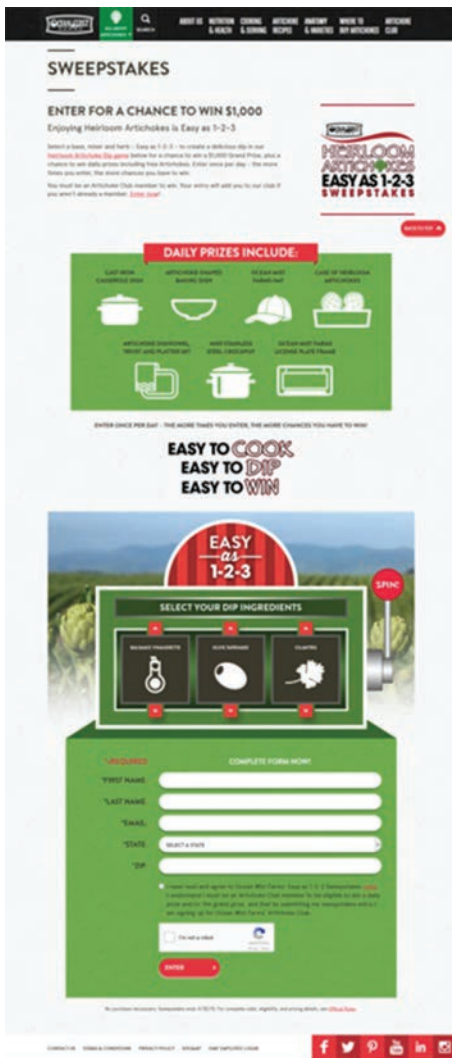
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Ocean Mist runs a traditional social media campaign every spring during artichoke season to generate awareness, prompt in-store purchases, and drive consumers to its website.

INDUSTRY COALITIONS AND CAMPAIGNS THINK BIG

The Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association (PMA) and Hockessin, DE-based Produce for Better Health (PBH) Foundation each brings together industry partners to support nationwide campaigns. PMA, Partnership for a Healthier America, and Sesame Workshop joined forces in the “Eat Brighter!” campaign to encourage young children to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. Industry supporters, including suppliers, distributors, and retailers, are invited to include Sesame Street character images in their marketing and packaging.

PBH’s Fruits and Veggies — More Matters campaign, introduced in 2007, encourages industry partners to engage through social and traditional media, packaging, and retail advertising and promotions to promote increased consumption of fruits and vegetables.

TARGETED MESSAGES MAXIMIZE IMPACT

“Social media advertising may be less expensive than traditional advertising, but developing and promoting content through sponsored posts still comes with a cost,” explains Goodman of Full Tilt. “The beauty of social media advertising is the ability to reach a specific target. Everything from gender and location to specific interests can be a good fit for your brand message and products.”

“Our website houses our content; we use social media to bring audiences back to the website for information and resources,” explains Stephenson of Pear Bureau Northwest. “Social media helps us focus our strongest messages to the right audience — creating a

conversation that is relevant to each consumer on the platform that he or she likes best.”

Ethnic groups can differ in their use of social media. “Social media plays a significant role in reaching the consumer we call the Nueva Latina,” explains Stephanie Bazan, director, Hispanic marketing, Avocados from Mexico, Irving, TX. “The Nueva Latina uses her smartphone not only for email, texting, and picture messaging but also to access her social networks and family every day. This is why a mobile-marketing plan is essential for this target.”

California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, ties every campaign to its website, where a software program captures all traffic, preferences, shopping behavior, and other infor-



SHOWCASE herbs & specialties

mation from visitors. The company monitors success by creating a new hashtag for each campaign and then following posts that use the hashtag.

“Everything is tied to our website, which has a software program enabling us to capture all traffic, preferences, and shopping behavior,” says Cindy Jewell, media contact, California Giant. “We support each of our promotions with a visual and message adapted for each platform. Consumers who provide us with demographic information can access recipes and promotional offerings. We also do a lot of email marketing through our blog, free email offers, and sweepstakes. Consumers opt to provide us with personal information as they become more comfortable with us, and we use

the information to better target their preferences. We provide incentives for buying our products, and ultimately drive more traffic to the produce department.”

Tracking of traditional media works too. Pear Bureau Northwest monitors the media for stories on pears and shares with consumers through social media. It then notifies retailers so that they can stock up on pears.

FOCUS ON FUNDAMENTALS FIRST

While new-age marketing generates excitement in-house, in-store, and with consumers, tried-and-true fundamentals need to be in place to support any marketing effort. “Wait to invest in social media until everything is in place — supply chain, pack-

aging, B-2-B programs, infrastructure,” advises Hansen of McDill Associates. “Social media is cool, but first support your product on the shelf.”

“Don’t go straight to social or just do a charitable campaign,” advises Dan’l Mackey Almy, president and chief executive, DMA Solutions, Irving, TX. “Companies should have a solid digital presence, starting with a website that continues to attract repeat and new visitors. To realize ROI, companies can and should access free analytics to tell them more about who is visiting and what they are looking for. Then ask: What is the path to purchase for our customers; What is the value of an impression; Where can we afford to be present with marketing?” **pb**

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THE TOP **7** WAYS WHOLESALERS SERVE RETAILERS



PHOTO COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS PRODUCE

In order to accommodate today's retailers, wholesalers are becoming chameleons.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

PHOTO COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS PRODUCE



In the wake of recent acquisitions and consolidations, along with efficiencies brought on by distribution and transport technologies, large chains have even more buying power to order directly from grower-shippers.

So why have North America's produce wholesalers not only survived but thrived when the forces to eliminate the middlemen grew stronger? To survive, wholesalers have not only diversified with a broader range of products and services, they became smarter and more nimble in their ability to adapt to today's ever-changing environment.

Testament to this is a thriving U.S. fresh produce wholesale industry that generates an annual revenue of \$80 billion, according to a January 11, 2016-released report from First Research, a division of Hoover's Inc., located in Austin, TX.

What's more, gross margins for fresh produce wholesalers rose from 17.9 percent

in 1997 to 21.1 percent in 2007, based on the September 2015-released report, *Produce Industry Procurement: Changing Preferences and Practices*, from Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management. It is these earnings that paid for the increased number of value-added services wholesalers today offer to their retail customers, according to the Cornell authors.

"The landscape is ever-changing, and our main focus is on flexibility; providing an ongoing service of efficient solutions," says Julian Sarraino, vice president of sales and marketing for Fresh Taste, located on the Ontario Food Terminal, in Toronto, ON. "The efficiency has to translate all the way through the supply chain. Providing additional benefits in every facet of the product can play an important role in what we provide."

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A LEGACY OF SERVICE

but to be successful nowadays you need to be full-service, according to Jonathan Steffy, director of sales and retail services for Four Seasons Produce, Inc., in Ephrata, PA. “This means everything from covering shorts to logistics and merchandising.”

1 BRAIN TRUST: KNOWLEDGE & RELATIONSHIPS

Gone are the days when retail buyers walked the market daily for their pick of produce. Today, purchasing means orders placed by phone, email, website or other electronic media. Yet, the need remains for tangible information about the timing, quality and pricing of crops.

“Market expertise is what we bring to the table,” says Christian Comito, president and chief executive of Capital City Fruit, in Norwalk, IA. “Suppliers don’t have staff in most major markets — we do. In addition, we keep customers abreast of consumer trends like organic and locally-grown and support them in meeting this demand.”

Decades-old relationships forged over time enables wholesalers to amass a wealth of information that can be passed on to customers.

“We established a history of trustworthiness and mutual respect with many of the largest and best suppliers in all growing areas. In turn, these growers provide us with up-to-the-minute information on weather, crops and what, where and when the new deals are coming in,” explains Tommy Piazza, potato salesman and third-generation wholesaler for Community Suffolk, Inc., located on the Boston Terminal Market in Everett, MA. “Retailers, on the other hand, tend to not be as familiar with all the different growing areas. There’s a loss of personality with national buying groups and that can negatively affect produce consistency and quality.”

Local knowledge is something wholesalers can often better supply to retailers than grower-shippers — especially if the latter is 3,000 miles away from the market.

“We are well positioned to more thoroughly understand our customer’s demographics and product preferences than someone working at a shipping point,” says John Vena, owner of John Vena, Inc., based on the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market in Philadelphia.

Many wholesalers give retail customers the benefits of walking the market or fields in a virtual manner. For Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., headquartered in Philadelphia, this means sharing real-time photos with retailers.

Four Seasons Produce accomplishes this via its market news, which is emailed weekly.



Four Seasons works with independent and chain retailers to expand inventory and merchandise product according to the consumer demographics.

“This provides specific information on threats and opportunities for conventional and organic produce. For example, if mini sweet peppers are coming on strong, we’ll say it’s a great time to promote,” says Steffy.

Wholesalers serve as a knowledge resource beyond the supply chain.

“Our retail-training guides help teach trimming and other handling techniques to increase shelf life and decrease shrink,” says Jin Ju Wilder, director of corporate strategy for Valley Fruit & Produce Co., based on the Los Angeles Wholesale Produce Market in Los Angeles.

2 COVERING ‘SHORTS’

Supplying ‘shorts’ (or fill-in orders) is a primary role wholesalers fill for large retailers.

“We use wholesalers to replace refusals, or if we have a truck that is unable to make a shipment,” says Brian Coates, senior produce buyer at Meijer, a Grand Rapids, MI-based retailer that operates more than 200 supercenters and grocery stores in six Midwest states.

Jeff Fairchild, produce director at New Seasons Markets, an 18-store chain based in Portland, OR, purchases 75 percent of his produce directly from suppliers. However, Fairchild utilizes a wholesaler for certain items as well as a distribution center. “We do need to horse trade with them when we’re short. That’s what they get out of the relationship.”

Inventory coverage is a steady business for wholesalers. “We do business with multiple customers like chain stores, independents and

foodservice in 11 states,” says Charles Gallagher Sr., chairman of the board of United Fruit & Produce, located on the St. Louis Produce Market, in St. Louis, MO. “Someone is always going to be short of produce. We have a large warehouse with \$2 million-worth of inventory daily and the ability to get it to a customer in less than 24 hours. When retailers need something, they need it now, not three days from now from California. It may be a little more expensive, but it gets the job done. After all, if it’s not on the shelf, it’s a lost sale and maybe a lost customer.”

Good wholesale buyers anticipate this constant demand for fill-in orders.

“There’s always four to five extra loads on hand,” explains Nate Stone, general manager and chief operations officer at Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Inc., on the Detroit Produce Terminal in Detroit. “That’s how we’re always able to say ‘yes’ when a customer calls. If they don’t call, we call them. That’s how we stay so far ahead of the competition.”

National chains do rely on wholesalers as a primary supplier for certain items. “A good example is bitter melon,” says Valley Fruit & Produce’s Wilder. “This is an item that’s usually needed in a small volume and an item where growers are fragmented. It’s a value-add for them if we can supply. On our side, we have many retailers that want this item, so it’s easy for us to source and buy in volume.”

3 SUPPLY & SOURCING

Most independent supermarkets and small regional chains rely on wholesalers



“We established a history of trustworthiness and mutual respect with many of the largest and best suppliers in all growing areas. In turn, these growers provide us with up-to-the-minute information on weather, crops and what, where and when the new deals are coming in,” explains Tommy Piazza, potato salesman and third-generation wholesaler for Community Suffolk.

as a primary produce supply source.

“The most important service we offer to retailers is supply. This is our core business. Everything else we do supports this function,” says Matthew D’Arrigo, vice president of procurement at D’Arrigo Brothers Company of New York, on the Hunts Point Produce Market, in Bronx, NY.

Independent grocers are on the rise in some areas. “In the past six months, with the demise of A&P, there’s been an opportunity and we’ve seen a lot more independent retailers supplying these neighborhoods,” says Four Seasons’ Steffy.

Consolidations have also left empty units in the wake that have been snapped up by independent retailers. “We help the little guy compete like a big guy by making a full gambit of produce for any demographic available to them at a competitive price,” says Mike Maxwell, president of Procacci. The independents do well this way. After consolidation, larger chains usually have higher mark-ups.”

Small and prospering regional chains look to wholesalers for produce procurement and supply chain management. “Consolidation didn’t happen here in the Midwest to the extent it did on the Coasts,” says Capital City Fruit’s Comito. “As a result, the traditional regional chains are still growing. They have their minds on new markets, real estate, staffing, remodeling and revamping layouts as well as adding servings like banking. They don’t want to have to worry about perishable produce, they just want to make sure it’s always there — that’s where we come in.”

Sourcing is a much bigger job than in the

past. “There were 40 items to sell back in the 1950s, and you were in the big leagues with 10 truckloads of lettuce,” recalls United Fruit & Produce’s Gallagher. “Now, you’re lucky to get a call for one whole truck of lettuce. Mixed loads are the norm since retailers carry more than 400 SKUs, including exotics like mangoes and avocados.”

The most popular retail service John Vena currently offers is pre-conditioning fruit, particularly Hass avocados, mangos and plantains. “We are able to offer these products to

order for our customers. In addition, we offer a line of bulk-packed specialties, such as chilies, ginger and garlic in small cartons based on a retailer’s need,” says Vena.

Large wholesalers provide buying power to small retailers. “We can leverage our size to procure lower-volume items like herbs and microgreens for our retailers,” says Greg Cessna, chief executive officer and president of Consumers Fresh Produce Co, Inc., based in Pittsburgh, and supplying customers in five states. “We also worked hard to source and

1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
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A wholesaler’s diverse customer base creates distinct sourcing advantages for retailers that they might not be able to accomplish as easily on their own.

For example, Valley Fruit & Produce can take an order that a grower is long in and get an order that is either short or short in a certain spec for a particular retail customer. “That’s because we have so many channels we sell through and so many outlets in our area. We have a customer for everything,” says Valley Fruit & Produce’s Wilder, whose customers range from chains like Bristol Farms and Gelson’s to Hispanic, Asian and Middle Eastern independents and foodservice operators.

Trends for locally grown created sourcing opportunities for wholesalers. “Local has been a huge focus for us in the past five to six years. Local growers need to be GAP-certified, so we help them to curate this process. We also work with the local farmers on what retailers want and how much to grow,” explains Four Seasons’ Steffy.

4 TRANSPORTATION LOGISTICS

Wholesalers play a principal part in the transport segment of a retailer’s produce supply chain. “The logistics model is a huge part of what makes us successful. Our sister company, Sunrise Transport, owns its own set of trucks with CDL [commercial driver licenses] drivers. That means we can deliver store-door from Washington, D.C. to New York City and to warehouses from Boston to North Carolina,” says Four Seasons’ Steffy.

Availability 24/7, load-or-less-than-truck-load quantities, forward distribution, just-in-time delivery, and last-mile delivery that allows a retailer to keep its inventory light and fresher are key capabilities of many wholesalers.

“I look to the wholesaler we use to provide the logistics of a distribution center in terms of delivering produce to our stores,” says New Seasons Markets’ Fairchild.

Timeliness is essential — especially in fresh produce. “Best laid plans can run into glitches. It’s what happens next — a contingency plan — that separates us from our competitors,” says Stone of Ben B. Schwartz, whose company



increased its delivery range into Canada and augmented its terminal market place to accommodate the added transient inventory.



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5 PACKAGING & RE-PACKING

Packaging and re-packing moved onto many wholesalers' list of services in recent years. "Packaging produce is a big part of our business," says Stone. "It's what makes us more valuable to retailers. For example, if we get 40-pound cases of jicama in, and a retailer only needs a 10- or 20-pound, we package it that way for them. We're capable of providing all types of packaging."

Wholesalers can create value opportunities for retailers. "If oranges come in cases, and a retailer wants bags because they sell better, they'll ship the fruit to us, we'll bag it and send it back to them," says Consumers Produce's Cessna. "Or, if they want to create a unique offering to differentiate themselves, like private label or a certain quality, size or price point, we provide these services as well. It's all about offering pack styles and options that enables them to merchandise the produce more effectively."

Extra grading is something suppliers often can't or won't do. "It may be USDA No. 1, but it's not to their [the retailers] spec. We will do the extra work to take it to that level," says Four Season's Steffy.

6 AD PLANNING & PRICING

Volume buys let wholesalers pass on significant price breaks on produce to retailers. In addition, a wholesale buyer's ability to astutely forecast can help retailers

to develop an effective ad program.

"We start ad planning six to eight weeks out with our retailers, then at four weeks and again at two weeks. The market is often a moving target, and we use our expertise to get customers the best items for ad at the best price," says Stone of Ben B. Schwartz.

Successful ads often necessitate greater stock. "We will work with our supply chain and broker a load to retailers to help them cover an ad," explains Consumer Produce's Cessna.


Retail ads are no longer relegated to

newspaper circulars. "In the past five years, we worked with retailers on ad planning to include everything from in-store specials to mass mailings, web-based ads and social media," says Steffy.

7 MERCHANDISING SUPPORT

Store-level merchandising is a service wholesalers strengthened in recent years. For example, Procacci Bros has 12 retail merchandisers on staff as well as a dozen

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“Now, organics are accessible in many more channels, so these stores need to be introduced to tried-and-true merchandising techniques to up their game. We help them, for example, to set their produce departments to maximize gross-profit opportunities and decrease shrink.”

— Jonathan Steffy, Four Seasons Produce



Valley Fruit & Produce Co. helps its retail customers transition through the seasons and holidays, not just in the produce departments, but throughout their stores. This photo from its retail training guide is exemplifying an ideal fall harvest scene for California-based Frazier Farms grocery store.

produce buyers.

“We study demographics by zip codes to help retailers with assortment, pricing strategy, in-store display and merchandising, weekly ads, manager’s special, setting up a promotional calendar and orchestrating events (such as tent or sidewalk sales/demos). In turn, wholesalers

serve as a gateway to retailers for suppliers,” says Valley Fruit & Produce’s Wilder.

One of the latest merchandising needs is in the area of organics.

“Natural food stores and organic co-ops traditionally didn’t need to do any merchandising,” says Steffy. “Now, organics are accessible in many more channels, so these stores need to be introduced to tried-and-true merchandising techniques to up their game.

We help them, for example, to set their produce departments to maximize gross-profit opportunities and decrease shrink.”

In addition, Steffy says Four Seasons works with conventional retailers that historically didn’t have organic-focused customers to expand inventory as well as advertise and promote organic merchandise effectively.

“It’s one of the many ways we nimbly take advantage of new opportunities,” says Steffy. **pb**

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The New Face Of Hydroponics



PHOTO COURTESY OF TANIMURA & ANTLE

As consumer values evolve, retailers take advantage of innovative hydroponic producers to support local, sustainable and environmental ideals.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

In the midst of a chilly Northeast winter, Giant Food Stores is preparing to promote locally grown lettuce. Just how does the retailer intend to accomplish this feat — through the technology of hydroponics and innovative growers.

Products from local hydroponics producer BrightFarms, headquartered in New York City, launched in select stores within the Giant Food (Giant-Landover, MD) division this February. The inventory showcases salad greens, basil, and tomatoes. According to a spokesperson from Giant, since this product is grown “right here on the East Coast, the stores are excited to be eliminating food miles and allow them

to deliver a fresher product to customers.”

The genre of hydroponics — also referred to as indoor farming, soil-less farming, and more recently, vertical farming — continues to sprout myriad commercial options. According to AgFunder (an online investment marketplace enabling accredited investors to invest in agriculture and agriculture technology companies), “indoor agriculture is a \$500-million-plus industry in the U.S.,” relays Marc Oshima, chief marketing officer with AeroFarms in Newark, NJ. “According to market research firm IBISWorld, the potential market is estimated closer to \$9 billion. This includes hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic techniques.”

Hydroponics first caught U.S. consumers’ attention via large-scale use in the hothouse tomato industry. “We were green before it was cool to be green,” says Douglas Kling, senior vice president and chief marketing officer for Village Farms in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

As an example of the growth of hydroponics, Kling references how 52-week rolling data for a full year ending in September 2015 shows about 60 percent of the dollars of tomatoes sold in the U.S. is greenhouse product. “I heard estimates that 15 years ago it was less than 2 percent for greenhouse,” he adds. “We see similar growth in other products.”

However, evolving consumer preferences



“The proliferation of hydroponic growing methods, including organic, is an extremely significant milestone.”

— Renee Cooper, Hollandia Produce

now power a move to local, urban greenhouses. “Consumer demand for a fresh and local solution drove produce suppliers to develop hydroponic greenhouses in strategic locations,” says Ryan Mazzuca, hydroponic commodity manager for Tanimura & Antle in Salinas, CA.

Case in point, local New York roof-top producer Gotham Greens enjoys a robust business with several retailers ranging from renowned Whole Foods Market to independent D’Agostino’s Supermarkets in New York City. “These operations are hyper-local and customers recognize it,” reports John Vasapoli, D’Agostino’s director of perishables. “It’s been a tremendous asset for us to have this product in our stores.”

TOUCH POINTS WITH TODAY’S CONSUMER

Hydroponics is less about the production method and more about what results. “Today’s consumer doesn’t really focus on it being hydroponic — they may not even know what that means,” explains Paul Lightfoot, chief executive of BrightFarms. “It’s more about it being local and sustainable.”

D’Agostino’s sees its retail consumers focusing less on the production method and more on the end product. “Consumers care about local, sustainable, freshness and flavor,” explains Vasapoli.

The pursuit to satisfy these consumer demands resulted in a plethora of hydroponic formats ranging from 100-acre operations to niche-businesses measured in square feet and everything in between.

The 27-year old Village Farms operates a total of 400 acres of greenhouse production in Vancouver, Texas, Mexico, and Ontario.

Tanimura & Antle operates 16.5 acres of hydroponic greenhouses producing Boston lettuce and a handpicked selection of artisan head lettuces.

Hollandia Produce in Carpinteria, CA, grows certified organic living Butter lettuce and watercress under its Grower Pete’s label in accordance with USDA organic standards under the National Organic Program.

“The proliferation of hydroponic growing methods, including organic, is an extremely significant milestone,” says Renee Cooper, marketing manager. “But, just because crops are grown hydroponically does not mean they’re necessarily organic.”

Local industry darling Gotham Greens started in Brooklyn, NY, in 2009 and now operates more than 170,000 square feet of greenhouses across four facilities in two cities. “We are the largest urban agriculture company in the world,” says Viraj Puri, chief executive.

Innovative BrightFarms has three greenhouse operations in three states (Pennsylvania, Illinois and Virginia) totaling 366,000 square feet and grows Spring Mix, baby arugula, baby kale, baby spinach, basil, and tomatoes.

North Shore Living Herbs in Thermal, CA, owns 8 acres of greenhouse space and grows living herbs. “We offer our products in a living

clamshell and as potted herbs,” explains Micki Dirtzu, director of marketing.

The local, vertical format reached as far north as Alaska. Vertical Harvest Hydroponics (VHH), a veteran-owned business in Anchorage, AK, designs and builds Containerized Growing Systems (CGS) — allowing produce to be grown hydroponically on-site.

“Throughout the U.S. and Alaska, we are seeing a big upsurge in hydroponic operations of all sorts from rooftop to retrofitted buildings to containerized systems,” says Linda Janes, VHH co-founder. “Alaska is one of the states that can benefit the most from a reliable local food source.”

A MOVE TO QUALITY AND FRESHNESS

According to industry members, traditional hydroponic greenhouse crops include tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers. “Vine crops such as tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers dominate this method,” relates Lightfoot of BrightFarms. “More local formats include salad greens and herbs; we’re starting to see strawberries as well.”

Lettuces and herbs play an increasing role especially in local or living hydroponic formats. “The hydroponic category is ruled by leaf items such as Boston lettuce,” says Mazzuca of Tanimura & Antle. “Other hand-selected specialty lettuces continue to be researched



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BrightFarms has three greenhouse operations in three states (Pennsylvania, Illinois and Virginia) totaling 366,000 square feet and grows a range of leafy greens and tomatoes.



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Marketers and hydroponic producers agree merchandising hydroponic products at retail with unique packaging to promote a fresh, sustainable and local solution will help differentiate the category.

and innovated.”

While Alaska’s current CGS design permits a variety of culinary herbs and leafy greens to be grown economically, new items are forthcoming. “R&D is working on systems allowing for flowering plants like tomatoes or berries to grow,” reports Janes of VHH. “R&D and tailoring the design just right are huge components to manufacturing a system that is financeable, sustainable — pays for itself and brings money into the community — offers employment opportunity and brings home the bacon.”

Advances in technology open doors for improved operations. “New growing technology increased yield and efficiency in the hydroponic greenhouse setting allows for better manipulation of sunlight, humidity, and temperature,” says Mazzuca. “One acre of hydroponic production is equivalent to 50 times that of traditional farming, while utilizing 95 percent less water and fertilizer.”

In the past, Janes recalls several indoor growing projects in Alaska didn’t go as planned. “Now, with improved technology, decreased prices for such items as LED lights, process

refinement, and increasing demand for local produce, hydroponic growing in Alaska is on the upswing.”

SUSTAINABLE METHODS

Efficiency, ecology and sustainability are crucial aspects of hydroponics. Gotham Greens uses advanced, re-circulating techniques to maintain precision plant nutrition.

“Since we’re growing in climate-controlled rooftop greenhouses using a high level of technology, we’re able to grow year-round and very efficiently,” reports Puri. “Our techniques are capable of producing over 50 percent more crop than conventional greenhouses while using 25 percent less energy per pound of crop produced.”

Hydroponics purports better use of land in terms of productivity. “You get 25 to 30 percent greater yield per acre,” says Village Farms’ Kling. “It’s more productive per acre with no land erosion.”

Hollandia’s sophisticated operation enables it to output about 3.55 times more lettuce per acre than field growing methods. “Hydroponics is more resource-efficient, producing higher

yields with less acreage,” explains Cooper.

Water conservation is significant with most hydroponic operations. “We use about 82 to 84 percent less water than field operations,” says Kling. “We recycle it about four to five times.”

Gotham Greens’ advanced irrigation system uses 20 times less water than conventional agriculture while eliminating all runoff. “This is especially pertinent given the drought in California and since agricultural runoff is one of the leading causes of global water pollution,” declares Puri.

Vertical farming in particular allows for large-scale, high-quality food production according to Janes. “It maximizes output while minimizing facility space, land requirements, water usage, electricity, waste, and man-hours,” she says. “Our systems are also very insulated, thereby requiring less for heating costs.”

SELL THE BENEFITS NOT THE FEATURES

Retailers are advised to center marketing messages for hydroponic on product benefits. “Marketing focus should be on the particular benefit of the product to the consumer,” suggests Lightfoot of BrightFarms. “If it’s local product, then focus on shelf-life and taste. It’s really about what results from the production method and not the production method itself.”

Kling agrees the average consumer doesn’t really place much emphasis on the technical features of hydroponic. “They care about what the production method results in,” he says. “This encompasses food safety, ecology and social responsibility.”

North Shore’s Dirtzu agrees that marketing must link to values, especially with Millennials. “Consumers are choosing to use their purchase power to support brands with earth-friendly practices that align with their personal values,” she describes.

VHH focuses messaging on these high-lights: local produce year-round; reduce the supply chain from weeks to hours; from farm-to-table just in time for lunch or dinner; eat food that’s still alive — that’s superior nutrition; produce grown without pesticides using non-GMO seeds; and rich flavor profiles, superior freshness, locally grown greens.

Hollandia recommends retailers create destination sets specific to hydroponics in produce departments. “Also, setting competitive price points at retail for hydroponics will likely impact adoption and consumption rates,” advises Cooper.

North Shore suggests cross-merchandising its living basil with tomatoes and avocados and displaying the clamshell herbs in the refrigerated section. “Our potted herbs do great at

the entry point into the produce department and gives a farmers-market feel to the store,” adds Dirtzu.

Educating consumers with these key messages will drive sales. “Merchandising hydroponic products with unique packaging to promote a fresh, sustainable and local solution will help differentiate the category and allow suppliers to further develop new SKUs,” counsels Mazzuca of Tanimura & Antle.

D’Agostino’s reports word-of-mouth and social media campaigns by Gotham Greens support sales. “I hardly promote the items as far as advertising or putting them on sale because of the already existing demand,” declares Vasopoli. “I can’t sell any other basil in my stores. My customers don’t want anything else.”

New Leaf Community Markets in Santa Cruz, CA, (with eight stores) regularly carries both Hollandia Butter lettuce and watercress and credits packaging for educating shoppers.

“The packaging helps call out the product on the shelf,” describes Maroka Kawamura, produce director. “It’s nice to have some info at the ready for a customer.”

Overall, success with hydroponic product is less about price and more about perceived value. “Every retailer I know says, ‘How do we



(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF AERO FARMS AND VERTICAL HARVEST

Vertical farming is favored for large-scale, high-quality food production. It maximizes output while minimizing facility space, land requirements, water usage, electricity, waste, and man-hours, according to Linda Janes, co-founder of Vertical Harvest Hydroponics.

get lift?” expresses Kling. “Lift is not just price; anyone can raise or lower price. Vegetables can be an affordable indulgence. If the benefit is there — whether flavor, quality or safety — we will get bigger lift, because it’s meeting what the consumer wants.”

Promoting quality and benefits of hydro-

ponics places the product in a unique situation. “Generally speaking, premium-quality produce grown using sustainable methods and fair wages can certainly command a premium price,” says Puri. “Gotham Greens’ products are competitively priced and on par with other leading local and national organic brands.” **pb**

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THE FUTURE OF Smart Packaging

Smart packaging gives retailers a hand in reducing shrink and marketing to consumers.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

In a little over four decades, the average produce department has gone from selling almost exclusively bulk produce to selling significant amounts in packaging. “Forty years ago, maybe 5 percent of the mix was

bagged,” says Rick Rutte, produce director for North State Grocery in Cottonwood, CA, with 19 stores. “Today with the bagged salads, veggies, and all the rest, I’d say a third of our product line is packaged.”

Somewhere along the way, packaging evolved beyond the fundamentals of containing/protecting/transporting and became “smart,” spurring a packaging revolution. As defined by *Packaging Digest* (a Santa Monica, CA-based trade magazine for packaging executives and engineers), smart packaging provides enhanced functionality and is generally divided into two submarkets: active and intelligent. *Packaging Digest* clarifies that active packaging provides functionality such as moisture control, and intelligent packaging incorporates features that indicate status or communicate product changes and other information.

“The Active and Intelligent Packaging Industry Association (AIPIA) reports U.S. demand for active and intelligent packages in food and other industries will reach \$3.5 billion by 2017,” recounts Dr. Eva Almenar, associate professor at the School of Packaging, Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI. “Demand for intelligent packaging, in particular, is expected to grow by double-digit percentage each year — hitting \$1.3 billion by 2017 as reported by AIPIA.”

According to a report from The Freedonia Group in Cleveland, OH, demand for active and intelligent packaging in produce applications is forecast to climb more than 10 percent



PHOTOS COURTESY OF INLINE PLASTICS

“Smart packaging provides an opportunity for manufacturers to differentiate products and build greater consumer confidence in brands.”

— Dr. Eva Almenar, School of Packaging at Michigan State University

annually to \$255 million in 2019.

With such a high-growth rate, smart packaging trends are quickly evolving. The Freedonia report notes in 2014 gas scavengers (additives with capability of absorbing gases) were the leading active and intelligent packaging type for produce. However, the report further explains though scavengers will experience solid growth, intelligent packaging demand will expand at a significantly faster pace based on increased adoption of temperature monitoring products and the growing presence of smartphone-enabled barcodes for tracking and marketing purposes.

“Trends show the most widespread application for smart packaging is QR (Quick Response) codes and time-temperature indicator labels (TTIs) on food packages,” agrees Dr. Almenar.

IN PURSUIT OF LONGER LIFE

Primary applications for smart packaging in produce typically revolve around quality and distribution factors.

The Freedonia report notes advances in packaging will be supported by heightened demand for fresh-cut, ready-to-eat produce, which offers increased convenience and uses more sophisticated packaging than bulk.

Indeed, the explosion of the pre-packaged industry is supported on the shoulders of packaging technology.

“The biggest help from smart packaging so far is in the availability of packaged vegetable items,” agrees North State’s Rutte. “Without active packaging, the bag salad category would not exist.”

According to Joe Bradford, vice president of sales for Temkin International in Payson, UT, French green beans are a prime example of smart packaging driving a market. “This commodity, mainly from Guatemala, had a limited market, because it was very expensive since it had to be flown,” he relates. “Now, with

the advent of a smart modified atmosphere bag, it’s still grown in Guatemala but packaged and shipped via ocean. The process made it affordable and extended shelf life. This is all due to the packaging. The bean didn’t change, the packaging did.”

The Freedonia report also references niche applications for self-venting and antimicrobial packaging as representing additional potential in fresh-cut produce. “Such packaging provides convenience of preparation for fresh vegetables often microwaved, such as green beans, broccoli, asparagus, and various blends,” according to the report.

“As busy as consumers are, microwaveable packaging offers convenience for cutting down on cooking times needed to produce a healthy meal,” concurs Joseph Bunting, produce business director for The United Supermarkets in Lubbock, TX with stores throughout West Texas, Dallas-Fort Worth and Eastern New Mexico. “We saw microwaveable packaging grow over the past few years and become more important to offer.”

MOUNTING A DEFENSE

Food safety concerns provide fertile ground for smart packaging. The Freedonia report forecasts smart packaging growth to be aided in part by the prominence of food safety issues and regulations spurring greater need for electronic tracking. It states: “Robust advances for intelligent packaging will be driven by the growing need for traceability in fresh produce due to the Food Safety Modernization Act’s emphasis on prevention-based measures to improve food safety.”

“We witnessed an evolution from no packaging to a transformation of packaging that makes produce more safe,” concurs Temkin’s Bradford.

Inline Plastics Corp. in Shelton, CT, sees tamper-evident packaging as a front-line defense and is extending its Safe-T-Fresh line of tamper-evident containers to include cups and containers for grab-and-go applications.

“Tamper-resistant containers are now common in the food industry,” states Jack Tilley, market research manager. “Rigid containers are moving toward a tighter, more secure perimeter-sealed closing system as opposed to button or slide lock containers.”

With respect to tracking, the Freedonia report also highlights how the development



Temkin manufactures a film designed to have different seal strengths. The packaging is currently used by Bolthouse on its Carrot ShakeDowns and Veggie Snackers (bagged baby carrots with a special seasoning compartment).

of more cost competitive TTIs and barcode-tracking systems will boost opportunities in intelligent packaging for produce.

ENHANCING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Marketers aim to harness intelligent packaging to enhance the customer experience in-store and at home. “Smart packaging provides an opportunity for manufacturers to differentiate products and build greater consumer confidence in brands,” advises Dr. Almenar from Michigan State University. “This virtual space has endless possibilities for the producer in terms of advertising and marketing.”

The industry already embraced QR codes, and technology developers are looking to take the next step. “We had some innovative ideas similar to a QR code,” shares Temkin’s Bradford. “We’re looking at applications for traceability, marketing and consumer education,” says Bradford. “The code can provide variable data, and we can accommodate this now on a variety of substrates, from sleeves to clamshells.”

Intelligent packaging technology also enables shoppers to be more informed about the products they are consuming. “Knowing where fruits and vegetables come from will not

only aid the consumer in being conscious of what they are eating and increase the freshness of the produce but might also help stop food safety issues from spreading,” suggests Dr. Almenar. “Codes on food packages have the ability to increase consumers’ confidence in the produce they are purchasing and their trust in a brand.”

Beyond usage and production information, the next generation of intelligent packaging hopes to inform consumers on ripeness, thought at this point, it is primarily at the R&D stage. The Freedonia report remarks how Ripesense labels, used to detect the ripeness of pears, were developed by the Plant and Food Research Institute of New Zealand. The report explains: “These labels work by detecting certain aroma compounds given off by pears as they ripen. The aromas change the label color in a range of colors, conveying to consumers the degree of ripeness.”

THE FUTURE IS ALREADY HERE

Several smart packages are already currently used in produce. Packaging offered by Apio Inc., as explained by Dr. Almenar, is capable of varying permeability to oxygen and carbon

dioxide in response to changes in temperature occurring during storage, distribution, and marketing.

“This occurs due to the presence of a membrane (the BreatheWay membrane) attached to a cut-out section of a flexible bag or tray,” she says. “It is customized according to the type of produce and the package size to passively maintain the ideal oxygen and carbon dioxide levels independently of the surrounding temperature. Essentially, the package is able to sense the surrounding environment and change as needed to ensure produce freshness for extended periods of time.”

Currently, United stores carry the Apio packaged vegetables. “The BreatheWay bags help keep the product fresher longer, extending the shelf life,” describes Bunting from United Supermarkets. “Because this technology allows a longer shelf life, it reduces shrink in the stores and keeps product looking better longer which helps sell the product.”

Temkin manufactures a film designed to have different seal strengths and currently used by Bolthouse in its Carrot ShakeDowns and Veggie Snackers (bagged baby carrots with a special seasoning compartment).

PHOTO COURTESY OF APIO



Apio’s BreatheWay membrane is attached to a cut-out section of a flexible bag or tray to sense the surrounding environment and changes as needed to ensure produce freshness.

“The side seals and top seal are stronger than the seal separating the carrots from the seasoning,” explains Bradford of Temkin. “The film is converted into a bag with two compartments. The bag has atmospheric control along with a laser score for easy opening. The bag when pulled, allows the separation seal to pull apart, so the seasoning can be mixed with the

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“It is already realistic to think of a packaging talking to the consumer via a smart device. You can have a computer chip communicate with a smart device and pull up recipes, production information or recall information instantaneously.”

— Joe Bradford, Temkin International

carrots while maintaining the integrity of the side seals.”

In the future, smart packaging may focus even more on eco and sustainability issues. “There is an eco-friendly line on the forefront,” says Bradford. “Reducing the carbon footprint is on everybody’s mind. Currently, most of those options are not viable either because of cost or because they don’t compost, but they’re coming.”

Bunting hopes to see smart packaging aid shrink in fresh berries. “While we sell a tremendous number of fresh berries, we also seem to have high shrink levels,” he explains. “We are evaluating technology already in the works to be packed in our strawberry containers. Time will tell if this new technology works or not, but the goal is to extend shelf life and decrease shrink.”

Packaging developers foresee a future where packages might even talk directly to shop-

pers via smartphones or devices. “The industry metaphorically asks, ‘What can I do so the package jumps out and talks to people?’ But it may not be just a metaphor in the future,” suggests Bradford. “It is already realistic to think of a packaging talking to the consumer via a smart device. You can have a computer chip communicate with a smart device and pull up recipes, production information or recall information instantaneously.”

Dr. Almenar advocates how smart pack-

aging could enable shoppers to be more informed. “Shoppers using smartphones could instantly know the period of best flavor or highest nutritional content,” she says. “Or it may someday have the ability to tell consumers when a package has been tampered with.”

Retailers look to developments in smart packaging to help with inventory as well. “Inventory control could be enhanced with RFID labels our store systems could read,” says North State’s Rutte. **pb**

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Produce Transportation Enters Its Own Digital Age

Electronic tracking could become universal by 2017.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Regulation brought produce into the computer age, as food safety traceability requirements led both shippers and retailers to adopt pallet and case labels that can be scanned to reveal instantly where and when fruits and vegetables were harvested.

Now, computer technology is being brought to bear the complex logistics of moving produce, which is frequently picked up and dropped off in partial loads by trucks operating under the time pressure that comes with carrying perishable cargo.

"There is some really good stuff out there," says Jimmy DeMatteis, co-founder of Des Moines Truck Brokers, Norwalk, IA. "One of the challenges we had for years as a broker is

having the ability to see where the trucks are."

Des Moines Brokers is one of the firms that organize hauls by the small trucking companies that characterize the business of produce transportation.

TRACKING EFFICIENCY

GPS systems made it far easier for these brokers to know where the trucks are, if they are on schedule, or if there is a fire that needs to be put out.

"One of the consequences of the smartphones and new technology is it opened up doors for brokers to track trucks where they are," says DeMatteis.

"We're a broker, but most of the trucking fleets we use have their own GPS systems, and

they give us access to their websites," says Paul Kazan, president of Target Interstate Systems, Bronx, NY.

Even when there is no emergency, transportation software can improve the efficiency of delivering a truckload of produce comprised of a number of smaller loads.

The meteoric rise in the use of smartphones provides an opportunity to take this communication to new levels.

"The iPhone really came on in 2008, and GPS in 2010," recalls Ricardo Salgado, chief executive at LoadSmart, New York City. "In 2010, around 25 percent of the truck drivers had smartphones; but today, 95 percent have them. This increases the communication of shipment details; and it allows the driver

to communicate with us if something goes wrong.”

Ken Lund, vice president of Allen Lund Company, La Cañada, CA, says software gives better visibility of the entire shipping process.

“If you have a truck with 17 pallets, and you can add a few more, it reduces the cost for each pallet,” he says. “You can also see when it will cost you more or less to ship, and maybe you can adjust your time. You can also see when you will be charged a fee because trucks have to wait.”

Allen Lund Company is a broker that lines up produce trucking, and provides software and logistics services.

“The advent of transportation management systems (TMS) is helping companies be more efficient and give better service,” says Lund. “We sell the first TMS that was designed from the bottom up for produce. A billion dollars a year in produce is shipped using this system.”

“We are working with a company with a device in the trailer that lets the driver pick up the temperature via Bluetooth, and then we can follow it,” says Kazan from Target.

Iowa State University and transportation logistics provider C.H. Robinson produced a white paper concluding that the amount of time shippers have to wait to load or unload is a highest priority for shippers.

“Carriers most frequently commented on shipper and consignee dwell time and the influence shippers have on the carrier’s ability to utilize their drivers and assets,” according to the white paper titled, *Do “Favored Shippers” Really Receive Better Pricing and Service?* Concerns were about shipper location, like congestion and distance from the highway, drop trailer opportunities, appointment setting,

“The advent of transportation management systems (TMS) is helping companies be more efficient and give better service ... A billion dollars a year in produce is shipped using this system.”

— Ken Lund, Allen Lund Company

and load/unload times. This wasted time for drivers and trucks also has a substantial impact on freight costs.

“Significant and large relationships were found between both origin and destination dwell times and increased freight rates,” according to the white paper.

Until now, only a relative handful of forward-looking shipping companies are taking full advantage of the combination of GPS and tracking software, but that is about to change in a big way and not everyone in the transportation business thinks it’s a good thing.

“Electronic logging devices are going to be mandated by December 2017,” says DeMatteis of Des Moines Truck Brokers. “I think it will be okay, but the smaller businesses that comprise most of the trucking may or may not be able to afford it.”

TRACKING AS A REQUIREMENT

Tracking is about to go mainstream if proposed new federal regulations go into effect, and many of the small truckers who form the backbone of the produce shipping business are anxious about this brave new world.

“The latest regulation is requiring on board electronic recorders,” says Bill Martin, an Oklahoma-based consultant who has researched

and written about produce transportation since the 1970s. “Small owner operators look at this as something that’s going to increase their cost of operation.”

The purpose of the new requirement is to make it easier for regulators to know if safety rules are broken, but electronic recorders could also take flexibility out of the transportation system.

“It could effect receivers or chain stores expecting a shipment at a certain time,” says Martin. “Now drivers might say if I go over my time of operation by a couple hours I can make my delivery on time. They won’t be able to do that.”

The Washington, D.C.-based regulatory office that mandates safety rules, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, is proposing the new rule go into effect in 2017, but the Grain Valley, MO-based Owner Operator and Independent Driver Association filed suit to prevent that regulation.

The trucking industry believes a strong case can be made that there is no need for greater enforcement of rules on hours of operation.

“The transportation industry has never been safer,” says DeMatteis. “My fear is some small carriers will decide, ‘I can’t do this,’ and park their truck. There’s going to be a reordering



of the whole produce buying and shipping business. We counted on the truckers to take up the slack. Now these trucks are going to have to stay by the book. I think it's going to drive prices up."

Even more important than the cost of installing the devices on all trucks will be the loss of flexibility drivers now have in going a little over on driving hours to make up for time lost to traffic congestion or glitches in picking up or dropping off loads.

"If we are picking up an eight-pick load with one stop, when the new electronic logging device requirements kick in, we will have problems getting those loads delivered properly within allotted hours for service," says Fred Plotsky, president of Cool Runnings, Kenosha, WI. "If it is a one pick and multiple stops, freight rates will spike due to the same drop constraints."

Cool Runnings is a transportation broker providing trucking, including refrigerated trucking, and logistical services.

The loss of flexibility could be particularly important for cargo, like most produce, that is highly perishable.

"If you run out of hours, you're going to

have to stop, even if you're a half hour away with a load of something perishable, like strawberries," says Lund. "This is something I think will really affect long haul produce."

"The requirement of electronic recording is going to be a problem for our industry," says Kazan from Target. "When a truck has to wait all day to get loaded, that's counted as 'on duty' time. You're taking a lot of the driver's actually driving time away from him. It's going to impact delivery time. I hope the regulations will include cellular technology among the approved devices," says Kazan. "Otherwise the driver will have to put in a new device at a cost of \$500 to \$1,000 a truck."

THE FUTURE OF TRACKING

If the electronic recorder requirement does go into effect, it would bring virtually all trucking operations into the world where a combination of GPS and software can be used to track shipments, and also integrate the information into all aspects of the business.

The sheer number of parties involved can easily make moving produce a complicated and unpredictable process.

"There are five players involved when you

move produce – the shipper, the dispatcher, the driver, the warehouse manager and the drop off manager," says Salgado of LoadSmart. "We try to bring seamless communication among all five."

"The fresh produce industry has a variety of companies at different places in terms of technology," says Ron Myers, executive vice president at Linkfresh, Ventura, CA. "I'd like to see this industry adopt technology at a greater pace. There are cloud-based solutions that work for the Mom-and-Pop truckers."

Linkfresh provides enterprise resource programs (ERP) that allow people in the produce industry to see, record and analyze the relationships among purchasing, transporting, storing and retailing.

"We have an ERP purposely built for the produce industry," says Myers. "There's a constant drive toward lower transportation costs, and that's where the software can help you. There are programs in place to help you decide how to load or route a truck, or track the tax implications of crossing state lines. We have a component that creates a transport request that goes into a scheduling queue. You can use it for load planning, back loading and



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scheduling.”

Target also uses software that makes it possible to follow, with permission, the location of the drivers’ cell phones.

“Anybody can follow the location of a cell phone if you have permission of the owner,” says Kazan. “The MacroPoint program will send you a text message asking you to go to a website and give permission. Another program will send a text message asking to track the phone. The driver answers ‘Y’ and you can track. When the load is delivered, they text ‘N’ and the tracking is turned off.”

Because the company believes tracking is necessary to be competitive, Target offers incentives to truckers to use the technology. “We create a little bit of a financial incentive for them to opt in to tracking systems,” says Kazan. “We cut out some of our fees to encourage truckers to use it. The weakest link in the produce business is not knowing where a truck is.”

Surprisingly, only a handful of the users of this product for the tech savvy are already following trucks in transit to see if issues are developing.

“Probably only 15 percent of our customers are using GPS to track produce as it moves,” says Myers.

That will probably change however if truckers are required to have devices federal regulators can monitor, because trucking brokers and receivers will almost certainly want access to that information.

“The vast majority of the carriers are good players, but the technology allows us to see where they are during a trip,” says DeMatteis.

Not everyone in the trucking industry, however, is smitten with the logistical power of these new age tools.

“I find there are so many different technologies that customers get involved with, we spend way too much time updating it all,” says Plotsky. “We got the same job done with less effort in the past.”

GIVE THANKS FOR CHEAP GAS

While the production transportation industry heads toward more complex times, for better or worse, the low cost of gas is providing a temporary buffer.

“The cost of diesel is down to \$2, except in states like California,” says Lund.

There is no hard-and-fast rule on how this transportation bonus is shared among retailers, consumers and truckers.

“We adjust weekly, or within the month,” says Lund. “Transportation costs are down, and a big part of that is fuel costs. The cost differ-

ence gets to the retailer quickly, but sometimes it takes longer to get to the consumer, because the store sets prices in advance.”

Trucking companies are hoping to hold onto at least some of the savings to pay the drivers, and invest in equipment.

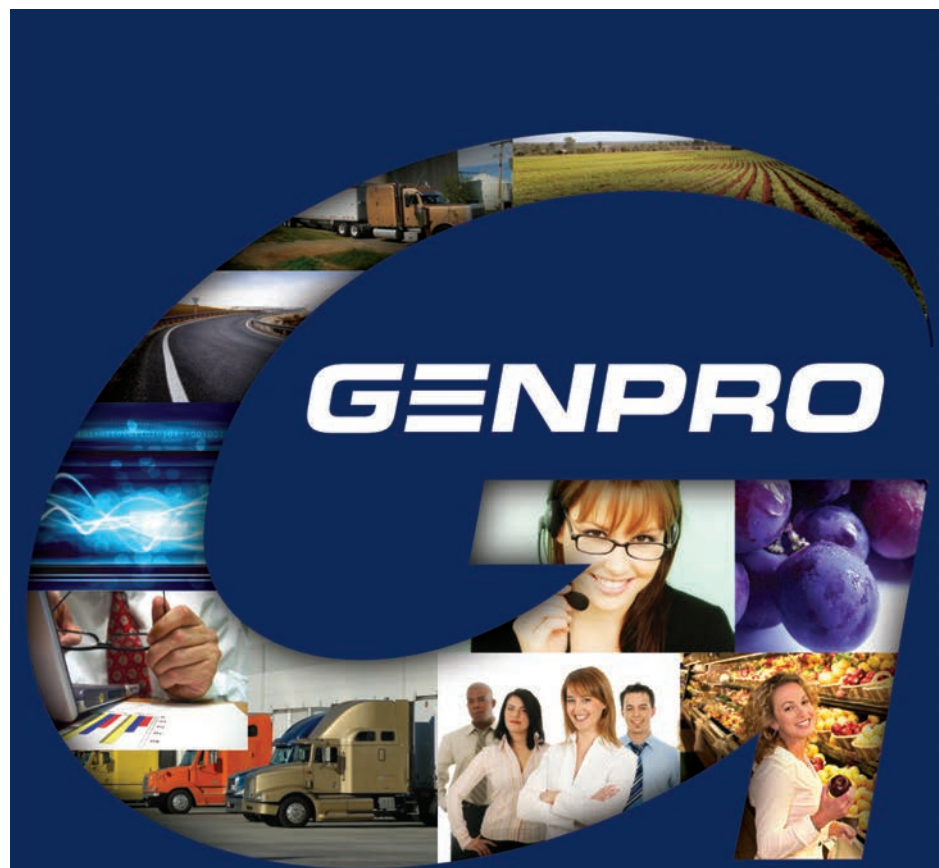
“Carriers are trying to keep the rates constantly high through falling fuel prices and using the money for raising drivers’ pay and upgrading equipment,” says Plotsky. “Some of the savings will find its way to the retailer, but

will the savings be passed on from the retailer to the consumer?”

The question of how to share an unexpected bonus is, at least temporarily, a nice problem to have.

“The lower fuel prices are helping,” says DeMatteis. “We’re adding \$200 to \$300 to a motor carrier’s profit on a 1,500- to 2,000-mile run, and they need it. We want everybody we do business with to make a buck. We all need to stay in business.”

pb



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Southern Retailers: Serving An Evolving Population

Changing demographics influence produce.

BY BOB JOHNSON

There is an evolving South — if not a new South — showing itself in new types of retail outlets and in the appearance of new varieties in the produce departments of the traditional outlets.

Today in many southern produce departments you will find, just a few feet away from the Muscadine grapes, boiled green peanuts and sweet potatoes, ample displays of Jalapeno peppers and Malanga roots.

No change is more visible in parts of this evolving region as the emergence of a large and growing Hispanic population.

“The Hispanic population has grown,” says Stan Ahl, senior merchandising manager for C&S Wholesale Grocers, which acquired the South Carolina Piggly Wiggly stores in 2014. “They have either migrated to the stores here, or they have specialty stores.”

Piggly Wiggly is a century-old chain with more than 600 stores throughout the South and extending north to Ohio and Minnesota.

STILL SOUTHERN AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

The South may be changing, but it is still a region with long-held culinary tastes that produce retailers serve.

“Collard greens are huge,” says Ahl. “We have green peanuts; you harvest them green and boil them. We grow and eat quite a few Muscadine grapes; they are part of the culture. Sweet potatoes are a big item. What we do is the same as the other regions of the country, but we have quite a few products that are unique to the South. Those are all seasonal, except for collards, which we sell 12 months of the year. Around Thanksgiving, we would be getting collards by the pallet.”

Piggly Wiggly has remained a localized chain, and may be better positioned than the national supermarkets to offer these regional produce items.

“We’re still a Southern retailer,” says Ahl. “The Wal-Marts of the world don’t understand Muscadine grapes or other similar items. Muscadine is a big summer item.”



Piggly Wiggly is just one of the chains that remained a Southern retail operation as the establishment grew.

"I know of retailers in Florida or Texas that started in those states, and cater to the people in those states," says Brett Bergmann, president of Branch: A Family of Farms, which was formerly Hugh H. Branch, Inc. of South Bay, FL. "Some chains are based and operated from the South, and independently owned."

Many consumers in the South also look to buy local produce, both to support the local farmers and to get regional items.

"Produce sales are driven by quality and origin now," says Kaylyn Bender, manager of marketing at Market Fresh Produce, Nixa, MO. "Today's consumer is looking for local or regional products that support their local areas."

There is a strong desire in much of the South to support the important agricultural sector of the regional economy.

"With this part of the country being a large provider of produce as well, local consumers are helping drive the produce industry by looking for and purchasing local and regional product in support of their growers," says Bender. "All retailers can takeaway that local and regional products will help drive your market but don't forget to always keep your quality. A key element of any product is being able to rely on consistent, good quality every time."

Trendier produce tastes have also reached the South, but are maybe not as strong as in, say, Northern California.

"Potatoes are still a strong category, tomatoes are right up there with them and these two categories alone represent close to 15 percent or more of our sales," says Mike Roberts, produce merchandiser at Harp's Food Stores Inc., which is a Springdale, AR-based chain throughout

"Produce sales are driven by quality and origin now. Today's consumer is looking for local or regional products that support their local areas."

— Kaylyn Bender, Market Fresh Produce

Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. "Bananas, salads, berries and citrus sell well also, and we are seeing a rise in our organic and local sales."

Another characteristic of the region is that produce, on average, accounts for a smaller share of total supermarket sales than in some other regions.

"Average distribution of produce sales to total store sales in our trade area is around 6.5 percent to 8.5 percent depending on the time of year, so I believe it is less than what you would find on the East and West Coasts," says Roberts.

THE EVOLVING SOUTH

Changing demographics led to the emergence of stores that cater to particular ethnic groups in much of the South, as in many other areas of the country.

"The number of new store formats that are entering into already saturated markets amazes me," says Bender. "This clearly supports the point that customers are looking for more out of their shopping experience. While the additional formats meet the customers' needs, the fact remains there is a finite amount of products to purchase, so with the additional competition comes reduction in prices and profit margins."

Market Fresh is a produce packer-shipper with special emphasis on sweet potatoes, tomatoes, onions, potatoes, peppers and avocados.

"Collard greens are still important, and if a retailer has Hispanic customers, they'll have Malanga root and some yuca," says Bergmann from Branch. "The Southern retailers market to the ethnic mix of the region. There is a heavy Mexican and Cuban population. They focus on some of the micro-markets. The biggest trend in the population has already taken place, and that is the increase in the number of Hispanics. The mobile and ever-changing landscape of the overall population makes produce retailing more challenging. The produce items would be whatever their market might demand."

Branch sources and ships nearly 20 vegetable varieties from enough growing areas to offer year-round supply, and the company is one of the largest distributors of sweet corn in the country.

As in most of the country, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day were joined in the South as holidays with culinary traditions of the holiday on May 5.

"Cinco de Mayo has become likened to celebrations on Memorial Day, Easter, or the Fourth of July," says Bergmann. "Whether you're in Texas, Florida, or New York, you'll see Cinco de Mayo ads. It's a big time for sweet corn as well as avocados and tomatoes."

To a certain extent, the region's population reflects the shift of the nation's shrinking industrial base from the Midwest to the South.



“The South is getting more large industry, but not enough to change the population,” says Ahl of C&S Wholesale Grocers.

Along with demographic changes, Southern retailers are navigating challenges that come with the changing generational tastes and habits.

“Definitely the demands of Baby Boomers and the Millennial generation make produce retailing more challenging,” says Roberts from Harp’s Food Stores. “Trying to cater to both can be challenging; the Baby Boomer generation is still looking for traditional items and lower prices, while the Millennial generation is wanting more information and more ready-to-eat or prepared items.”

Harp’s Food is a medium-sized regional chain, with 72 stores in Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri. “We offer an everyday-low-pricing structure that makes us competitive in our market,” says Roberts. “We may not have the lowest ad offerings, but we offer the overall lowest price we can every day on items. We also offer more customer service and usually more variety than our big-box-store competition.”

The influence of the Millennials and Boomers is seen in the emergence of natural foods outlets more commonly associated with the coasts.

“Companies such as Fresh Market and Whole Foods Market are starting to infiltrate our trade area,” says Roberts. “While being in Wal-Mart’s back yard, we are located or based out of Springdale, AR. We are not seeing a real influx of independent niche competitors.”

Younger shoppers are not only looking for different produce items, they are also going to the store more frequently and making smaller, more convenient purchases.

“Today’s Millennials are not making the typical weekly shopping trip,” says Bender from Market Fresh. “They tend to make more daily trips to stores and create more diverse dishes that call for ingredients outside of the basic ingredients their parents purchased at the same grocery each week. This trend alone creates a challenge to find innovative ways to market our products. Also, the convenience of goods is becoming more necessary from fast food to store-bought items. This requires more time and money to package convenience products, so finding a balance is a big task at hand.”

As the region’s demographic changes, and the tastes of new generations make their mark, mainstream retailers try to keep pace in their produce departments.

With more than 1,100 stores in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee, Florida-based Publix is the largest employee-owned retailer in the country.

The company maintains its position in the face of shifting competition by building much of its business model on offering quality service by workers who have a share in the company.

“Competition in our sector is always popping up from farmers markets to independents,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix Super Markets, Inc., Lakeland, FL. “Regardless of the competitor, we stay focused on offering our customers stellar customer service, and high-quality products at competitive prices.”

NEW WORLD PRODUCE ORDER

Produce retailers in the evolving South, as elsewhere, face both new opportunities and new challenges that come with the “New World Produce Order.”

“There is more competition coming from independent stores that cater to specific ethnic tastes, and also from Amazon,” says Bergmann of Branch.

While online shopping is an option for many stores in the South, it seems to have not gotten much of a foothold in the region.

“We really have not seen any impact from Internet sales in our trade area at this time,” says Roberts of Harp’s Food Stores. “There is only one operation like this in our trade area.”

There may be a stronger regional preference in the South for face-to-face interactions with familiar staff as an indispensable part of buying produce.

“We tried online delivery service in the early 2000s,” says Brous. “And while we had raving fans with PublixDirect, we also heard our customers say they still preferred to come into our stores and visit with our associates, their neighbors and complete their daily/weekly shopping. Our customer service is a differentiator. Associate ownership makes us unique. Our associates have skin in the game. They want to protect and promote what’s theirs.”

The “New World Produce Order” also, however, gives retailers ever greater ease in sourcing items desired by a changing consumer base.

“If a retailer has a population that wants mangos, they’ll find them,” says Bergmann. “So much of it is a world economy.”

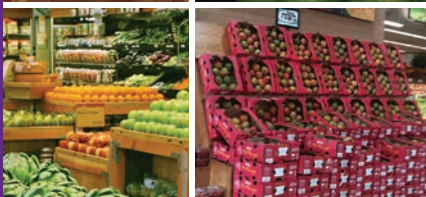
It is also an ever-smaller world as retailers see the advantage in looking around the country to see what is working elsewhere.

“The retailers are all so competitive; they travel and see what other people are doing,” says Bergmann.

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Every once in a while, the opportunity presents itself to do well while also doing good. Such is the case with this, our 15th annual Masters of Merchandising supplement. The industry owes a tip of the hat to the collection of industry leaders who elected to invest with us in a marketing vehicle that is both promotional and educational.

Each vendor worked hard to produce a piece of advice for the industry on how to more effectively merchandise the product category at hand. By sharing knowledge acquired while working with retailers throughout North America, these vendors help retailers move more product, help growers find outlets for production, and help the world by encouraging a more healthful diet.

Increasing sales of fruits and vegetables is not only a matter of big industry initiatives. Sales in general can increase only if sales of specific items increase. That means knowing how to build consumer trial and how to offer the most effective assortment; it means knowing how to market things on a day-to-day basis and how to do some out-of-the-box promotions just to keep consumer interest high.

Retailers, please take the time to review this offering carefully. When did you last think about how to increase sales of carrots? Or papayas? Or artichokes? Here is a chance to think of merchandising in a different way. When did you last really consider how to best sell bananas — was it when you were a produce department manager 10, 20 or 30 years ago? Here is an opportunity to revisit tactics with a different perspective.

The sponsors of this year's Masters of Merchandising section are a special breed. We spoke to many producers who declined to participate, saying they simply had no idea how to merchandise their own items effectively. When we offered to help them research the matter, we encountered all too many vendors who essentially said, "That is the retailer's problem; we just book loads."

Merchandising is everyone's problem, and in the produce industry, "The Times, They Are A-Changin'." Retailers today are in a position to expect more support from producers, and intellectual capital is just about the most valuable support one can provide. So kudos to our Masters of Merchandising sponsors.

There is always temptation to keep knowledge tightly protected and controlled, but oftentimes what goes around comes around, and in sharing their knowledge, our sponsors are giving the industry a great gift. May it return to them many times over.

As an added service to our retail readers, we're printing additional copies of this guide, so if you would like extra copies of the 2016 Masters of Merchandising supplement to give to your colleagues, please fill out the form on the next page, and fax or mail it to us. For the cost of shipping and handling, we'll send you up to five supplements, so they will be available on a first-come basis.

If you require larger quantities for distribution to store-level personnel, please call our offices at 561-994-1118 for information on customized reprints.

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James F. Prevor
Jim Prevor,
Editor-In-Chief,
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Yakima Fresh

It's perhaps the best over-the-counter prescription available, as the old adage goes, "An apple a day, keeps the doctor away." Apples are proven to help lower cholesterol and combat cancer. A primary item in your produce department for years, apples present many fun and unique opportunities to enhance sales. As a proud grower of Washington Apples, we at Yakima Fresh, are enthusiastic about apples and getting consumers to eat more! Join us as we journey through the wonderful world of apples.



DISPLAY AND MERCHANDISING

The average U.S. consumer eats 19 pounds of apples a year, which equates to about an apple a week! Giving your department the tools to educate consumers on the benefits of eating apples and increasing consumption from one apple a week to two can quickly grow your category.

USE SIGNAGE/POP: Yakima Fresh enjoys working with partners to create eye-popping, inspiring POS material to assist in the education and sales of apples. Ranging from our "Fit for Life" campaign to a hand-crafted grower profile, connecting consumers to the orchard. Let us help you create the signage you want, highlighting variety names, variety flavors and food pairings.

PLAY UP THE COLOR: In addition to signage telling the profile of each variety, utilize the unique coloring of each variety to give a color break to the display. This can drive your consumers curiosity to try something new. And don't be afraid to sample new and old varieties. The more they know, the easier it is to buy.

INCLUDE SOME PARTNERS: Be sure to cross-merchandise to create impulse and added purchases. For an easy cross-merchandising set, put a pie crust near the apples to spur customers to make their own fresh pie (most recipes call for 2 to 3 pounds of apples. Quite an increase in sales!)

PROMOTION

Let the Yakima Fresh team help you create some buzz in your apple category. Join us in the fight against cancer. With our partnership with the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) we can educate consumers on the health benefits of apples. By educating today, we can help the health of those tomorrow, which is not only a reason to eat, but a reason to buy. Let us support you locally as we partner nationally with the AICR. From POS educational material to getting involved in local cancer fights, Yakima Fresh is here to educate.

Add some fun to consumption with bobbing for apples during Halloween, giving the teacher

an apple in May for teacher's appreciation week, or joining the fight against cancer in "Mo"vember with mustache-powered apple advertising.

Healthy promotions are another proven avenue to boost the category. Recent studies linked apples to helping with everything from weight loss to different types of cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and even asthma. The more we can educate, the more people will eat. Yakima Fresh wants to help you make that one apple a week eater into a one apple a day eater.

Stop comparing apples to apples. Instead, help consumers compare apples to coffee. Various studies show the benefits from waking up to an apple far exceed the benefits from a cup of coffee. The apple's natural sugar provides an energy boost. The fruit's good carbs fuel the body, and doesn't initiate drastic energy slumps like coffee. Also rich in fiber, apples aid in the absorption of sugar into the body.

HANDLING TIPS

- Don't dump; hand stack
- Watch color schemes
- Temperature changes: Apples ripen 10 times faster at room temperature. This leaves most varieties with low pressure after only four to five days at room temperature
- Don't mist your apples: misting causes a white buildup, or Calcium (which is okay to eat, but doesn't look that great). Misting also can make your apples dull.
- "One bad apple spoils the whole lot" — it can! Apples are ethylene producers, which can affect other fruits, vegetable and flowers. (This gives you an additional answer when consumers ask why their produce goes bad in their refrigerator.)
- Watch where you store your apples in the cooler. Apples can cause:
 - Russetting of lettuce
 - Increased ripening of tomatoes
 - Sprouting of potatoes
 - Yellowing of broccoli and cauliflower

- If you are going to cut apples for display, use lemon juice on your knife (or a porcelain knife) to slow the browning process.

VARIETIES

With over 7,500 types of apples grown worldwide, priority is a must when choosing what varieties to carry. For now, we are proud to be a grower of your staple items from Honeycrisp and Gala's to Red Delicious to the next big thing. Yakima Fresh is there for you as a leader in year-round supply of the varieties that mean the most to your category. We believe the perfect apple starts in the orchard, and its beauty and taste is reliant on a perfected supply chain. Come visit us in the Pacific Northwest to see a vision of the perfect apple. Variety charts and availability available at Yakimafresh.com

FUN FACTS

- 80 to 130 calories per apple (average size)
- 25% of an apple is air — that's why it floats
- It takes about 36 apples to make 1 gallon of apple cider
- High in fiber: 5 grams of fiber per apple, that's more than a serving of oatmeal — 2/3 of which comes from the peel
- Largest apple to record is 3 pounds
- Average European eats 46 pounds of apples annually versus the U.S. Consumer at 19 pounds
- Apples are a member of the Rose family

Fact Resources: U.S. Apple Association & Washington Apple Commission



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Ocean Mist Farms

CROP FORECAST

Ocean Mist Farms is the largest and only year-round grower of fresh artichokes. Three growing areas provide a 52-week harvest schedule. March through May is peak season for artichoke production overall, and the only time of year that Ocean Mist Farms Heirloom artichokes are available in some regions. Retailers can create in-store excitement around the artichoke category by highlighting the seasonality of these delicious vegetables.

MAXIMIZE SPRING

Artichoke sales exhibit sharp peaks of volume and dollars during holiday weeks, and sales are elevated from February through May — including these holidays: Valentine’s Day, Easter, Mother’s Day and Memorial Day.



ENGAGING SHOPPERS

With less than half of shoppers making a purchase decision in the grocery store, it increases the importance of reaching out to people when they are not in the retail environment with infor-



mation about artichoke usage, nutrition and preparation. Ocean Mist Farms invested in our website to do that as well as social media tools such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

This spring we will leverage our existing social media tools and Artichoke Club to alert artichoke lovers about weekly specials in their area for fresh artichokes. These social media tools allow us to promote retailers’ specials to a very targeted, motivated audience who wants to know when and where artichokes are on sale.

Heirloom Artichokes

Like a family recipe, Ocean Mist Farms has been growing a unique variety of Heirloom artichoke from the same rootstock that has been passed down to each generation of Ocean Mist Farms family growers for more than 90 years. The Ocean Mist Farms Heirloom artichoke is never grown from seed and grows only in and around Castroville, CA. This variety is seasonally available between March and May; a chef favorite, we made it identifiable to shoppers with a distinctive red UPC sticker.

ARTICHOKE MERCHANDISING 101

Artichokes have a rich, deep-green color that complements other items in the produce department and stack well when building large end-cap displays. If handled properly, artichokes will look and taste fresh for up to two weeks. It is important to keep them cool and moist. Tips to merchandise artichokes include:

- Refrigerate artichokes at 34° Fahrenheit or 1° Celsius.
- Remove any damaged petals. Do not re-trim stems. Re-trimming will cause artichokes to lose up to 30 percent of their moisture and weight, and stems will darken within seconds of re-trimming.
- Merchandise artichokes on their sides, stem-to-stem, for easier handling by store personnel and shoppers. Place next to lemons for both color blocking and impulse purchase.
- Create side displays in other departments such as in the meat and fish department, to prompt an impulse purchase. Artichokes make the perfect side dish to any meat, poultry or fish entree.
- Cross-merchandise with dipping ingredients such as mayonnaise, balsamic vinegar and ready-to-eat sauces.
- Offer multiple sizes for increased sales. Shoppers use different sizes for different applications.



Stuffed Artichokes with Bacon Mac N' Cheese

Find more recipes and cooking videos here
AllAboutArtichokes.com



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PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS

Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association



Asparagus is now an expected year-round item yet still has great potential for increased sales. Asparagus from Peru, a principal supplier, allows retailers to complement other seasonal sources and offer quality product year-round.

MAKE IT VISIBLE

Make sure asparagus is displayed prominently. Many successful retailers set displays at the front of the produce department and utilize island displays and endcaps.

Attention-grabbing, quality displays will result in sales. Ensure asparagus display is well-maintained with only Peruvian product so shoppers won't have to think twice about purchasing.

ADD VARIETY

Variety adds to sales by encouraging shoppers to purchase more colors, sizes or package options.

Use multiple colors for attractive display alternatives. Fresh asparagus is readily available in green, white and purple (all from Peru).

Display several different packaging options to increase convenience for customers. Large display tables of different product forms (whole spear bunches, microwave tray-packed trimmed spears, packaged green and/or white asparagus, packaged asparagus tips, white and purple asparagus) will increase sales and add profits to the produce department.



Peruvian Asparagus



Importer's Association

PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS IMPORTERS ASSOCIATION

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MAKE SUGGESTIONS

Give consumers ideas on usage by cross-promoting with other easily used items. Good cross-merchandising items include: salad, oils, dressings, deli, meat or seafood items and wines.

Value-packaged or tray-packed fresh asparagus can also be cross-merchandised with packaged salad.

Fresh and packaged asparagus can be cross-merchandised in other departments to provide a nutritionally complete meal solution.

HIGHLIGHT HEALTH

Health-related promotion is a definite method of gaining sales. Asparagus contains a host of health benefits:

- Asparagus is low in calories
- Naturally fat-and cholesterol-free
- Source of potassium, vitamin A, vitamin C
- Rich in rutin and folacin, which has been proven important in the duplication of cells for growth and repair of the body.

HANDLE WELL

Successful sales start with quality and a well-handled product. Asparagus should be bright-looking with closed, firm tips. The butt-end of fresh asparagus should be cleanly cut and sufficiently hydrated. Be sure to monitor the condition of water in display trays and change frequently. In the backroom, keep asparagus cold (34-36 degrees F) and moist (damp room)

prior to display. Fresh asparagus is not ethylene-sensitive but is susceptible to absorbing strong odors.

CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESSFUL ASPARAGUS SALES

- ✓ Quality product, correctly handled
- ✓ Visible displays
- ✓ Usage suggestions and cross-merchandising
- ✓ Variety in color and packaging
- ✓ Communicate health benefits

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Fabian Zarate - U.S. Office
fabianz@tamboosur.com
Richard L. Miller - U.S. Office
richardm@tamboosur.com
Blanca La Hoz - Peru Office
blancah@tamboosur.com
Angela Zarate - U.S. Office
angelaz@tamboosur.com
Adolfo Canazza - Peru Office
adolfo@tamboosur.com
Edwin Aranda - Peru Office
edwin@tamboosur.com
Claudia Benavides - U.S. Office
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California Avocado Commission



THE CALIFORNIA LABEL

California Avocados are locally grown in the coastal groves of California. Now in season, carry the avocado with the golden seal of approval — the California label. It's the symbol your customers rely on for the guaranteed homegrown taste, freshness and quality.

INTEGRATED MARKETING PROGRAMS

In 2016, CAC will continue to support retailers with merchandising materials promoting California Avocados to drive customers to your stores.

The California Avocado Commission (CAC) connects consumers to premium California Avocados through integrated marketing programs including advertising, recipe booklets, social media channels, dietitian programs, merchandising and promotional support. Our knowledgeable marketing team and personalized programs help grow your sales. Trust the leaders to bring you a customized retail program developed just for you.



CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS ARE SOCIAL

Consumers want to know where and when California Avocados are available. We can help get the word out and let California Avocado lovers know they are available in your stores! Our team of experts is ready to get to work with your online marketing personnel to develop an integrated promotion that's right for you!

INSIST ON CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS

Visit CaliforniaAvocado.com/Retail or contact your California Avocado Commission Retail Marketing Director for more information and to order your promotional material.



California Avocado Commission

12 Mauchly, Suite L
Irvine, CA 92618-6305



800.344.4333

949.341.1970

www.CaliforniaAvocado.com/Retail

dcruz@avocado.org

CALIFORNIA GOLD



Our avocados are locally grown in the coastal groves of California. Now in season, carry the avocado with the golden seal of approval—the California label. It's the symbol your customers rely on for the guaranteed homegrown taste, freshness and quality.



Call 1-800-344-4333 or visit CaliforniaAvocado.com/Retail for merchandising support and marketing programs to help grow your California Avocado business. Produce of U.S.A.



Brooks Tropicals

INCREASE AVOCADO CATEGORY SALES WITH SLIMCADOS®

With less fat and fewer calories*, SlimCados deliver a delicious choice for the avocado aficionado, the healthy-minded and the diet conscious.

Many Latinos and Asians choose SlimCados because they're the avocado of choice in their native cuisines.

The SlimCado is an attention grabber. Its large size complements any avocado display, and interests your value-conscious customer.

Avocados are a growth category. Wider selection expands sales. After all, you don't eat just one variety of apple, so why limit your sales to one variety of avocado?

New research says avocados keep the "bad" cholesterol at bay. Add that to research showing avocados containing the "good" fat, and you have a powerhouse of nutrition in one great tasting fruit. Still, doctors suggest that even with such nutritional benefits, avocados should be eaten in moderation (70 calories a day).

Those 70 calories go much further with SlimCados.

SlimCados' distinctive, light avocado taste can be added to:

- Green Salads
- Hot Soups
- Chunky Guacamole
- Sandwiches or Hamburgers

Or SlimCados can be simply enjoyed with



a squirt of lime. Any dish can be made into a little celebration with SlimCados. Besides being lower in fat and calories, these Florida avocados are also rich in vitamin A, high in potassium and cholesterol-free. SlimCados are food safety certified from the field to the store.

They are not genetically modified — SlimCados come by their size, lower fat content and fewer calories naturally.

POINT OF PURCHASE/SIGNAGE

Consumers want information about what they eat. Signage showing the SlimCados' nutritional information (highlighting the lower fat and fewer calories of the fruit) pays off.

Emphasize that this fruit is non-GMO and has been grown in the U.S. for more than 80 years by Brooks Tropicals. Let consumers text or scan to access tips and recipes for this fruit.

This online information can be branded for your stores.

DISPLAY CARE AND HANDLING

Display enough to sell in one day, roughly 15 to 30 pieces (depending on the traffic in your store).

When replenishing, rotate any leftover, day old fruit to the front.

Remember, avocados are sensitive to ethylene.

OPTIMUM SHELF LIFE

From hydro-cooling to single-purpose dedicated coolers set at optimum temperature

and humidity levels to refrigerated loading dock, SlimCados are shipped to your store at optimum freshness.

As the largest grower, packer and shipper of green-skinned avocados, Brooks Tropicals has a reputation for delivering this fruit with the best shelf life. SlimCados have approximately a four-day shelf life, with the fruit being ready to eat for another one to two days.

BACKROOM RECEIVING AND PREPARATION PROCEDURES

Store SlimCados by keeping their environment cool and humid, between 42° F and 48° F. Do not store below 40° F.

Optimum humidity is between 85 percent and 95 percent.

SlimCados are UPC- and PLU-coded as well as boxed in flats, doubles and bruces.

RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS

Add SlimCados to your avocado section and give your customers a choice of great avocado tastes. But don't stop there. Place SlimCados near other salad ingredients. These green-skinned avocados make delicious additions to salads.

When you're rounding up ingredients for your guacamole display, make sure to include SlimCados for a fresh-tasting dish.

VARIETY AND AVAILABILITY

Available June though January, Florida avocados are generally pear-shaped and green-skinned.

Their weight can vary from 14 ounces to a hefty 34 ounces.

Avocados will vary in size.

They can be from 4 to 12 inches long and up to 6 inches wide.

**Contains 50 percent less fat and 35 percent fewer calories than the leading California avocado.*

SlimCado and the Brooks Tropicals logo are registered trademarks of Brooks Tropicals, llc.



Brooks Tropicals
 PO Box 900160, Homestead, FL 33090
 305.247.3544
 305.242.7393
 www.brookstropicals.com
 info@brookstropicals.com

OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL ideas

The SlimCado season is in full swing by mid-July, just in time for summer's outdoor eating events. Look for promotional volumes of 12-count fruit in July and 10-count fruit in August — just in time for chopping up into the salads that make their yearly debut during summer barbecues.

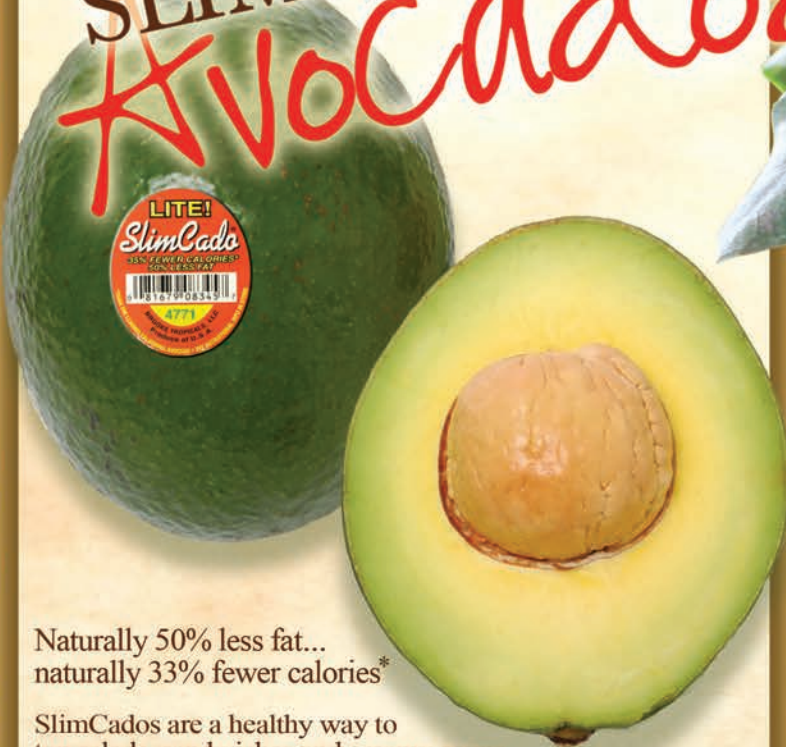
During demonstrations, garnish in-store cooked food with a piece of SlimCado. Any heated dish will slightly melt the SlimCado for an added treat.

Avocado displays can be a sea of dark green. Break it up with bright green-skinned SlimCados.

Guacamole displays work, but don't stop there. Salsa displays can also entice SlimCado buyers.

FROM OUR
AVOCADO FIELDS
TO YOUR STORES

SLIMCADO® Avocados



Naturally 50% less fat...
naturally 33% fewer calories*

SlimCados are a healthy way to top salads, sandwiches and creamy soups. SlimCados are the green-skinned avocados with sell-thru, coming by that reputation with a lot of hard work:

- In-house research and development
- Hydro-cooled straight from the field
- Food safety-audited fields, harvesting crews, packing and shipping facilities
- Quality control team
- Continuous Cold Chain® from our fields to your stores



when food safety counts

All that hard work delivers quality — SlimCado avocados with great taste and proven shelf life. Call today to get SlimCado avocados coming your way.

*compared to the leading California avocado



**BROOKS
TROPICALS**
GROWER • PACKER • SHIPPER



800.327.4833 • Fax: 305.246.5827
www.brookstropicals.com



BOOSTING SALES OF AMERICA'S FAVORITE FRUIT

Bananas remain as popular as ever. With their bright color, naturally sweet flavor, nutritional goodness and affordable price, bananas are an almost perfect food, and one of the top-selling items sold in grocery stores. In fact, over 90 percent of U.S. households buy bananas each week, yet the average retail banana transaction size remains at roughly 2.5 pounds.

To increase banana-purchase size and profits, Dole provides retailers with turnkey promotional programs as well as the customized components to ensure success, including: expanded usage ideas and recipes, point-of-sale materials, in-store posters, take-one educational materials, and digital and social channel support. We're committed to making it easy for retailers to give their consumers more of what they love. Contact your Dole representative today to begin increasing your weekly banana sales!



RECOMMENDED BANANA DISPLAY IDEAS

- **First impressions are important.** Shoppers are looking for a full display of bright, clean, healthy bananas. Keeping your display fully-stocked with beautiful, ripe DOLE® Bananas is the key to attracting consumer's attention.
- **Display placement matters.** A fully-stocked display of DOLE® Bananas prominently placed in the front-end of the produce department can draw shoppers into the section.
- **Offer choices and variety.** Some shoppers and consumers prefer bananas of a greener color — either for cooking or to enjoy later. Offering two-color stages appeals to broader shopper tastes and may increase the amount purchased. Additionally other exotic banana varieties displayed nearby also offer opportunities for a wider audience.
- **Secondary displays can also stimulate banana sales.** Secondary displays near check-out target bananas as a snack option or impulse purchase. A banana display can also boost sales when strategically placed as a complement next to breakfast cereals, peanut butter or dairy sections.



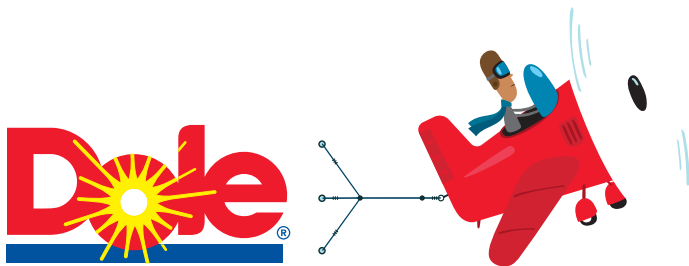


DOLE REFRESHES "GET UP AND GROW!" CAMPAIGN IN 2016

Back by popular demand, Dole's *Get Up and Grow!* initiative returns for 2016 with an exciting teamwork approach to health and nutrition. Dole was educated in 2015 that adopting the healthy living attitude came easier when doing it together with friends or family as a collective, shared experience. The collaborative effort between Dole Fresh divisions and the Dole Nutrition Institute challenges consumers to enlist their family, friends, co-workers and other groups to help build, encourage and support an active lifestyle and diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables.

Get Up and Grow! Campaign Elements

- Get Up and Grow! Summer Tour
- Interactive Healthy Living Pledge and Rewards Program
- Ongoing Interactive Emails to Participants
- Latest Research from the Dole Nutrition Institute
- Compelling New Fruit and Vegetable Recipes
- Trade Shows and Retailer Events



DOLE'S GET UP AND GROW! SUMMER TOUR

Dole is bringing back its Get Up and Grow! Summer Tour in 2016 with new cities, new event stops, new fantastic banana-included recipes and new hands-on experiences for families and kids. That means we're giving your shoppers more reasons than ever to visit this summer! The 2016 Tour hits the road on National Eat More Fruits and Vegetables Day on May 26.

Get Up and Grow! Tour Details

- More Than 380 Stops at Supermarkets and Events Across the U.S.
- Hands-On Activities and Giveaways to Engage Shoppers
- Onsite Samplings of New Recipes
- Local PR, Social Media and Blogger Support
- At-Store Retailer Programs

As always, Dole will offer local PR, social media and blogger support in tour cities and partner with retailers to collaborate on in-store promotions, point-of-sale materials, local community events and other activities to create awareness, excitement and traffic to your store.

Come grow with us in 2016!
For more information,
visit Dole.com/GetUpAndGrow.

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



Dole

- ★ One Dole Drive
West Village, CA 91362
- P 818.874.4000
- f 818.874.4514
- W www.Dole.com



• GET UP •

AND GROW!TM
WITH DOLE BANANAS



Are you getting the most from your banana program? As America's favorite fruit, bananas are one of the most popular items in the store year-round and especially during the spring and summer months.

Since Dole is the nation's number-one banana provider, we encourage you to keep a well-stocked display of DOLE® Bananas ready for your customers this season.

Contact your Dole representative to find out how we can help you make the most of your banana program this year. For more info on DOLE Bananas, please visit www.Dole.com

BOOST DOLE BANANA SALES WITH UNIQUE USAGE IDEAS!

One of the best ways to boost banana sales is by sharing unique recipes and usage ideas with your customers. And nobody knows more fun and delicious ways to prepare bananas than Dole. In fact, the culinary experts at Dole have developed dozens of exciting, nutritious banana recipes, including appetizers, entrees, side dishes, smoothies and more. Help your customers find new ways to enjoy their favorite yellow fruit at www.Dole.com

STUFFED BANANAS WITH CILANTRO SAUCE

PREP: 25 MIN COOK: 20 MIN MAKES: 6 SERVINGS

INGREDIENTS:

3 firm DOLE® Bananas, greenish-yellow peel
1/2 teaspoon chili powder
Salt to taste
3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
1/2 cup grated fat-free mozzarella cheese
Cilantro Sauce (recipe below)

Preheat oven to 400°F or grill to high heat.

Cut a deep slit through each peel into the bananas, lengthwise. Open the slit and sprinkle inside with chili powder and salt. Stuff with cilantro and cheese. Wrap bananas in foil. Bake or grill for 20 minutes.

Unwrap bananas, peel and cut each fruit into four pieces and serve with Cilantro Sauce.

Cilantro Sauce: Combine 1/2 cup fresh cilantro leaves, 1/4 cup sliced DOLE Green Onions, 2 tablespoons lime juice, 1/2 teaspoon chopped jalapeño and 1 garlic clove in blender or food processor. Cover; blend until smooth.





BERRIES

Naturipe Farms



DISPLAY IDEAS

Encourage more berry behavior and purchase intent by giving your customers every opportunity to include berries in their daily diet. Create “Peak of the Harvest” displays, cross-merchandise with complementary products, or offer recipe sampling and demonstrations. Customers continue to buy more berries and represent almost 20 percent of total fruit sales (see chart).

PROMOTION & ADVERTISING

- Create an “in the field” experience: display a complete berry patch, feature a grower and their family-farm story, offer consumer take-a-ways for more grower information.
- Cross-merchandise with products like dipping chocolate, or recipe ingredients for berry salsa
- Use health, flavor and convenience messages to help educate consumers
- Offer handling tips and recipes to encourage usage ideas
- Berries on promotion or ad are the best way to increase consumer awareness and create purchase intent

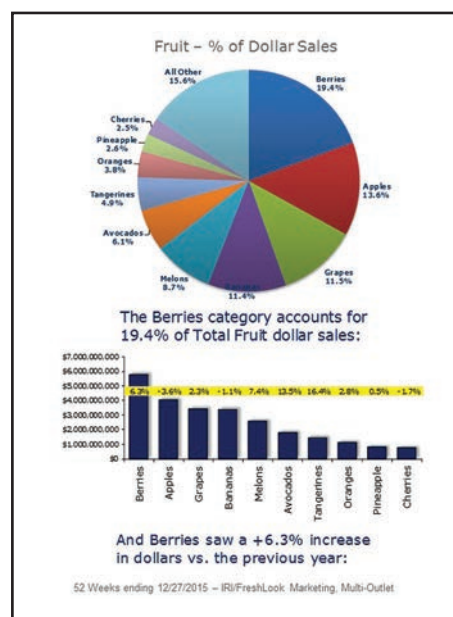
OUT-OF-THE-BOX IDEAS

Think outside of sweets: pair blueberries with avocados and chips for a salsa; or strawberries, brie cheese and crackers.

Promote a better breakfast with rice cakes, greek yogurt, honey and berries.

Dark and white chocolate are always fun for creative dipping.

Display with champagne or white wine for a celebratory berry beverage.



VARIETY AND AVAILABILITY

Naturipe® berries are available year-round! Take advantage of this fact, and get creative with holiday opportunities such as, long-stem strawberries for Mother’s Day or refreshing berry drinks for the summer months.

Create additional excitement and drive sales by featuring Naturipe Selections: the next generation of healthy and better-tasting berries through our international plant breeding programs. Highlight these great berry varieties with terms that draw consumers and stimulate impulse sales such as: “New,” “Proprietary Varieties,” “Best Tasting.”



Naturipe Farms
 PO Box 4280, Salinas, CA 93912
 831.443.2358
 www.naturipefarms.com
 sales@naturipefarms.com

Berries should always be kept at:

32°F

and stored/displayed with little break in the cold chain

Impact of in-store sampling

+656%

avg. sales lift for one day of engagement

Source: PromoWorks





GROWN NATURALLY

Grown Beautifully

GROWN BOLDLY

Naturipe® Farms, is an industry leader in producing healthy and delicious fresh berries and value added berry products. With a commitment to great flavor and quality, our farms and state-of-the-art facilities provide you with the best tasting products with a focus on continued improvement, innovations and uncompromised quality and food safety standards.

We are perfectly suited to be your Total Berry Solution.



sales@naturipefarms.com | 831.443.2358

To learn more about Naturipe, visit naturipefarms.com

Grimmway Farms

DIVERSITY OF CARROTS

- Carrots are the “go-to” fresh vegetable snack.
- Their crunch, color and sweet flavor are desirable across all age demographics.
- Immense fresh versatility — from your simple fresh snack, salad and sandwich topper, through your favorite dipper — carrots come in all ready to eat shapes and sizes.
- Carrots are the perfect complement to other cooking vegetables.

MERCHANDISING CARROTS

- Best-in-class merchandising starts with segregating the carrots into two occasion based groups — value-added carrots and whole carrots.
- Value-added carrots are best suited next to the pre-packaged salad and refrigerated dressing set:
 - Carrot cuts including baby carrots, shredded carrots and carrot chips are the perfect complement to items within this category.
 - Merchandising value-added carrots with other value-added items helps drive incremental sales.
- Whole carrots are primarily used as an ingredient for cooking and are best suited in the wet rack area adjacent to other cooking vegetables.

ASSORTMENT

- Baby carrots are the staple in every produce department and are key in driving usage and occasion.
- Whole carrots provide the key ingredient for most cooking applications.
- Maintain consistent assortment of value-added carrots to maximize year-round availability. These items are driving consistent year-over-year growth across the category serving time-starved consumers.
- Organic carrots, both baby carrots and whole carrots, are a must in the produce department as demand continues to increase ample supply driving overall sales:
 - Consumers are more educated about their food today and are looking for organic alternatives.
 - Organics continues to report strong double-digit growth.
 - An integrated merchandising approach is most effective.



POINT-OF-SALE MESSAGING

- Highlight the health benefits of carrots.
- Feature the trusted farm or farmer responsible for growing the carrot.
- Provide shelf-talkers promoting various recipes that direct consumers to your website or your supplier’s website.

PROMOTIONAL IDEAS

- Promote carrots regularly during the year.
- Work with your supplier to develop creative displays for key promotional carrot holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, Superbowl and Easter.
- Develop social media carrot campaigns that engage consumers.
- Integrate lifestyle and family messaging into the carrot set; for example, summer road trips, picnics, tailgates, New Year resolutions, and party appetizers.
- Cross-Promote with other produce items or grocery items:
 - Buy a 1-pound baby carrot bag and save \$1 on a bottle of your favorite organic premium juice
 - Buy a 2-pound baby carrot bag and save \$1 on your pre-packaged salad

DISPLAY CARE HANDLING

- Carrots should be maintained between 33 to 35 degrees F with a relative humidity of 98 to 100 percent.
- Carrots are ethylene-sensitive and should not be stored or transported with ethylene-producing items.
- Whitening of carrots is caused from air within drying the outer cells, otherwise known as oxidation, of peeled carrots. Soak the peeled carrots in ice water to bring the freshness and color back to the carrots.
- Proper handling of the cold chain is crucial to extending the shelf life of the product.



A family of *Growing* companies.™



Grimmway Farms

PO Box 81498, Bakersfield, CA 93380



661.845.9435

www.grimmway.com



A family of *Growing* companies.

From generation to generation



Back in 1968 when Rod and Bob Grimm set up their first roadside produce stand, the brothers made a promise; always take care of the customer. Almost five decades later, that promise has never been broken.



Grimmway Farms proudly maintains the family owned and operated heritage of outstanding quality you've come to expect.



www.grimmway.com



CAULIFLOWER

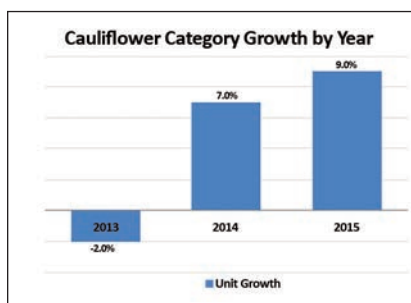
Green Giant™ Fresh

GREEN GIANT™ FRESH: CAULIFLOWER



Green Giant™ Fresh is an industry-leading fresh produce supplier — and the only fresh produce brand featuring Box Tops for Education™ clips. They offer 300-plus branded fresh items, and offerings in the Top 25 vegetable categories. A leading category expert, the company is committed to upholding the high standards its customers and consumers have come to expect.

INNOVATION DRIVER



Cauliflower is a growing, on-trend and in-demand item. Chefs and consumers, alike, are finding delicious new ways to use this popular, versatile and nutritious vegetable. Recognizing this rising demand for Cauliflower — both in retail and foodservice — Green Giant Fresh brought

innovation to the category by addressing consumers' desire for healthy meal solutions in a convenient, ready-to-use form. Last summer Green Giant Fresh expanded the Cauliflower category—and their extensive line of fresh value-added products—which also includes head Cauliflower and florets.

Their unique new Cauliflower Crumbles™ were developed and are produced with a patent-pending packing and packaging process, which keeps them fresher longer, and reduces shrink at the retail level.



One package of Crumbles is equivalent in size and price to a head of Cauliflower, but without the prep, mess or clean up!

RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS

- Cauliflower Florets and Crumbles can be displayed in the value-added section of the produce department

POINT OF PURCHASE/SIGNAGE

- Green Giant Fresh smart packaging includes on-pack messaging that offers consumers preparation/cooking directions, usage ideas and nutrition facts
- Recipe cards, tear-off pads, IRCs and channel strips are also developed for retailers to help bring awareness to consumers in an effort to convert consumer interest to sales

GROWING LOCATIONS & AVAILABILITY

- Green Giant Fresh Cauliflower — heads, florets and Crumbles — are available year-round and sourced from California's Salinas Valley during MAR-NOV and Yuma, AZ, from DEC-FEB



PROMOTIONAL & CROSS-MERCHANDISING IDEAS



- There are plenty of opportunities throughout the year to promote cauliflower by challenging consumers to be creative by using it as a healthier alternative to mashed potatoes, rice or pasta dishes

- Create displays featuring unique usage ideas or recipes to pique consumer's interest; encourage parents to use Cauliflower to create tasty and healthy meal options for kids like cauli mac 'n cheese, tacos, pizza and even desserts



- Promoting Cauliflower in your produce department is a year-round opportunity — from a grilling item or crunchy, fresh salad topper in the summer months, to warm creamy soups and holiday side dishes in the fall and winter months

DISPLAY CARE & HANDLING

- Cauliflower damages easily. To avoid bruising, store and merchandise stem side down to avoid moisture buildup on curds
- Cauliflower generally maintains a two to three week shelf life; remember to rotate product — first in/first out

BACKROOM RECEIVING & PREPARATION PROCEDURES

- Never break the cold chain. Keep Cauliflower in a cool environment to prevent browning
- Cauliflowers' freshness is optimal when stored or merchandised at around 34°F to 36°F
- Do not mist wrapped Cauliflower; mist naked Cauliflower lightly



Green Giant Fresh
Salinas, CA 93901



831.751.3800



www.greengiantfresh.com



jfanher@thegiant.com

Expand your Cauliflower Category with Cauliflower Crumbles™

Offer your consumers the next level in
versatility and convenience!



- Retailers that carry Crumbles experience total category growth, up +35% (\$) and +31% (units)
- Crumbles outsell Florets 1.5 : 1 with current everyday sales exceeding Florets at rate of 48% (units)

Green Giant Fresh

Consumers
love our Crumbles
for healthy meal
solutions!



Contact us today for more info: 831.751.3800 • GreenGiantFresh.com



CHERRIES

Chelan Fresh



SWEETEN UP CHERRY SALES

Fresh cherries excite consumers. They're seasonal, limited, and retailers can benefit from the get-it-before-it's-gone mindset. When it's Northwest cherry season, consumers are ready to buy based on impulse, and in best-case scenarios, cherries can outsell some year-round produce.

GET THEM OUT

Get cherries out of delivery cartons quickly and into clear pouch bags. Build large displays at the front of the store or department communicating fresh seasonal fruit.



When showcasing Northwest cherries, add something near the display to grab their attention. From checkered tablecloths to pie tins, cherry season is also summer season, so get creative.



LET THEM BE THE EXPERTS

Studies have shown that 8 out of 10 consumers who sample cherries prior to purchasing will buy them. Let them be the experts!



CONVENIENCE IS KING

Display this as an on-the-go convenience snack in fresh fruit or deli areas.

TIPPING IS ENCOURAGED

Be ready to engage with customers on how best to prepare and store cherries. If they know how to make them last longer, they'll buy more. Have tips on hand to share.

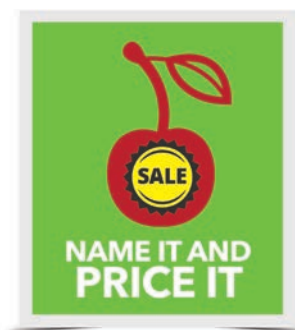
AVAILABILITY

Northwest cherries are available from early June to late August, with peak sales in July. Package types include slider bags, clamshells and cups of stem-free cherries.



DELIGHT YOUR CUSTOMERS

Super-sweet Orondo Ruby Cherries, a Chelan Fresh exclusive. Large fruit with an irresistible color.



Consumers want to know exactly what they are buying, so use signage that clearly names the product and variety.

Ensure the price is clear and accurate.

Chelan Fresh distributes multiple varieties of fine Northwest cherries

CHELAN FRESH

- Chelan Fresh
PO Box 878, Chelan, WA 98816
- 509.682.2539
- 509.682.2651
- www.chelanfresh.com
- comments@chelanfresh.com

WASHINGTON'S FINEST MOUNTAIN GROWN FRUIT.

Chelan Fresh fruit is picked from the fertile slopes of the Cascade Mountains and delivered fresh from the grower to you. Touching sky and earth, our orchards are cooled by crisp air lifted from the Columbia River.

CHELAN
FRESH

THE BEST TASTING FRUIT COMES FROM THE BEST GROWING PLACE.

chelanfresh.com



RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS

Winter is peak citrus season, and during these dark, cold months citrus displays can brighten up stores to drive consumer excitement and sales.

At Sunkist, we believe the most successful displays are not only eye-catching, but also educational. This is because education in the produce department is critical to drive sales, particularly for specialty varieties such as Meyer lemons, Cara Cara Navel oranges, Minneola tangelos and Gold Nugget variety mandarins — all currently in season.

POINT OF PURCHASE/SIGNAGE

One of Sunkist's new retail marketing tools is a fully customizable display bin, which can be digitally printed directly on corrugate. These new quarter bins are easily assembled and can stand alone or enhance existing displays. The new bins address retailers' needs for flexibility, offering the ability to quickly and fully customize for various promotional opportunities in cost effective quantities.



QUICK TIPS

- Capitalize on creative seasonal opportunities to promote citrus. For example, in addition to being a wonderful ingredient, citrus makes fantastic décor for Easter entertaining. Also, as a guacamole staple, display lemons and limes along with avocados for game-day entertaining and Cinco de Mayo.
- Leverage consumer health and lifestyle trends with the versatility of citrus. For example, display nutrient-rich Cara Cara Navel oranges in the pharmacy section to capitalize on consumers looking for natural cold and flu prevention options or market lemons in the household department to promote natural-cleaning solutions.

VARIETY AND AVAILABILITY GUIDE

Sunkist offers fresh, California- and Arizona-grown citrus year-round, but wintertime is peak citrus season. During the winter months, there are many specialty varieties available for a limited period, creating an opportunity to generate seasonal excitement among consumers. Sunkist's point-of-sale materials emphasize seasonality information to help bolster this peak-season enthusiasm.

PROMOTIONAL/ADVERTISING IDEAS

Families are looking for ways to snack healthier. Sunkist citrus offers an array of health benefits. Our promotional materials are aimed at emphasizing these benefits to consumers. For example, Sunkist has branded Cara Cara Navel oranges as The Power Orange® because they contain 20 percent more Vitamin C and nearly 30 percent more Vitamin A than regular Navel oranges.

Sunkist also offers materials promoting the

cooperative's S'alternative® program, which promotes sodium reduction to consumers by encouraging them to flavor food with freshly-squeezed lemon juice and zest instead of high-sodium seasonings.



Consumers today also expect a greater degree of transparency when it comes to the food they feed their families. As a cooperative of multigenerational family farmers, Sunkist has powerful stories to tell consumers about the care, dedication and heritage behind our citrus. To help retailers tell these stories in the retail environment, we created point-of-sale materials featuring our growers.

CROSS-MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES

Citrus is such a versatile fruit, making it a great item to promote throughout the store. Sunkist offers merchandising assistance to retailers via secondary display units, which give retailers the flexibility to showcase Sunkist products in the front lobbies, at the registers, or in the liquor/beer, seafood, water or pharmacy departments to drive incremental sales.



a cooperative of family farms since 1893™



Sunkist



sales@sunkist.com



MARKETED BY
Sunkist
GROWERS, INC.

Get ready for the Gold Rush,
with Sunkist® Gold Nugget
variety mandarins.

From Sunkist's family farms to tables everywhere.

Gold Nugget variety mandarins are deliciously sweet with a beautiful, bright bumpy rind. Strike gold by capitalizing on consumer excitement for this special, seasonal variety.

Like a cherished family recipe handed down through generations, our citrus is nurtured by more than 120 years of experience. At Sunkist, we're deeply committed to tradition but also to innovation and sustainability, both on the farm and in the marketplace – embracing fresh approaches for citrus lovers today and tomorrow.

To score this season's Gold Nugget variety mandarins, contact Sunkist sales: sales@sunkistgrowers.com.

To learn more about Sunkist,
visit www.sunkist.com

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a cooperative of family farms since 1893™



FRESH-CUT VEGETABLES

Apio, Inc.

THE LEADER IN FRESH-CUT VEGETABLES

Apio, Inc. is the innovative category leader in high-quality fresh produce by offering consumers easy and delicious ways to eat healthy. Apio's full range of GreenLine® and Eat Smart® bagged vegetables, vegetable salads and vegetable trays provide two of the strongest brands in fresh-cut vegetables. The GreenLine® brand leads sales of fresh-cut green beans within the U.S., and Eat Smart® is the leader in fresh-cut branded bag and tray sales. Apio products account for 14 percent of fresh-cut vegetable sales. Contact us to learn more.



QUALITY ASSURANCE — FROM FIELD TO FORK

Apio has implemented an extensive quality assurance and food safety program designed to minimize food safety risks and ensure top-of-our-field quality — from the farm to the consumer's table. A California Leafy Greens Agreement signatory, Apio utilizes post-harvest physiologists, an on-premises microbiological lab, and annual third-party food safety and quality audits. The company has also adopted a complete HACCP program, a vendor approval program, and both GAP and GMP/Food Safety Training Programs.

RECEIVING AND PREPARATION PROCEDURES

Fresh-cut vegetables should be received from adequately refrigerated trucks and transferred immediately into storage that is ideally cooled to 34 to 36 degrees F. Shelves should be well stocked and products culled with attention to code date.

CAPITALIZING ON FRESH-CUT VEGETABLES' HOLIDAY POPULARITY

Fresh-cut vegetable sales peak at various times throughout the year. Carrying adequate supply is essential during these weeks. Cross-merchandising value-added vegetables with bulk counterparts (e.g. fresh-cut broccoli merchandised next to bulk broccoli) can entice shoppers to trade up and lead to higher basket rings.

VALUE-ADDED VEGETABLE	PEAK SALES WEEK
Bagged Slaw	Easter, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day
Broccoli	Easter, Christmas
Cauliflower.....	Thanksgiving
Trays	Super Bowl, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years



HOW DOES ITEM COUNT STACK UP?

Nationally, an average of 44 unique fresh-cut vegetable items are carried per store, per week.

- Side Dish 24
- Snacking 7
- Meal Prep 9
- Trays 4

Specifically for trays, the ideal assortment includes two large trays (32-ounces or larger) and two small trays (8-ounces to 32-ounces) items.



THE FRESH-CUT VEGETABLE CONSUMER

Fresh-cut vegetables appeal most to premium, healthyliving couples and families. These consumers tend to cook fresh home meals, but they value products that serve as meal starters. Apio's Steam-in-the-Bag feature is ideal for these core consumers, as they can eat fresh vegetable side dishes at home with minimal preparation.



FRESH-CUT VEGETABLE HOUSEHOLD PENETRATION

53%

In the past year, 53% of U.S. households purchased fresh-cut vegetables

AVERAGE FRESH-CUT VEGETABLE BASKET SIZE

\$87.89

Compared to the average basket size with any produce item: \$59.74

AVERAGE VOLUME % LIFT ON PROMOTION

When promoted, fresh-cut vegetables' volume sales increase on average 76 percent. Promoting during their holiday peaks can help attract incremental sales.



76% lift

Sourcing Consumer Data Source: Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts® Shopper Insights Powered by Spire Performance Data Source: Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts® Total Produce Database 52 weeks ending 11/28/15; *Not including packaged salads



Apio, Inc.
 PO Box 727, Guadalupe, CA 93434
 800.454.1355
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HYDROPONICALLY GROWN BUTTER LETTUCE

Hollandia Produce, L.P.

Since 1996, Hollandia Produce has been helping retail produce merchandisers drive category innovation and year over-year-growth with its Live Gourmet® and Grower Pete's® brands of living butter lettuce. Packaged in its award-winning, protective clamshell with the roots still intact, our butter lettuce delivers longer lasting freshness, reduced shrink and increased margins.

MERCHANDISING ADVANTAGES

- Non-GMO
- Hydroponically greenhouse-grown
- Living Lettuce/"Roots-on" freshness
- Certified Organic
- Available year-round
- Unrivaled uniformity and quality

CREATE COMPELLING MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS

Our value-added lettuce is ideal for cross-promotions and multi-location merchandising.

For highest velocity, merchandise directly next to the other leafy greens and /or whole head lettuce with the wet-rack mist system nozzles closed to avoid clamshell wet spots. Also, try these ideas to grab shoppers' attention:

OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL ideas

Create a "Living Produce" Destination Set – Pair living butter lettuce with other complementary living produce like tomatoes, cucumbers and fresh herbs.

Create a Billboard Effect – Try stacking multiple SKUs of the Live Gourmet brand of living lettuces to create an eye-catching display.



- Place Grower Pete's Organic next to the leafy greens in the Produce department's Organic section.
- Create a refrigerated end-cap or free standing island for high velocity impact
- Display an opened clamshell among the facings to showcase its freshness, color, density and head size.

CROSS MERCHANDISING IDEAS

Create a sensory meal experience and generate increased sales across categories by combining living butter lettuce with other salad toppers, dressings and vegetables. Or, try these promotional options: Use on-package recipe and use-case promo tags to help cross-sell non-category ingredients.

- Use cents-off coupon promotional displays for complementary recipe items located



in other store department such as meat or dairy

- Use shelf-strips, talkers or wobblers to draw attention to key benefits like Certified Organic, Non-GMO, and Roots Matter!
- Offer LTOs, BOGOs and discounts for multi-brand purchases to increase trial and repeat usage.

HANDLING & STORAGE TIPS

- Comply with cold chain & storage temperature recommendations to maintain freshness.
- Adhere to printed package code dates and cooler and shelf product rotation standards.
- Avoid merchandising in the bagged salad showcase, where shoppers seek tear and pour convenience.



Hollandia Produce, L.P.
 PO Box 1327, Carpinteria, CA 93014
 805.684.4146
 805.684.9363
www.hollandiaproduce.com
info@livegourmet.com



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Vision Import Group

All consumers use limes; they cannot be overlooked. Limes cross over all cultures and cuisines. Although limes in the U.S. have been displayed as a tropical/ethnic item in the past, they are now mainstream. Aggressively promoting limes will yield increased sales.

Direct grower-relationships make the Vision Companies unique and allow us to deliver the highest quality produce and service at fair market price. Every one of our grower partners offer top-quality fruit and are held to the highest food safety standards/certifications. Our customers receive timely information on product availability, market price points, trends, weather and other variables that influence our commodities.

RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS

- Make displays prominent, and be aggressive.
- Utilize the shipping boxes, and show off the labels to increase consumer confidence in your quality.
- Display limes with recipes. Ideas include marinades, zesting for desserts, a squeeze of lime as a condiment.

PROMOTIONAL/ADVERTISING IDEAS

- Limes are extremely versatile — incremental sales and positioning will bring limes to a top-grossing produce item.
- Place in the butcher section and/or seafood department with recipe recommendations.

OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL ideas

Host a "Going Green" day at your store to increase environmental awareness while selling product and having fun. Promote locally sourced foods along with lime displays. The Vision Companies are very conscience of environmental impacts as our livelihood comes from the land.

Restaurants can increase community connection and fun with a "green" fundraiser or awareness event — promoting locally sourced foods and serving Mojitos made with our Mojito™ limes and fresh mint. Everyone will enjoy "Going Green."

Promote limes in a "Refreshing Drink Display" with other citrus and various drink components from sparkling water to drink mixes. This not only increases lime sales but adds ring from higher-end components.



QUICK TIPS

A little lime juice and water can prevent cut fruit or vegetables (like potatoes and apples) from getting discolored.

Limes contain unique flavonoid compounds that have antioxidant, antibiotic, and anti-cancer properties.

Allow a lime to come to room temperature before squeezing — it will release more juice.

Use limes as a healthy condiment on meats, fish and chicken — just a squeeze of lime can change or accentuate the flavor.

Fresh lime in drinks and cocktails can take a moment of relaxation to the next level.

- Place in a basket in beverage aisle with a reminder: "Don't forget the limes!"
 - Promote using fresh lime juice to enhance beverages from Lime-aid to Mojitos.
 - Special occasions are an opportunity to sell limes. Any occasion for home entertaining (Super Bowl, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Cinco de Mayo) is a great excuse to promote limes.
 - Promote during summer months for barbecues, family picnics and social gatherings.
- With a little direction, your customers can use limes every day of the week! For printable recipes, email us at info@visionimportgroup.com

DISPLAY CARE AND HANDLING

Remember: Good Limes Sell More!

- Clean and neat displays do wonders for lime sales. Undesirable fruit left on the stand becomes a negative focus, so ensure those few are removed so the beautiful product stands out. Limes should not be an item your customers need to pick through — quality fruit is available all year.



- Keep limes at 48°F; fresh limes can be held for up to four weeks after picking — as long as they are picked and stored at optimal conditions.
- To maintain optimal quality for an extended period, be conscious of the storage temperature in your warehouse and back rooms in addition to retail displays. Optimum is 48°F to 50°F.

VARIETY AND AVAILABILITY GUIDE

Seedless lime varieties include Persian and Bears. Persian Limes grown in Mexico have set the highest standard and are the most desirable.

Seeded varieties include West Indian, Mexican, and Key.

Availability: Historically, there is lighter volume out of Mexico in January through March — creating higher pricing than the rest of the year. Through the Vision Companies positive grower relationships, we are able to carry limes 52 weeks of the year from Mexico. When needed, we utilize our offshore relationships for additional sourcing.

The Vision Companies Sizing/Packs:

- 1-, 2-, and 5-pound bag limes
- 40-pound box ranging from 110 to 250 size (PLU sticker optional)
- 10-pound place-packed and stickered (packed by hand, highest grade and color level)
- Ability to pack loose 10-pound

For more information on how foodservice and retail companies can start or increase their lime sales, simply send an email to info@visionimportgroup.com



Vision Import Group
 Offices in New Jersey, Texas and Florida
 201.968.1190
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[Facebook.com/VisionImportGroup](https://www.facebook.com/VisionImportGroup)



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Ciruli Brothers, LLC

INSIGHTS FOR CATEGORY GROWTH

Mango import volume and availability has increased in recent years, and opportunities to increase mango category sales abound. Therefore, strategizing with accurate information is critical for retailers to develop and execute successful promotion campaigns.

PLAN. Promotional messages will be better tailored to boost sales if you have a solid understanding of your market, consumer demographics and the decisions that influence spending.

- A typical mango buyer spends more money per trip compared to an average shopper who does not buy mangos. Build plans that aim to retain your power buyers and attract new mango buyers to build product awareness and increase sales.
- Think about how you can impact sales by addressing buying barriers such as lack of knowledge about mangos. Engage your supplier or the National Mango Board (NMB) to identify the best approach.

SOURCE. Good information will help you pre-plan, adapt to a changing market, and adjust promotions as needed.

- Good suppliers will give you consistent and reliable crop data and will help you develop replenishment schedules to ensure your stores get fresh and suitable deliveries.
- They will also keep you apprised of opportunities to promote in volume or cut back in the event of adverse weather.

PROMOTE. Mangos are available year-round. Promote frequently! Consider not just the breadth and availability of SKUs but the messaging you are putting out as well. Promotions will be more successful if paired with comprehensive consumer education campaigns.

- Partner with suppliers or NMB to develop POS material that informs customers about mangos to make them more appealing. Messaging should include selection and ripening tips, cutting instructions and nutritional information.
- Offer in-store sampling and cutting demos to build awareness and generate impulse demand.
- Ensure quality is consistent to guarantee a good eating experience.
- Cross-merchandise next to fresh items with higher market penetration. Mango



customers are more likely to have fresh products such as avocados, pears and stone fruit in their basket compared to an average shopper (Source: NMB).

- Offer selection. Flavor, texture, appearance and size vary by variety. Promoting in different packs also lets you test SKUs.

DISPLAY. Don't limit shelf-space to the tropicals section and keep displays looking fresh with the following tips:

- Feature mangos in larger displays and in higher-traffic areas.
- Showcase different varieties to get customers to try new flavors.
- Organize displays so mangos are staged by variety and level of ripeness.
- Always have ripe fruit on hand. Ideally, fruit that is ready to eat should also be labeled as such. (Your supplier or the NMB can provide tools to help you develop the right message.)
- Keep fruit on smooth surfaces and don't stack too high or you'll risk bruising and damaging the mangos as they mature.
- Rotate displays frequently to keep mangos looking great; discard damaged fruit and keep softer, riper fruit on top.
- Sample riper fruit to reduce waste.
- ALWAYS display mangos at ambient temperature.

EDUCATE. Engage and develop produce staff to ensure the best back-room practices are enforced to help reduce shrink and safeguard product integrity.

1. Temperature. Holding mangos at the correct temperature is probably the most critical thing you can do to preserve quality and flavor post-harvest. Temperature affects mangos

differently, depending on variety and maturity. Keep mangos at the following temperature ranges depending on need:

- 56 – 65°F to ripen and add color
- 52 – 55°F to hold ripeness and color
- ≤ 50°F Avoid prolonged holding at low temperatures or risk chill injury

Move mangos directly into cold storage when they arrive as to not break the cold chain, and discuss adequate reefer temperature with suppliers to minimize chill damage.

2. Handling. Never display mangos on a cold rack. Mangos also do not require misting. Keep them at ambient temperature and away from ethylene-sensitive items.

3. Ripeness. Know which sensory signs shoppers can rely on to gauge how ripe a mango is. Skin color is not the best indicator because some mangos stay green when ripe. To determine ripeness, squeeze gently. Soft fruit is ripe and firm fruit is not. Buyers should be informed that they can speed up ripening by placing two or more mangos in a sealed paper or plastic bag on the kitchen counter for a few days.

APPRAISE. Are you analyzing data? Think back on your promotions and consider what worked well and where you can improve. Your mango supplier and NMB representative are good sources when reviewing performance and identifying benchmarks for future growth.

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- ☆ Ciruli Brothers, LLC
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MUSHROOMS

Monterey Mushrooms, Inc.



Stuffed Mushrooms



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BROWN/
BABY BELLA

PORTABELLA

OYSTER

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HELPFUL TIPS FOR RETAILERS

Display various pack styles side-by-side to give the consumer a wide selection.

Always rework mushroom packs each morning, and spot check throughout the day.

Be prepared for peak shopping hours between 3 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Evaluate often for maturity, quantity, packaging, weight, and grade. Report any issues to your Monterey Mushrooms sales manager immediately.

HANDLING & STORING MUSHROOMS

Mushrooms are an integral part of your fruit and vegetable program. Proper receiving and handling will extend shelf life and increase the vegetable's popularity on your shelves.

Follow these guidelines to get the best return on your mushrooms:

COLD CHAIN

Upon receipt, immediately move mushrooms from refrigerated truck to refrigerated storage between 34 - 38° F.

MOISTURE

Fresh mushrooms must never come in direct contact with water. Moisture will cause breakdown and discoloration.

HUMIDITY

Humidity should be in the range of 85% - 95%. Too little humidity can cause drying and shriveling. Too much humidity can cause mushrooms to become tacky and slimy.

ROTATION

Rotate inventory, referencing code date printed on each till/box. Remember: first in, first out.

VENTILATION

Ensure adequate cold-air circulation around the mushrooms.

STORAGE

Always store mushrooms in a refrigerated case away from odorous items (e.g. onions and garlic.) Mushrooms absorb the odors around them. Do not stack tills - mushrooms bruise easily.

The Blend

Use point-of-sale materials to give consumers the idea of blending mushrooms into some of their favorite meals such as burgers, meatloaf, tacos, burritos, sloppy joes, chili, meat sauces, spaghetti, lasagna, pot pies, casseroles and more!



Blended Beef and Mushroom Spaghetti



Blended Chicken and Mushroom Cheeseburger



Monterey Mushrooms, Inc.

- ☆ 260 Westgate Drive, Watsonville, CA 95076
- P 831.763.5300
- f 831.763.0700
- w www.montereymushrooms.com
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Idaho-E Oregon Onion Committee

RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS

USA Onions (homegrown in Idaho-Eastern Oregon) are versatile onions that may be used at any meal or in any favorite onion recipe. The appeal of USA Onions is their golden globe shape and their remarkably mild flavor. Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onions retain their texture when cooked — adding flavor and consistency to any dish.

When it comes to displaying Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onions, we say, “The bigger, the better.” The bigger and more dramatic you can make your displays, the better your sales will be. “From the heart of Onion Country, buy USA Onions ... homegrown in Idaho and Eastern Oregon.” In addition, good signage that distinguishes the different varieties and versatility of onions and onions grown in the USA will go a long way in increasing sales.

POINT-OF-PURCHASE/ ADVERTISING IDEAS

Make quick-idea recipes available near the onion section to encourage impulse purchases. Retailers should also take advantage of consumers’ ever-increasing desire to engage in social media. USA Onions has an active following on its Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Simply displaying the words: “Follow USA Onions” with the Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube icons will engage consumers and spark their interest to learn more about the product. Prompting consumers to use their smartphones in-store will provide them with recipe ideas and useful onion information in real time, and may increase sales. The Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee also has an all new “Farm to Table” video which can be viewed at any of the social media outlets and is available for displaying on in-store TV monitors.



VARIETY AND AVAILABILITY GUIDE

USA Onions, homegrown in Idaho-Eastern Oregon, are available in yellow, red and white varieties. Harvest begins in August with onion availability lasting from August through May. During the growing season, the Idaho and Eastern Oregon Onion region provides approximately 30 percent of the bulb onions consumed in the USA. A complete Sizing Guide containing details about colors and sizing can be downloaded at USAOnions.com

DISPLAY CARE AND HANDLING

USA Onions are known for their long shelf-life. You can increase profitability by reducing shrink if you follow these simple steps:

- Onions should be kept dry and unrefrigerated at retail. Good air circulation is critical for onions.
- Keep product rotated and remove separated and loose skins from the display bin.

BACKROOM RECEIVING AND PREPARATION PROCEDURES

When onions are received, they should be placed 1 foot away from the wall for proper air circulation. Air circulation is crucial for long-term storage of onions.

Remember not to use plastic pallet wrap on onions in storage, as the plastic wrap limits air movement.

Onions should be kept cool and dry, ideally at 34°F to 45° F with about 65 to 70 percent humidity.

Onions should not be stored with other produce that gives off moisture, such as potatoes.

CROSS-MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES

USA Onions have long been cross-merchandised with potatoes, which is a natural fit. Onions and potatoes go well together and are prepared together in a variety of dishes. Today’s consumer is experimenting with a variety of ethnic cuisines. Onions can be successfully merchandised with tomatoes, avocados, and chili peppers with Latin-themed promotion. Fresh salsa recipes and guacamole recipes displayed as tear-offs or on TV monitors will interest consumers and drive sales.

Grilling is another consumer favorite. USA Onions are the perfect size for topping hamburgers, and king-size onion rings will naturally have your customers thinking steak for dinner. For summer, try merchandising onions along with barbecue sauces to suggest a perfect outdoor grilling accompaniment.



**Idaho-E Oregon
Onion Committee**
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PAPAYAS, CARIBBEAN RED

Brooks Tropicals

Caribbean Red® papayas are the maradol-like papayas that have both a sweet taste and floral aroma. For cost-conscious consumers, these papayas yield a lot of great tasting fruit for the cost. For retailers and wholesalers, it's the papaya known for great shelf-life.

Cut in half, this fruit can be enjoyed with every spoonful. This fruit is a team player, huddling with other melons or berries in great-tasting fruit salads. Go beyond fruit salads. Any salad — be it coleslaw, kale, and even seafood salad — will sparkle with chopped Caribbean Red papaya.

Weighing between 2 and 5 pounds, this fruit delivers a lot of bang for the buck. It's a lot of fruit to enjoy, but enjoy you can in appetizers, salads, toppings for veggies and meats and desserts. Caribbean Red papayas are non-GMO.



OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL *ideas*

Caribbean Reds remind your customers of melons, so increase sales by forming gorgeous skirts of Reds around cantaloupes and honeydews.

Set up "the biggest bang for your buck" displays with Caribbean Red papayas bringing a whole lot of gorgeous red fruit to your customers' bargain-hunting delight.

Don't let your customer be overwhelmed by the fruit's size. Make sure they have smartphone access to recipes and tips.

A bucket of limes by the Caribbean Reds makes a great combination. Display a cut-in-half papaya with lime wedges, starfruit and a plastic spoon both in the produce section and the meals-to-go section.



RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS

Display papayas as whole fruit as well as cut in half and shrink-wrapped. Use both methods simultaneously for increased sales.

Generate excitement by displaying a large number of papayas — 15 or more pieces of Caribbean Red. Caribbean Reds won't disappoint when displayed by the melons.

Keep an eye on your papaya display. Be quick to sort out any fruit that is less than cosmetically appealing. This fruit is still great tasting, so be sure to use it in store to add a tropical taste to prepared fruit salads or blend into fabulous smoothies (or as Hispanics call them, batidos).

POINT-OF-PURCHASE/SIGNAGE

Your customers may not realize they can start enjoying the fruit at about 50 percent color. Ask your Brooks Tropicals sales representative for copies of ripening chart artwork to use in your produce aisles.

Ask Brooks for smartphone accessible tips on selecting, ripening and preparing Caribbean Red papayas. These mobile websites can be branded for your stores.

Brooks grows, packs and ships these papayas year-round with food safety audited fields, harvesting crews and facilities in Central America.

RIPENESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Caribbean Red papayas are ripe starting at 50 percent color. If the fruit gives when gently squeezed, it's ready to eat.

BACKROOM RECEIVING AND PREPARATION PROCEDURES

Caribbean Red papayas can be stored at 42°F to 58°F to minimize ripening. Storing them at higher temperatures will speed the ripening process. Storing at 40°F or below for prolonged periods may cause injury to the fruit.

DISPLAY CARE AND HANDLING



Papayas have soft skins, so they are delicate when ripe. Stack up to two or three deep. If using wicker baskets with uneven bottoms and sides, provide a layer of protection between the wicker and the fruit.

Do not mist papayas.

Keep them at room temperature. Caribbean Red papayas have a shelf life of two to five days depending on ripeness. If possible, display papayas with the larger more colorful end up.

Caribbean Red and the Brooks Tropicals logo are registered trademarks of Brooks Tropicals, LLC.



 Brooks Tropicals
PO Box 900160, Homestead, FL 33090
 305.247.3544
 305.242.7393
 www.brookstropicals.com
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Brooks Tropicals

The sweetest of the papayas, Solos are pear-shaped with bright orange flesh. Weighing about 1 pound, this fruit can be eaten starting at 50 percent yellow, when it gives to a gentle squeeze. Grown in Brazil, these Solos are non-GMO.

This fruit is a great treat for breakfast, lunch and dinner. For breakfast, Solos become the bowls to hold yogurt or cereal. No need to top that breakfast with fruit because the fruit is the delicious bowl. Or fill the Solo with berries for a fruity breakfast treat with every spoonful.

Fitting perfectly in the hand, this fruit is perfect for work lunches. Eat whole or save the other half in the refrigerator for a snack.

Solos are known for their dinner flare whether chopped in salsa or showing up as a bowl for a seafood salad. Ice cream is made extra special when served in a Solo or served with chopped Solo papaya on top.



DISPLAY

- Melon or tropical? Why choose? Solos' increasing demand deserves a spot in both displays. A basket of this beautiful golden fruit (with protection between the basket and the soft-skinned fruit) in the midst of your cantaloupe displays will grab attention that'll motivate impulse buys.
- Anything you'd fill a Solo with is a great cross-merchandising display idea. Make some room next to the berries, yogurt, limes, and cereal, to name a few. Adding a photo of Solos filled with the fruit being cross-merchandised with will close the add-on sale.
- Show how this fruit can deliciously contain some breakfast, lunch and dinner favorites by having sliced Solos wrapped with a couple of berries in the seed cavity, along with a spoon and a slice of lime.
- If you display bananas in your cereal department, add Solo papayas to the display. These papayas make a delicious eatable bowl for any cereal.
- Solos and salads go perfectly together. Any salad from Caesar to chopped fruit to veggie mix can sparkle with a Solo chopped in it. Chop half and use the other half as the bowl. Any salad ingredient display is enhanced by adding Solo papayas, including seafood salads whether crab, tuna or shrimp.
- Display Solos with a fruit ripening chart and smartphone accessible recipes and tips.



- Condiments rev up their party appeal when Solos make an appearance. In salsa, the Solo papaya's flavor nicely complements the tomato's acidic flavors. Make sure this fruit is a part of any salsa or relish display.

KEY POINTS

- **Taste:** Similar to a melon in flavor, it is juicy and sweet, and provides a fragrant aroma.
- **Selection:** Solo papayas yield to gentle pressure when ripe. Their skin should be smooth and free of decay.
- **Ripening:** Keep fruit between 70°F and 80°F until it reaches at least 50 percent color.
- **Ethylene Production & Sensitivity:** High
- **Shelf Life:** Once 100 percent yellow, the papaya should be used within two to three days.
- **Brooks Availability:** Year-round
- **Brooks Origin:** Brazil
- **Storage Temperature:** 50°F to 55°F. Solo papayas won't ripen if kept too cold.
- **Storage Humidity:** 85 percent to 95 percent

OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL ideas

Make sure your signage says Non-GMO for these Solo papayas.

A Solo papaya cut in half (seeds discarded) and wrapped with a slice of lime, a slice of starfruit and a spoon makes for a quick breakfast or treat on the go.

Do the dishes! Make Solo papayas the edible dish for almost any item in the "ready-to-eat" section. Whether acting as a delicious dish for berries, honeydew or coleslaw, the Solo is an eye-catcher that heats up "ready-to-eat" sales and follow-on sales in your produce department. Use one half of the Solo as the dish, and chop up the other half to toss into the salad.

Try a display near the seafood counter with a tantalizing photo of a seafood salad nestled in a Solo bowl.

Many in-store cooking demonstrations gain festive proportions if the dish is garnished with a slice of a Solo papaya. Slice from top to bottom or get a star effect with a slice across the width. The demonstration gains rave reviews if the Solo papaya acts as the demo's dish.

Yogurt looks like a dessert when served in a Solo papaya half. Add a display of this fruit and starfruit near the yogurt. Have a wrapped, ready-to-go Solo papaya half filled with yogurt and topped with a slice of starfruit nearby.



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FROM OUR BRAZILIAN
PAPAYA FIELDS
TO YOUR STORES

SOLO
Papayas



Great taste delivered from our fields in Brazil to your stores. Perfect for individual salads, breakfast bowls and dessert cups. These solos are backed with:

- Ongoing research and development
- Food safety audited fields, harvesting crews, packing and shipping facilities
- Quality control team

All that hard work delivers quality — Solo papayas with great taste and proven shelf life. Call Brooks today to get Brazilian Solo papayas coming your way.



**BROOKS
TROPICALS**

GROWER • PACKER • SHIPPER



800.327.4833 • Fax: 305.246.5827

www.brookstropicals.com

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Taylor Farms

For three generations the Taylor Farms family has delivered quality fresh salads and vegetables. We are strategically located in 12 regional processing facilities across the country including Mexico. Our efficient logistic program increases days of shelf life, reduces warehouse inventory and shrink. Smarter innovation, organic and conventional products, robust sustainability programs and integrated teams of people are just a few reasons why our produce tastes better, looks amazing and appeals to more consumers. Our family and your business can grow a healthier bottom line.

As the “clean and healthy” eating trends increase, Salad Kits are perfect for enabling consumers to feel confident in serving fresh healthy meals.

- Restaurant meals are declining as consumers are eating more meals at home.
- Restaurants’ modern menu’s shift their focus from meat to fresh vegetables and salads to meet consumers’ “healthy aspirations”.
- Consumers today are engaged with their food more than ever. Many site having less time for planning and preparation.
- Expanding regional profiles is on the rise as consumers broaden their taste and exploration of different foods.
- Health and Wellness consumers look to produce for solutions to meal preparation.
- Increasing the need for “easy assembly” or “fast” opportunities to prepare.

The Evolution of the Millennial Generation*

- Oldest is now 35 years old
- Largest group in the workforce
- 9 out of ten report preparing dinner at home 3+ times per week
Only 56% feel confident in the kitchen
- 72% say they want to be a better cook
- Shoppers of all generations are willing to pay more for premium distinctions

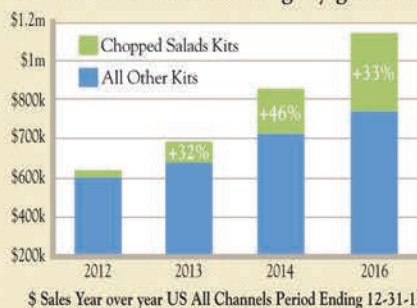
* NGA SupermarketGuru 2015 Survey

Complete Salad Kits Are the Primary Drivers of Salad Category Growth Complete Salad Kits Represent 23% of all Salad Category Dollar Sales

SALAD SEGMENT SHARE & GROWTH	\$ Shr 52wk	\$ Shr 24wk	\$ Shr 12wk	% Chg vs YAG 52wk	% Chg vs YAG 24wk	% Chg vs YAG 12wk
SALAD BLEND	29.90%	29.10%	28.90%	1%	2%	1%
ORGANIC SALAD	23.30%	23.60%	23.60%	8%	6%	6%
SALAD KIT	22.00%	23.00%	22.90%	33%	33%	31%
CLASSIC SALAD	11.10%	10.90%	10.90%	1%	2%	5%
SPINACH SALAD	4.80%	4.60%	4.60%	4%	2%	0%
GREENS	3.70%	3.80%	4.30%	8%	3%	2%
COLESLAW	3.40%	3.20%	3.10%	3%	3%	4%
PREMIUM CLASSIC	1.80%	1.70%	1.70%	-1%	-5%	-4%
GRAND TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	9%	9%	8%

Source AC Nielsen Scandata All Channels ending 1/16/2016

The Chopped Salad Kit introduction stimulated Kits and the entire salad category growth



Salad Kits are well positioned with changing consumer demands.

The produce department can leverage the salad kit consumer through:

- Effective cross-merchandising with meat and dairy departments
- In-store events and or sampling
- Signage at point of sale for “meal in minutes” suggestions
- Social Media campaigns



TAYLOR FARMS CREATED A \$400 MILLION DOLLAR SEGMENT AND RECHARGED THE ENTIRE SALAD CATEGORY.



INTRODUCING OUR TWO NEWEST INSPIRATIONS

Our family of chopped salads are inspired by our consumers who crave the unique blends we offer in each and every chopped salad variety.



1-866-675-6120

www.taylorfarms.com



SPECIALTY-CUT VEGETABLES

Mann Packing Company

Since 1939, Mann Packing has been a leading provider of innovative, washed and ready-to-eat fresh vegetables. Mann's Culinary Cuts® are a line of fresh vegetables cut into distinctive shapes — including Sweet Potato Ribbons, Butternut Squash Zig Zags, Finely Chopped Cauliflower, Shaved Brussels Sprouts, and Sliced Broccoli Clovers.



54% store fresh vegetables purchased vs. all other vegetable types

\$1692 average value-added veggie sales per store/week

80% of schools offering 2 or more vegetables per meal

10% more vegetables being eaten by children vs. 5 years ago



OUT-OF-THE-BAG PROMOTIONAL *ideas*

Mann's Culinary Cuts® come with on-shelf recipe cards to engage consumers

Mann's promotes CulinaryCutsClub.com for sharing consumer recipes and photos

Feature a Mann's Culinary Cuts® display for holidays as convenient products that pair perfectly with pasta and stir-fry sauces

Position Mann's Culinary Cuts® veggies as healthy and nutritious ingredients for consumers to make their own baked good and pasta-swap dishes

Encourage consumers to leverage the versatility of Mann's fresh-cut veggies by using them in "any" meal and as "healthy" substitutes in their favorite recipes

DISPLAY

Display with other specialty-cut vegetables in the produce department and in the value-added section.

BACKROOM AND HANDLING TIPS

- Shelf Life: 16 days, depending on temperature and humidity

KEY POINTS

- Fresh vegetables cut into unique shapes that inspire creativity for everyday meals
- Vegetables are washed and ready-to-use
- Versatile enough for multiple uses and carb swaps
- Ideal for a pasta swap, these fresh vegetables are all natural, low in carbohydrates, preservative-free and gluten-free



Culinary Cuts®

GLUTEN FREE • NON-GMO • ALL NATURAL



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CUTTING EDGE MEETS CUT VEG



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Brooks Tropicals

Starfruit (or carambola) is a sweet and tangy fruit that varies in size from 3 to 6 inches in length. It's a good source of vitamins A and C. Starfruit turns from green to yellow during ripening. During this process, the tips of this fruit's ribs will naturally turn brown.

Brooks' starfruit are now available on the West Coast including California, Texas and Arizona.

Although starfruit can be enjoyed as a nutritious snack, bite-by-bite, like an apple, it's often sliced into star-shapes for topping salads or garnishing an entree or cocktail. Chopped, it's also enjoyed in dishes adapted from its native cuisines of Southeast Asian like relishes and curries. Of course, starfruit in the Western Hemisphere finds its way into salsas, pastas, pies and veggie toppings. No matter the recipe, the cook always saves some star-shaped slices for the top.

As the largest grower and shipper of domestic starfruit, Brooks grows this fruit in food safety-audited fields, picked by audited crews, and packed and distributed in audited facilities. Brooks' starfruit is also non-GMO.

Health Note: Those with kidney problems should check with their doctor before eating starfruit.



DISPLAY

Showing how starfruit slices into stars drives impulse buying, stimulates snack and meals ideas and closes the sale.

These stars deserve multiple appearances in your produce aisle. Pack them in wicker baskets with star-shaped ends pointed out to accentuate star-shapes. Add a small basket of thought-provoking displays for on-the-go lunches, fruit salads and salsas. Break up the greens of different avocado varieties with these bright fruits.

Give in-house, chopped-fruit salads the star treatment with starfruit slices strategically placed on top and around the container's sides.

Just as you would add a couple of berries as garnish to cut fruit, go for some diversity and add stars to the mix. Slices of melons and papayas look even more appetizing with starfruit slices. Star appeal can be added to almost any "ready-to-eat" and "ready-to-heat" dish.

Help the impulse buy with easy access to tips on selecting, ripening and preparing. Ask Brooks about smartphone access — scan and text — to tips and recipes. These mobile websites can be branded for your markets.

KEY POINTS

- **Taste:** Similar to that of a tart apple when green, starfruit sweetens as it turns yellow.
- **Selection:** Choose a firm, crisp fruit. Browning on the edges is a sign of ripeness.
- **Ripening:** Store fruit at room temperature until most traces of green have disappeared and ribs turn brown.
- **Ethylene Production And Sensitivity:** Low
- **Shelf Life:** One week, depending on temperature and humidity. Once fully ripe, it should be eaten within two to three days.
- **Brooks Availability:** July to April
- **Brooks Origin:** Florida
- **Storage Temperature:** 48°F to 55°F
- **Storage Humidity:** 88 percent to 90 percent

Starfruit is also available in a clamshell called StarPac®, which prevents bruising during transport and customer handling. It stacks easily, reduces shrinkage by controlling humidity, tracks and scans more easily with UPC coding, and enhances ripening.

OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL ideas

On-the-go lunch displays sparkle with some star appeal. It's easy to add a starfruit to the brown bag or add slices to most sandwiches tucked inside a lunchbox.

Include tips and ideas for side dishes in barbecuing, grilling and tailgating displays. Starfruit can play starring roles in salsas, potato toppers, relishes, creamy salads and more. In a supporting role, starfruit can top almost any salad, fruit or vegetable dish.



Almost any in-store cooking demonstration can add to sales. A starfruit slice makes an eye-catching garnish for many sample dishes. This includes many drinks. Starfruit can be squeezed just like a lime for a great citrus flavor to add to tea, carbonated drinks, even fine wines.

Summer holidays (especially the Fourth of July) are all about the stars and stripes. Starfruit has the stars part covered. Make sure your customers know it.

BACKROOM AND HANDLING TIPS

Keep storage temperatures between 48°F to 55°F.

When adding to fruit salads, take a vegetable peeler and remove the brown tips of the starfruit. Slice the fruit, punch out the seeds, and it's ready to go. As starfruit turns yellow, it becomes sweeter. Display starfruit with varying degrees of ripeness.



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 PO Box 900160, Homestead, FL 33090
 P 305.247.3544
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FROM OUR
STARFRUIT FIELDS
TO YOUR STORES

FLORIDA

Starfruit



Leading Food Safety

First with starfruit that's food safety-certified across the board: groves, harvesting crews, packinghouse and storage facility.

Grown by Brooks for over fifty years, this Florida-grown starfruit has a refreshing, sweet-tart, crisp taste ready for your customers' dining tables. Available in bulk or StarPac clamshell packaging and with double-stack barcode labels.

Brooks Tropicals' high-scoring starfruit audits join the roster of other successful audits for Caribbean Red papayas, SlimCado avocados and more.



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View our
mobile
website



Groves
Harvesting Crews
Packinghouse
Storage Facility



Keystone Fruit Marketing

Sweet onions present an opportunity for incremental produce sales. The health and flavor benefits are an easy sell for consumers looking to cook tasteful food without salt and cholesterol. Sweet onions also offer ample opportunity for promotion and cross-merchandising with a variety of products in and out of the department.

Onions are the most consumed produce item in the world. Average annual onion per capita consumption in the United States is 21 pounds — a tremendous opportunity for consistent sales.

RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS

GO BIG! Capitalize on one of today's hottest trends — fresh produce. It's healthful, colorful and bursting with freshness. Nothing says, "Buy Me" quite like big, prominent bulk and consumer bag displays. Endcaps, stand-alones, value-added product offerings, multi-size strategies and consumer bagged displays offer consumers multiple buying options and ensure incremental sales lift!

Establish secondary display areas, especially during promotional periods, to increase sales and consumer awareness. Effective point-of-purchase materials and signage also help to showcase the nutritional benefits and outstanding flavor of high-quality sweet onions to consumers.

FLAVOR AND NUTRITION DIFFERENTIATION

Product differentiation gives consumers reasons to buy with confidence. Emphasizing the quality, flavor, and nutrition differences of

OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL ideas



Schedule a chef demo to show consumers new ways to use healthy onions to infuse flavor into recipes.

Develop a "Recipe Kit" promotion, which cross-merchandises all the ingredients, including sweet onions, to make an easy meal.

Authentic Sweet onions over regular cooking onions will promote higher rings at the cash register. The top two reasons people eat fruits and vegetables are taste and nutrition. Product education and tasting demos allow consumers to experience products and always generate sales lifts.

AVAILABILITY: YEAR-ROUND OPPORTUNITY

Being able to ensure a consistent sweet onion flavor profile is an important element for repeat and consistent sales. Retailers can now ensure their consumers an enjoyable eating experience every time. Authentic Sweet onions are available 365 days a year.

Consistently purchasing the highest quality sweet onion brands from only reputable industry leaders is the easiest way for retailers to provide consumers with confidence that they are buying the highest quality, safest, freshest and most flavorful sweet onions all year long. Forming a win-win relationship between vendors and retailers provides long-term, sustainable and uninterrupted supply. Use regional freshness as an educational vehicle to educate consumers on uniqueness of recognized sweet onion growing districts.

As consumers increase interest in buying local and knowing the grower, stores can capitalize on the fantastic regional information available for the various sweet onion regions. Creating brand awareness translates to consumer loyalty and repeat sales.

Authentic Sweet Onions Include:

- Sugar Sweets® available spring and summer
- Walla Walla River® available summer and fall
- Mayan Sweets® available fall, winter and early spring



Thirty percent of consumers say they would buy and eat more fruits and vegetables if they knew how to use them, so go ahead and help them. Stores can take advantage of various websites such as Keystone's Kitchen Website, the Vidalia® Onion Association's site, and the Walla Walla® Sweet Onion Committee site to provide additional information and resources

QUICK TIPS

Sell "A Healthy Way to Add Flavor": Onions are highly recommended for those trying to prevent cardiovascular disease, cancer and infections. Also, sweet onions are fat- and cholesterol-free, and contain very little sodium.

Ensure your sweet onions are SWEET! Get them from a reliable, authentic source.

Educate Store Personnel: Ensure store-level personnel are aware of how to store and handle the product, the difference in sweet onions versus other varieties, and usage ideas. They are the front line in helping to promote the product and provide information to customers.

for customers and to seek out new and creative promotional ideas.

Demos add excitement as well as an educational component. A good demo can not only spur sales that day but build consistent sales on a regular basis.

Emphasize Authentic Sweet onion's nutritional benefits and variety of uses. Promote as an ingredient for holiday or party entertaining, including Superbowl, Cinco de Mayo, and summer barbecues.

CROSS-MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES

Sweet onion usage is very diverse, and cross-merchandising opportunities are virtually limitless. Their sweet mild flavors make them fantastic on a hamburger or in a fresh salad — simply slice and enjoy. As an ingredient they are guaranteed to enhance your favorite recipes; sweet onions will take any menu offering to a whole new level! Sweet onions are an excellent ingredient added to any dish. Especially in guacamole, as part of salads, on hamburgers, in Kabobs, or with steaks.



Keystone Fruit Marketing

- ☆ 11 N. Carlisle St., Suite 102, Greencastle, PA 17225
- P 717.597.2112
- f 717.597.4096
- w www.keystonefruit.com

SPRING

SUMMER

SWEET ONIONS

AUTUMN

WINTER

STAY SWEET ALL YEAR LONG.



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TOMATOES

Village Farms

SPECIALTY TOMATOES THE PROOF IS IN THE PULL

Greenhouse Grown specialty tomatoes have driven significant growth within the category for more than a year. Specialty tomatoes are the largest growth segment according to Nielsen data due to flavor and color. Proven at retail, Village Farms specialties like Heavenly Villagio Marzano, True Rebel Mix, Cabernet Estate Reserve, and Cherry no. 9 out sold current category leaders on a weekly basis. During a 90-day trial, Heavenly Villagio Marzano out sold the No.1 category leader in three major chains.



VARIETY AND AVAILABILITY

Greenhouse Grown tomatoes have the luxury of being available 365 days a year — providing consistent supply for your customers.

Greenhouse Grown tomatoes are vine ripened for consistent garden-fresh flavor with every purchase.

Greenhouse Grown tomatoes use sustainable growing methods that require no pesticides or herbicides — making them healthier for people and the planet.

MERCHANDISING AND DISPLAY

Because tomatoes should be stored at room temperature, this makes them ideal for display in areas outside of the produce section. Try a display of grab-and-go bags in the snacking aisle of the store or near the register to promote healthy eating.

Village Farms can work with you to create a unique POP display for your store's format. RPC wraps, pallet wraps, banners, and shelf talkers all add value for consumers in the tomato category.

Village Farms' Heavenly Villagio Marzano tomatoes are the ultimate snacking tomato loved by all! Kids love to snack on the tender juicy little bites, and adults go ga-ga for their well balanced garden-fresh flavor.



OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL ideas

For a healthy snack display, showcase grab-n-go bags of Heavenly Villagio Marzano in the snack aisle or near check-out.

QUICK TIPS

Locally grown is hot! Promote locally grown fruits and vegetables with POS signage. Village Farms' new packaging features Texas Grown and BC Grown on every product. Did you know we are GMO Free? Look for seals on pack.



Greenhouse Grown

Village Farms

195 International Pwy,
Heathrow, FL 32746

407.936.1190

407.708.5763

www.villagefarms.com





the proof is in the *pull*

Greenhouse grown specialty tomatoes have driven significant category growth for more than a year. And due to flavor and color, they're the largest growing segment based on Nielsen data. **During a 90-day trial, Heavenly Villaggio Marzano outsold the category leader in 3 major chains.** Village Farms... a brand that moves.

Village
farms®
Greenhouse Grown®



Access Untapped Shoppers Ripe In Your Area

1

Buying power for Hispanics and Asians are expected to reach 2.5 trillion in 2015 and 5.3 trillion by 2020. They spend 41% more than any other customer, make 2-3 store visits per week, and choose stores based on high quality fresh produce. Turbana will help you identify ethnic shoppers in your market and make your store a destination!

Boost Tropical Sales With Current Customers

2

It's not just Hispanic and Asian shoppers that are looking for more variety in their tropicals. Thanks to the foodie boom, fusion ingredients are hot! Food shows and blogging have risen greatly. Over 50% of millennials refer to themselves as foodies. Mainstream shoppers are venturing out; feed their cravings and introduce them to new tropical flavors.

Tailor Displays to Your Shoppers

3

For ethnic shoppers, create bilingual displays and add staff knowledgeable in tropicals. For mainstream shoppers, education is key. Showcase food samples for inspiration and instructions on storing and choosing the right tropicals. Turbana provides tailored collateral materials, signage, promotions, and cross-merchandising opportunities to keep your store fresh for shoppers!



6
TROPICAL
UNSTOPPABLE



STEPS TO MAKE YOUR STORES' CALLS RESPONSEABLE

PRODUCTS

ALOE VERA

PRODUCT INFORMATION

CONSUMER PROFILE

in community.
an Indian
for kidney and
longevity
... it

Go High Tech

Access to demographic data, specific to your local market area, will help tailor produce orders and better cater to each of your stores' consumers. Thanks to Turbana's proprietary app, retail partners gain real-time key insights that enable a store to understand eating habits of shoppers and learn more about tropicals. The result: customized assortments and growth of the category.

4

One Stop Shop

Flexibility to mix different tropicals is essential to provide a customized assortment. Turbana offers the ability to mix a shipment of any of its tropicals with its bananas. This enables retailers to customize orders for each store's needs while reducing costs and ensuring the highest quality produce.

5

Partner With a Tropicals Expert & 360° Turnkey Solution Provider

Turbana provides a 360 degree turnkey solution to your store's tropical needs. We work hand-in-hand with retail partners to deliver expertise, marketing intelligence, staff training and tools to help stores build a successful tropicals program that increases overall sales.

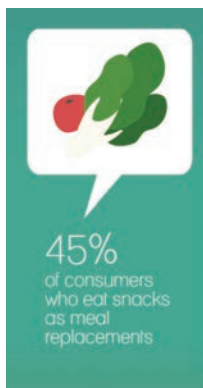
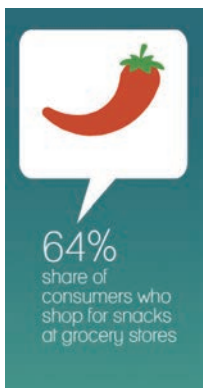
6



VEGETABLE SNACK TRAYS

Mann Packing Company

Mann's Snacking Favorites Trays are a great way for consumers to get their daily dose of vegetables. They are washed and ready to eat, featuring favorites like carrots, broccoli, celery, and sugar snap peas and delicious dips. All trays are convenient for both snacking and entertaining year-round.



DISPLAY

Display with other fresh snacking products in the produce department or in the value-added section. The trays are suitable for multiple displays — including vegetable trays, designated snacking sections, and an on-the-go section.

BACKROOM AND HANDLING TIPS

- Shelf Life: 16 days, depending on temperature and humidity.

KEY POINTS

- Great for moms on-the-go
- Lunchbox-friendly and make for a convenient addition to any meal or as a stand-alone snack
- Healthy and fun after-school, at-work, and on-the-go snack
- Vegetable combos go great with a variety of drinks and even fine wines
- Perfect for Millennials who are both super snackers (4-plus times/daily) and average snackers (2-3 times/daily)

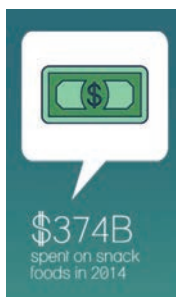
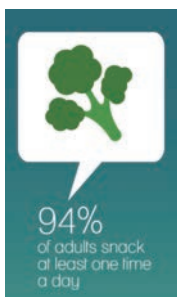
OUT-OF-THE-TRAY PROMOTIONAL *ideas*

Feature trays during back-to-school time, summertime snacking and quick on-the-go meal solutions

Position protein packed trays as meal replacements

Develop engaging social media contests/sweepstakes that drive consumer sales and interest

Build secondary displays for the weekends for shoppers looking for a quick in-and-out trip to the store



★ Mann Packing Company
PO Box 690, Salinas, CA 93902
P 831.422.7405
f 831.422.5171
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SNACK ATTACK!



WOMEN OWNED BUSINESS

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Thank You!



A family of Growing companies.™



FIFTEEN YEARS OF “MASTERS” SPONSORSHIP



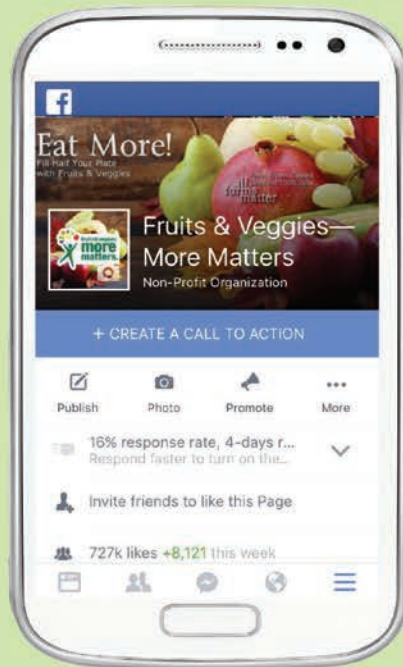
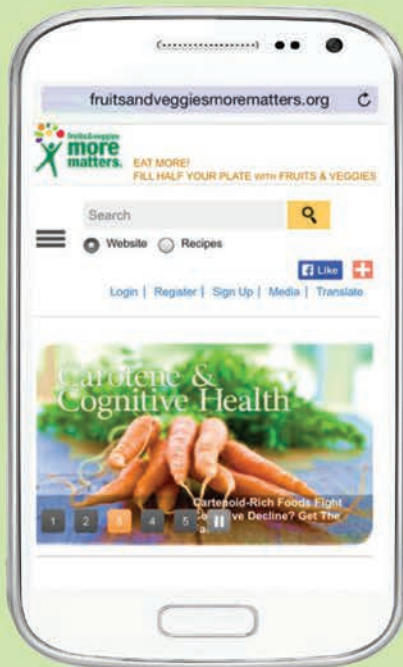
MASTERS OF MERCHANDISING CATEGORIES

- Apples
- Artichokes
- Asian Pears, Pluots & White Flesh Fruit
- Asparagus
- Avocado
- Avocado - Lightskin
- Bananas
- Bell Peppers
- Berries - Conventional
- Berries - organic
- Beverages
- Cantaloupe
- Carrots
- Cauliflowers
- Celery
- Cherries
- Chestnuts
- Chili Pepper
- Citrus
- Collard Greens, Kale, Mustard & Turnip Greens
- Corn
- Cucumbers
- Dates
- Dips
- Dried Fruit
- Dried Fruit & Nuts
- Dried Plums
- Eggplant
- Figs
- Fresh Cut Meal Solutions
- Fresh Cut Vegetables
- Fresh-cut fruit
- Garlic
- Grapes
- Green Beans
- Green Onions
- Greenhouse Tomatoes
- Greenhouse Vegetables
- Guacamole
- Herbs
- Hydroponcially Grown Living Lettuce
- Hydroponic Butter Lettuce
- Hydroponic Lettuce
- Kiwi
- Kosher Fruit
- Leafy Greens
- Leaves
- Lettuce
- Lighting
- Limes
- Mangos
- Melons
- Mushrooms
- Nuts
- Onions
- Organic Fruit
- Organic Vegetables
- Papaya
- Party Vegetable Trays
- Pears
- Peppers
- Pineapples
- Plantain
- Potatoes
- Pre-Conditioned Fruit
- Radishes
- Retail Merchandising
- Salsa Chips
- Salad Dressing
- Salad Kits
- Specialty Bananas
- Specialty Cut Vegetables
- Spinach
- Star Fruit
- Steam Veggies
- Strawberries
- Sun Dried Tomatoes
- Sweet Onions
- Sweet Potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Tree Fruit
- Tree Fruit - Pre-conditioned
- Tropicals
- Veggie Kits
- Veggie Snacks
- Whole Leaf Lettuce

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Ways To Maximize Avocado Sales



PHOTO COURTESY OF BROOKS TROPICALS

Expanding SKUs, innovative cross-merchandising and unique promotions will encourage increased avocado sales.

BY LISA WHITE

The avocado industry is in a unique situation these days, with demand often outpacing supply. This is because, in recent years, this fruit has become more of a staple in many Americans' diets.

"For the past five years, demand for avocados increased 10 percent annually; and in the past year, it increased 14 percent, which is the growth we predict moving forward," says LeighAnne Thomsen, marketing manager at Mission Produce, headquartered in Oxnard, CA. "However, supply is only increasing 3 percent."

This is the case despite the fact that there are a variety of sizes of avocados now available in the U.S., the most common classified by PLUs as large Hass avocados 4225 sizes 40

and 48, according to the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board's 2015 Shopper Path-to-Purchase study. Small Hass avocados 4046 sizes 60 and smaller are the next most available classification. The 4770 PLU code refers to jumbo-size Hass avocados 36's and larger.

Consumers do not necessarily follow the same definitions as the PLU system. In a recent quantitative survey by the Hass Avocado Board, 59 percent of heavy users of avocados preferred large avocados, 25 percent medium, 13 percent small and 3 percent mixed.

Those who purchase avocados the most,

including heavy, super and mega users, tend to be well educated and higher income consumers, according to the 2015 Avocado Tracking Study by Bovitz Inc., a Los Angeles-based research firm. The category is more developed in the western part of the country than the east.

"Heavy Users" purchase 37 to 119 avocados per year, while "Super Users" buy 120 to 209 avocados annually and "Mega Users" purchase 210 or more avocados per year, according to the Hass Avocado Board report.

In emerging markets where share of avocado sales is less than the share of U.S.





“We’re encouraging customers to consider carrying more SKUs and experiment with increasing display space. The data continues to show that it promotes a higher sales velocity.”

— Doug Meyer, West Pak

population (roughly the eastern half of the U.S.) household penetration of avocados is just 45 percent. And in developed markets (roughly the western half of the U.S.) including the markets where the organization concentrated its marketing support, household penetration is at 66 percent, according to Hass Avocado Board research.

INCREASING DEMAND

Size availability is often a factor of Mother Nature; therefore, experts say consumer preference isn’t always the key driver of sales by size. There are three groups of avocado sizes. Jumbos are 32’s and 36’s; mid-range are 40’s and 48’s and where the size curve peaks; 60’s, 70’s and 84’s are the smallest sizes. Most bulk business is with 40’s and 48’s.

The majority of bagged avocado business is with the smaller sizes, while retailers are more likely to use jumbo avocados as a value-added offering, since this type offers more fruit.

Research demonstrates the value of merchandising two sizes of avocados simultaneously to drive category sales at the retail level.

“The larger sizes preferred by many consumers can be marketed based on versatility of use, and a great display of beautiful California avocados adds to the overall appeal of a produce department,” says Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the California Avocado Commission, based in Irvine, CA. “The smaller sizes appeal to consumers who want an individually-sized avocado as well as to some consumers who either are used to small sizes or prefer their yield. Small sizes can be marketed at a more aggressive price point or for hot multiple pricing.”

According to Avocado from Mexico’s (AFM) *Source of Growth — Segmentation by Usage Study* from 2015, sandwiches are one of the Top 5 use occasions for avocados. Avocados from Mexico built the “Fanwich” campaign with Arnold’s Healthfull bread brand to

promote these meal options.

“Fanwich was [a campaign] designed to target consumers looking to include better options for health and wellness in the grocery cart and to inspire them to incorporate Avocados from Mexico on sandwiches,” says Maggie Bezart Hall, vice president of trade and promotion for Irving, TX-based AFM.

Avocado promotional discounts drive greater volume lifts than equivalent declines in everyday price, according to St. Louis, MO-based research firm Fusion Marketing’s 2015 Price Elasticity Study. And, contrary to some opinions, changes in everyday price generate only minimal interaction between large and small avocados. Interaction between the sizes is more evident with promotional discounts than with declines in everyday price.

It is important to note that avocado pricing is generally not a barrier to purchase, impacting only 15 percent of consumers, according to the Hass Avocado Board’s report. Suppliers are noting that one of the biggest trends in result of this price insensitivity is that retailers

are now carrying more avocado SKUs in the bulk section.

“We are seeing stores carrying as many as four SKUs of avocados,” says George Henderson, marketing manager at West Pak Avocado, headquartered in Murrieta, CA. “It is very encouraging to see the additions of bagged and organic SKUs being offered.”

There are typically two sizes in conventionally-grown arenas, with a larger sized offering as well as a smaller size. Also, more organic and bagged SKUs are popping up in today’s produce departments.

“We’re encouraging customers to consider carrying more SKUs and experiment with increasing display space,” says Doug Meyer, West Pak’s senior vice president of sales and marketing. “The data continues to show that it promotes a higher sales velocity.”

The most popular avocado sizes across all areas of the country and retailer types are the 48’s and 60’s, which encompass the highest



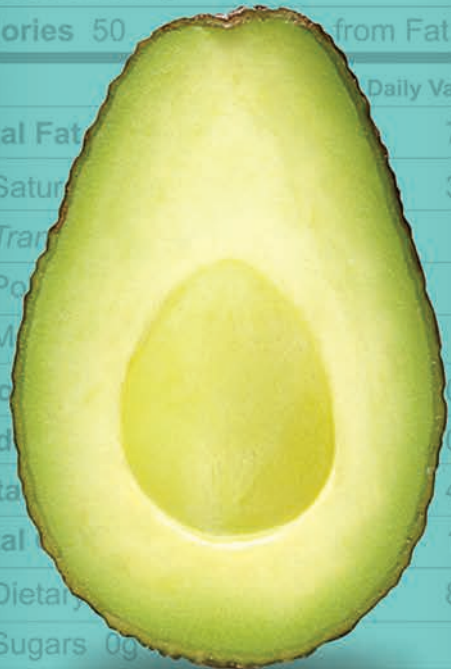
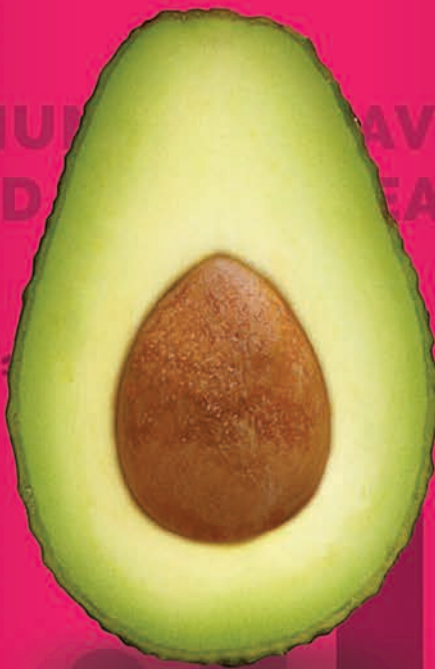
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M		
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Sod		0%
Pota		4%
Total		1%
Dietary		8%
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“Because retail is the base of our customers, and they can’t switch avocado sizes each week, we try to keep prices as stable as possible.”

— LeighAnne Thomsen, Mission Produce

percentage of sizes available on a year-round basis. But suppliers say there also is an opportunity to fill in and complement these programs with larger fruit, such as 32’s or 36’s, or smaller fruit like 70’s and 84’s.

“This can present a good value opportunity for retailers’ customer base and is something we’re seeing more attention drawn to,” says Meyer.

In terms of sizes, all are merchandised differently, depending on the retailer. “For example, Whole Foods Market often goes for the bigger avocados, since that’s what their customers are looking for,” says Thomsen of Mission Produce. “While the chains with Hispanic demographics are more apt to choose the smaller sizes.”

Mission Produce offers avocados in different sizes for its bulk and bagged program. Because prices fluctuate almost daily, the company’s focus is building avocado business on value-added and quality product.



Retailers understand the price volatility and will typically ride it out. While wholesale customers are more apt to buy based on price, so these purchases will fluctuate between large and smaller sizes.

“Because retail is the base of our customers, and they can’t switch avocado sizes each week, we try to keep prices as stable as possible,” says Thomsen. Mission Produce supplies fruit year-round and sources its avocados from five countries of origin that have different peak months to work through seasonality issues. While its

winter avocados are sourced from Mexico, the California season begins in February, and Peruvian avocados are best at the end of May or early June.

Calavo Growers Inc., based in Santa Paula, CA, is currently producing avocados in record volumes. “We improved our customer demand forecasting as well as our fruit costs,” says Rob Wedin, Calavo’s vice president of sales and fresh marketing.

Since July of 2015, its avocados have been large and extra-large, rather than the 48’s and 60’s that were previously popular. “Price plays an important role in wholesale and retail sales,” says Wedin. “Other key factors are ripeness, packaging and dependable service.”

Buyers of Homestead, FL-based Brooks Tropicals’ SlimCado brand are attracted to its larger size and cost per pound. “This tells the novice buyer that it’s not just a huge Hass avocado,” says Mary Ostlund, Brooks Tropicals’ director of marketing.

EFFECTIVE PROMOTIONS

Retailers are getting creative with avocado promotions that provide added visibility for this fruit, along with usage information.

King’s Food Markets (a 24-plus store chain headquartered in Parsippany, NJ) features avocados on its big bin stacks and promotes the fruit with guacamole ingredients during football season. This includes limes, garlic and large Mayan sweet onions. The stores also have a wooden cart to merchandise avocados with flatbread, tomatoes on the vine, limes and





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onions, along with dipping chips.

According to one store's produce manager, promotions are centered around ripening, and stores will bring in extra cases to ensure ripe fruit is on hand. It's important to plan ahead, since customers will typically shun unripened or overly ripe avocados.

"We like to cross-merchandise avocados if we get a lot of bins and point-of-sale material from wholesalers," says Brian Gibbons, produce director at Highland Park Market, a five-store, Connecticut-based chain.

The markets carry bulk and 48-count Hass varieties as well as organic bulk and bagged product. Highland Park Market held a big avocado contest last January surrounding the Super Bowl, creating a football field display for the fruit.

"I've heard 140 billion pounds of avocados sell during Super Bowl season," says Gibbons. "Still, this is not a seasonal item, and pricing has been great for the past two years."

Avocados are on ad for the stores at least once a month, and typically every other week all year long, due to a strong supply out of Mexico. With marketing and merchandising this fruit, it's important to be aware of supply. Generally, avocados from Mexico have three selling seasons. The season opens with a summer bloom that lasts from July through September. In October, the early season boom is ready. This selling season usually extends through December. The normal crop season runs January through June. Super Bowl promotions are often the peak volume for Mexico.

"This year, California avocados will maintain a steady promotable volume through Labor Day," says Wedin of Calavo.

Even though this fruit is a strong seller year-round, it's important to target the major selling occasions with store promotions. In addition to the Super Bowl, these include

Cinco de Mayo, the Fourth of July, Labor and Memorial Days, Halloween and Thanksgiving.

Filling in the gaps between these events is also key. "We encourage retailers to work in promotions specific to their stores that involve traditional advertising combined with other tie-ins, such as increasing display size and secondary display bins, cross-promotions, and in-store and digital couponing," says West Pak's Meyer.

AFM uses shopper insights when selecting promotional opportunities and partnerships. "Opportunities exist to help shoppers find balance without sacrificing taste through Fanwich," says Bezart Hall of AFM.

"Sandwiches have so many opportunities as they are eaten at home, on the run, at school, work or before and after practices," she says. "Avocado displays can be placed in front of dry or refrigerated cases to tie in fresh items from lettuce, tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, sprouts, dressings in the produce department to CPG items such as mustard, ketchup, drinks like bottled water, pickles, meats etc."

With the current healthy supply of this product, retailers can now more easily map out future promotions for avocados, which wasn't the case years ago. Some also are enhancing packaging programs with custom labeling.

For the current California season, Mission Produce is debuting its California Heritage sticker. This will be a small callout for the state's fruit. "Another thing we're experimenting with is a sticker printer that prints on demand," says Thomsen.

As avocados run through the packing line, this sticker will be printed with the size and barcode as well as different callouts. These messages can include ripening tips, specific holiday promotions or customizations for retailers.

Mission Produce continues experimenting

with different technologies, which can be tougher with bulk fruit since there's virtually no packaging. "We're always working with customers to help them display [product] properly and [provide] in-store communicate about ripening practices," says Thomsen.

EXPANDED EATING OCCASIONS

What has helped drive avocado sales in the U.S. is the fact that consumers are more aware of the fruit's versatility.

"Each customer has a sweet spot to drive sales volume, with avocados being a major part of produce programs," says Meyer. "If these products are on ad or at a reasonable every-day price, product generally turns more quickly. It's about figuring out the formula that works best for the individual retailer."

The biggest benefit is the ability to tout the healthful aspects of avocados, which helped propel its growth. Versatility is also a prime merchandising tactic. Avocados are not just associated with guacamole, but have been incorporated into many recipes.

"What's helped accelerate growth is the versatility of avocados and the nutritional benefits they offer," says Meyer. "Avocados apply to all meal occasions, from breakfast, to lunch, to dinner, to appetizers, to desserts, and even cocktails. It has appeal that spans the spectrum."

Avocados are also in the media more often. Recent coverage touts avocados as good food for nursing mothers and ideal as a first food for babies. "Many pediatricians recommend avocado as a perfect first food for babies, so supermarket registered dietitians (SRDs) could include that information in new parent packages," says Brooks Tropicals' Ostlund.

This fruit is even one of the most pinned food items on the popular Pinterest social media platform. Although top uses continue to be in guacamole and salads, the California Avocado Commission is seeing lots of new breakfast applications as burger toppings and blends as well as smoothies. In recent years, the CAC developed programs promoting California avocados for breakfast and snacking. The result has been a decent jump in usage — particularly for breakfast.

Brooks Tropicals' SlimCado's season runs June thru January. During the summer, promotions focus on how SlimCados are geared for outdoor eating as a mayonnaise alternative. In the fall, avocado marketing highlights tailgating and school lunches.

"When people think about their kids' lunches, they start thinking about their own," says Ostlund. "So lunch-to-go displays can be

gourmet, with adults giving their own work lunches some thought.”

Brooks Tropicals' online SlimCado recipes have the biggest hits during the holiday season. “SlimCados and tomatoes are a perfect combination, whether as additions to salads or topping a sandwich at lunch or an omelet for breakfast,” says Ostlund. “Also, SlimCado and tomato displays delivers results.”

The company promotes its line as an ingredient for salsas, relish and chutneys. Each summer, Brooks Tropicals and Concord Food Mix put together a guacamole sweepstakes. Last year, the entries quadrupled, according to Ostlund.

“Demand is universal, and packaging innovations will be big in the next year,” says Thomsen.

Many suppliers are expanding their avocado programs to bring added attention at the store level. For example, bagged avocados are becoming a bigger part of Mission Produce's business, which used to be primarily bulk. This factor is attributed to the increased usage by consumers. As a result, the company is working on a variety of bagging options.

The California Avocado Commission built a foundation of marketing support to encourage

“SlimCados and tomatoes are a perfect combination, whether as additions to salads or topping a sandwich at lunch or an omelet for breakfast.”

— Mary Ostlund, Brooks Tropicals

consumption of avocados overall since 1978 and recently enhanced its promotions of this fruit. “This year, we will be expanding our target audience and reaching them wherever they are to encourage them to purchase more California avocados,” says DeLyser.

The CAC will utilize traditional media and innovative, tightly-targeted new digital and experiential tools over the next several months. Its integrated marketing program continues to provide public relations support, nutrition communications and customer-spe-

cific promotions for retailers and foodservice operators. The CAC works with SRDs on a variety of programs, and this year will include content with ideas for busy Millennial moms, encouraging using California avocados in easy, appealing meals for children.

While avocado sales and consumption growth has been impressive during the past decade, there remains a lot of room for expansion. The growth of avocado consumption is anticipated, and this includes purchases of both bulk avocados and multi-avocado packages. There is room in the category for increases in household penetration, purchase frequency and units per purchase.

Bovitz's tracking study found that 56 percent of adults (ages 25 and up) said, “I love avocados.” In the California Avocado Commission's ad markets, that number jumped to 75 percent.

As long as the market continues to deliver quality avocados to consumers there is a bright future in store. “We foresee continued growth of bulk and bagged avocado sales,” says West Pak's Meyer. “The projections for increases in consumption continue to look very promising all across the U.S., with the highest increases coming from the east.” **pb**

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Berry Velocity



PHOTO COURTESY OF WELL-PICT BERRIES

Versatility, availability and health benefits make berries an easy sell.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

The health benefits of berries have been well established. It also doesn't hurt their reputation that kids love everything about them: their size, color, shape and sweetness. While many consumers associate berries with the spring and summer months, they can be enjoyed year-round and are the perfect addition to any holiday meal. As ready-to-eat snacks, toppings for cereal, yogurt and ice cream, as a key ingredient to add an extra touch of texture and sweetness to baked goods, berries are always welcome at the table.

While berries may practically sell themselves, maintaining well-stocked displays, using POS materials, ensuring proper handling to prevent bruising, and maintaining the cold chain (including refrigerated displays) help to keep berry sales brisk year-round.

HEALTH BENEFITS & PROMOTIONS

From the tiniest sweet blueberry to the largest plump strawberry, berries are packed with antioxidants, which help the body fight disease, reduce inflammation, maintain joint flexibility, and slow age-related memory loss. These health benefits should be stressed in the produce department — especially for kids who are already fans.

“Much of what we do every day is geared toward kids and families,” says Cindy Jewell, vice president of marketing for California Giant Berry Farms based in Watsonville, CA.



The Cal Giant berry family includes blackberries, raspberries, strawberries and blueberries.

“We actively support the Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools campaign with our Foundation that serves as the presenting sponsor for the Tour de Fresh by raising funds to support salad bars in schools.”

The Tour de Fresh is a four-day cycling event which raised enough money in 2014 to place 40 salad bars in communities across 11 states. It's a part of the company's long-term commitment to promoting good eating habits early and focusing on the health benefits of all fruits and vegetables.

“In the short term,” says Jewell, “we have an active section of our website that we constantly update and share on our other social media channels geared toward getting kids in the kitchen with videos and recipes that are fun to make and to eat. At different times of the year, our kids messaging shifts, like with back-to-school ideas and promotions, and Halloween ‘Scary Berries.’”

Christine Christian, senior vice president of the California Strawberry Commission based in Watsonville, CA, sees value in communicating the health benefits of berries to kids as well. The goal of the commission is to conduct research to support the strawberry industry in

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the state and to share that information with educators, among others.

“We provide educational materials to teachers, schools and youth organizations upon request. We also participate in community events within our California growing regions, such as the Oxnard Strawberry Festival, where we have a booth with activities for kids and families.”

The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, based in El Dorado Hills CA, raises awareness about the importance of eating a healthy diet, which includes berries. According to executive director Mark Villata, “As obesity rates rise and more attention is drawn to the importance of healthy eating, more Americans know they need to make healthier choices, but they keep tripping up when it comes to sticking with those decisions. One way the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council helps to bridge the awareness-to-action gap is by reminding parents, kids and school nutrition managers that little changes, like choosing blueberries over a breakfast pastry, can set the stage for a healthier way of life in the long run.”

Villata says the philosophy behind educating young people about the nutritional value of berries will help ensure inclusion on their parents’ grocery lists as well as in their school cafeterias.

“Today’s consumers are increasingly trending toward healthier foods,” acknowledges Jim Grabowski, director of marketing for Well-Pict Berries based in Watsonville, CA. “So many are already looking for nutritious options when they go to the store. With their delicious flavor and high nutrition, strawberries and raspberries can be an easy sell with just a little merchandising. As consumers now receive information from many sources, the message of the benefits of berries can be communicated not only through in-store displays and traditional media, but also by retailer websites, social media, and anywhere that the potential buyer may be looking for product information.”

HOLIDAYS & SPECIAL MEAL OCCASIONS

In addition to the everyday benefits consumers gain from adding berries to their shopping lists, special occasions also provide opportunities for promotions. “Occasions and holidays are always an opportunity to fit berries into the mix since they are available on a year-round basis,” says Jewel. “We are taking a hard look at how we can adapt many of our existing recipes and develop new recipes that fit into some of the trends consumers are following now, such as Paleo and gluten-free [diets].”

“Berries should be promoted regardless of meal occasion or time of the year, and as a way of conscious nutrition.”

—Manuela Leyba,
Argentinean Blueberry Committee

According to Grabowski, “Any event or holiday is a great time to promote berries. Now that berries are readily available 12 months of the year. With shoppers thinking about berries for brunch, weddings, picnicking and even gift-giving, strawberries are actually gaining in popularity over flowers when people consider gifts for spring events, such as Mother’s Day.”

“I would encourage produce managers to keep the message interesting and relevant to the consumer,” says Kyla Oberman, director of marketing for Naturipe Farms based in Salinas, CA. Oberman recommends holiday promotions as an effective way to promote berries. “For Easter, we find consumers are

looking for brunch and dessert recipes. Creative usage ideas are also a big hit. Our Naturipe’s Pinterest page is full of innovative ideas that consumers are craving.”

Manuela Leyba, of the Buenos Aires-based Argentinean Blueberry Committee, says retailers should take advantage of the year-round availability of blueberries and not limit promotions to any one season. “I don’t think berry’s consumption rate is affected by climate as you see with citrus,” says Leyba. “Berries should be promoted regardless of meal occasion or time of the year, and as a way of conscious nutrition.”

Inés Pelaez, manager of the Argentinean Blueberry Committee, works to make sure the availability of blueberries is well known in the U.S. “Argentina, as a country itself, started with several campaigns aiming to highlight Argentinean blueberries’ quality because of its climate, soils and access to water, in addition to the fact that we have very early blueberries — since our season starts some weeks (or months) before other South American countries. Our promotional actions included a graphic campaign at the beginning of the season, oriented to the U.S. market.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY FARMS

FOLLOW THE TRENDS

Trends in berry consumption can mirror shifts similar to other commodities, for example a continued interest in organics. Demand for organic produce has also affected the way retailers are merchandising berries.

According to Gary Wishnatzki, chief executive of Wish Farms based in Plant City, FL, "In addition to consumer demand for healthier products, organics in particular, the other trend that we're seeing with retailers that are driving the higher demand for organics is the way organics are being merchandised alongside conventionals. We see this happen when retailers shift merchandising from organics of all types in a special section to mixing organics throughout the department; the movement on the organics has picked up." Wishnatzki has seen retailers that took this step toward integration create a lot more demand and sales of organics.

While organics sales continue to trend upward, certain berry varieties are also enjoying increased popularity. "I think the most significant change in berries is the growth and change in blackberry varieties," notes Jewell. "Today's California-Giant grown blackberry is larger

with the perfect combination of tart and sweet, really boosting this berry variety with shoppers and with the foodservice industry as they add more blackberries to their menu offerings."

Jewell acknowledges the increased focus on blackberries in supermarkets can be attributed to the rise of their use in foodservice. "Typically when foodservice promotes specific products, you see an uptick in shopping behavior since research shows most new food trends begin in restaurants first with trial before consumers try it at home."

"Because consumer consumption rates have increased, we're working with retailers to move to larger pack sizes," says Frances Dillard, director of marketing for Driscoll's, Watsonville, CA.

"IRI data indicates that the berry category remains, by far, the most important category in produce," says Dillard. "Fresh berries have driven the growth of the produce category for more than five years. Year-round berry availability has expanded the types of consumption opportunities beyond just fresh snacking. In fact, we are finding that even fourth quarter holiday sales are very much in demand for special occasions."

POINT OF SALE OPPORTUNITIES

Produce executives have a number of resources available from growers and organizations that promote berries. "We help our retail partners by providing their shoppers with recipes, contests, care and handling information, and ways shoppers can use berries with other produce items — as we hope to increase overall consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables," says Jewell.

When consumers buy more berries, it's a win-win situation. Healthier eating for families and increased sales benefits all parties. "Ideally, we would like to help today's families eat less processed foods and more fresh. Much of our communication is about how to add flavor, color and variety to menus with fresh first by partnering with other produce brands to broaden our reach and impact," adds Jewell.

Sue Harrell, director of marketing for the Florida Strawberry Growers Association based in Plant City, FL finds allies in other state programs and agencies to help promote their fruit. "This season, we partnered with the Fresh from Florida campaign. More of our shippers are using the Fresh from Florida logo on their packaging. Consumers can identify items as a



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Florida product. They know it's the freshest and their local supplier of fresh berries in the winter months." Harrell adds, this labeling also satisfies another desire of today's shoppers who want to know where their produce is grown.

Berries are a perfect ready-to-eat food that are good for people on the go as Oberman at Naturipe Farms attests, "People love blueberries; they sometimes love convenience even more. Our ready-to-eat, fresh blueberry snack packs are a welcome fresh fruit, healthy snack that is great while on the go or to improve an existing meal, such as oatmeal or a salad. Berries absolutely appeal to the impulse buyer. The color and aroma of delicious berries are often enough to put the clamshells in your cart. Purchase intent increases more when displayed with complementary products, recipe cards and usage ideas promoted through POS."

MAINTAINING THE COLD CHAIN

Berries have a high perishability rate, so maintaining the cold chain is critical for maximizing profits. Any break in the chain, and berries start to break down quickly.

A retailer's best efforts to display and merchandise the fruit may be in vain if this is overlooked. As Grabowski at Well-Pict states, "The top consideration to ensuring the best berries and longest shelf life is to maintain the cold chain. Upon receiving a shipment of berries, it is key the retailer puts them directly into cold storage in the backroom and continues to maintain temperature at 33 degrees. Any break in the cold chain drastically reduces the shelf life and salability of the berry."

Jim Weber, produce director for Tadych's Econo Foods headquartered in Brillion, WI, stresses the importance of maintaining the cold chain. "We try to have blueberries and raspberries on sale once a month and strawberries on sale once a month," says Weber. "In March

and April, we run truckload sales where we sell the heck out of them."

Even large volume sales require the cold chain to be kept in tact. "You would really have to be a very busy place in a big city to have them unrefrigerated out there. They die too quick, plus they come a couple thousand miles away, so you have to turn them very quick."

Dillard from Driscoll's says as part of cold chain support, the company developed a closed-loop feedback system referred to as "The Delight Platform," which provides us visibility to see how our berries get to the retailer. We use this information to continually improve two key drivers of the platform: age and temperature."

MERCHANDISING & DISPLAY

The versatility of berries as toppings and recipe ingredients provides retailers with abundant opportunities for cross-merchandising.

Weber recommends cross-merchandising berries in the produce department with baked goods. "Angel food cakes, shortcakes, whipped topping, Reddi-Wip, especially when they're on sale, you want to have all these different items in there from other departments. We put blueberry glaze by the blueberries, strawberry glaze by the strawberries, there is a sugar-free strawberry glaze also; everything to give customers ideas on what to do with the berries other than just eating them."

For Jewell, the best way to maximize sales is by featuring all berry types together in one large display. "This practice allows the shopper more choices and adds to impulse sales while allowing the retailer the flexibility to maintain one specific destination for all their fresh berries. Depending on supply and ad features, they can adjust berry allocation within the display without changing overall size."

Produce executives who know their

customers' buying habits will have an advantage in merchandising their fruit, and keeping a close eye on displays is highly beneficial as well.

"I think retailers know their customer base and try to maintain displays effectively based on whether or not they are a feature item within the department," says Jewell. "Diligence is definitely necessary in maintaining displays regardless of the size to ensure proper rotation and eliminating any product that is overripe or decaying. Shoppers buy with their eyes first, so an attractive display will draw them in and get the berries into the shopping cart, whereas a poorly stocked display or marginal product will lose the sale."

Villata of the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council has seen retailers use refrigerated display cases effectively in their stores.

"In recent years, Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, Ahold, Wegmans, Safeway and a number of other smaller retailers added rolling refrigerated cases as secondary displays for berries, which increased space allocation," says Villata. "The trend among those looking to capture additional sales has been toward adding refrigerated displays both inside the produce department and in other sections of the store to take advantage of cross-merchandising opportunities."

Villata has also seen retailers have success incorporating existing tools, such as in-store signage, social media channels and e-newsletters to remind customers of the health halo berries wear so well.

GIVE THEM SPACE

Given the popularity of berries, the question becomes: are retailers devoting enough space to them in produce departments?

"When measuring sales per square foot, berries as an entire category tend to be under-allocated on space at retail," says Villata. "On the plus side, this means berry displays are constantly refreshed and often receive attention from store employees throughout the day. Conversely, it means that berry displays may not catch as many eyes and attract as many shoppers as they could if they were more expansive."

Grabowski at Well-Pict Berries says consistency and prominent placement will help berries reach baskets. "The best presentation for merchandising berries is a prominent front display zone, with a consistently full display. You want to avoid that picked-over look, and you want to put out a full variety of package sizes, strawberries and raspberries, conventional and organic. Then you have a destination berry category in your store that can drive a lot of impulse buys."

pb

Organic Salad Blends



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

Brands are meeting consumers' needs by offering flavorful, bagged-salad mixes.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Organic salad blends are trending toward “Goliath” sales even though these products are currently the “David” of the bagged salad category. In fact, while organic represented only 18 percent of packaged salads sold at retail in 2014, more than half (52 percent) of these were blends versus single leaf products, according to Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group’s FreshFacts. What’s more, based on 52-week data ending December 6, 2015 by IRI, also headquartered in Chicago, organic salad blends were up 9.5 percent in dollar sales and 11.3 percent in unit sales over the year prior.

“Organic salad blends are a big growth category for us,” says Jeff Fairchild, produce director at New Seasons Markets, an 18-store chain based in Portland, OR. “Out of the 30 SKUs of packaged organic salads we carry, 20 of these are blends. I think consumers look

for flavor in these products, such as the spicy taste that comes from greens like chicory and arugula.”

Another big motivation is new usages. “Educated customers are looking for greens that give them more options,” says Christi Rozema, produce buyer and merchandiser for Meijer, a Grand Rapids, MI-based retailer that operates more than 200 supercenters and grocery stores in six states. “This means not just salads, but for smoothies, juicing and cooking. This is a change from in the past



when customers basically used salad greens in salads. As a result, all the tender leaf products are growing, while lettuces like Iceberg and Romaine, although they represent a larger percentage of category sales, remain flat.”

Thirty-four percent of shoppers do use packaged greens for something other than a salad, based on proprietary research conducted in 2013 by the Seurat Group on behalf of San Juan Bautista, CA-based Earthbound Farm, which is owned by WhiteWave Foods Company.

“Growth in the demand for organic salads is being driven by Millennials, along with an increased sense of health and wellness among the general population,” says CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing for Dole Fresh Vegetables, in Monterey, CA. “Consumers now enjoy a wider array of organic salad choices, led by darker, more nutrient-dense greens like kale.”

BEST SELLERS & WHAT'S NEW

“Spring Mix is our best-selling organic salad blend,” says New Seasons Markets’ Fairchild.

Spring Mix represented 39 percent of organic packaged salad sales in 2014, up 11.4 percent from 2010, according to Nielsen Perishables Group’s FreshFacts. This product

contains a variety of tender leaves like arugula, baby green and red oak, red and green chard, baby spinach, frisee, mache, Lolla Rosa, tatsoi and radicchio.

“Growers control what goes into a blend based on how much of each green is available. So, the exact mix and proportion of ingredients in each bag can vary,” explains Cary Rubin, vice president of Rubin Bros Produce Corp, located on the Hunts Point Terminal Market, in Bronx, NY, which distributes Dole and Organic Girl organic salads.

Baby spinach is the top seller at Meijer, according to Rozema. This is followed by two blends, Spring Mix and Power Greens (a mix of baby spinach, baby red and green chard and baby kale sold by Earthbound Farm), in second and third, respectively.

“Our most popular organic salad among consumers is the Organic Cranberry Walnut Bistro Bowl Salad, which transitioned to our elevAte brand as Nutty Cranberry,” explains Tristan Simpson, chief marketing officer at Ready Pac Foods, Inc., in Irwindale, CA. This product contains a bed of Spring Mix topped with dried cranberries, candied walnut pieces, Feta cheese crumbles and raspberry vinaigrette dressing in a single-serve 4.5-ounce container.

The combination of Spring Mix and baby spinach rates as a register ringer with customers at New Seasons Market, coming in second in sales to Spring Mix alone.

Dole recently introduced four new organic salad offerings to its existing line. One of these is the Dole Organic 50/50. This is a blend of baby spinach and organic Spring Mix, combining baby lettuces, baby greens and endive. The 50/50 is the third most popular item for the company, after its Spring Mix and baby spinach.

America’s love affair with kale and this green’s nutritional halo is leading to its inclusion in organic salad blends.

“Overall, the kale category continues to grow and is very strong,” says Ashley Rawl, director of sales, marketing and product development at Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc., in Pelion, SC. “Our Organic Vita Blend is a blend of baby kale, spinach, chard and beet tops. It’s doing very well in the market.”

Out of 12 organic salad blends regularly stocked at Meijer, four varieties contain kale, according to Rozema. One of these is Kale Italia, a blend of baby kale, mizuna, arugula and radicchio introduced by Earthbound Farm last year.

SuperKALE Salad Slaw is the latest organic blend introduced by Oxnard, CA-based San

“The latest trends in organic salads include greater options utilizing darker greens including family-size bags for cooking and juicing, organic salad kits and organic salad bowls.”

— CarrieAnn Arias, Dole Fresh Vegetables



Miguel Produce.

“It contains carrots and a mix of shredded seasonal specialty kales to be a little more targeted for consumption raw as a salad, but it can also be used in cooking like a quick sauté for a side dish and added to a flatbread or pizza for a crispy topping,” explains Garrett Nishimori, marketing manager and corporate chef for San Miguel.

Nishimori adds, “Dark leafy greens like kale, unlike lettuce, do not need any gas flushing to prevent browning. Matching breathability of the packaging with the respiration of the product is and has been the key to maintain integrity and shelf life. We also grow the majority of our own greens. This allows us to control the quality all the way through the process especially when it comes to food

safety and freshness.”

This year, Dole will expand its Dole Organic line, which features organic versions of its most popular conventional salad blends, with four new products. Three of these contain kale. One is Organic Baby Kale and the other two are an Organic Kale Mix (baby kale, baby spinach, red and green chard) and Organic Super Spinach (baby kale, baby chard, mizuna and baby spinach). The fourth product is Organic Spinach Mix, a combination of baby spinach and arugula.

“The latest trends in organic salads include greater options utilizing darker greens including family-size bags for cooking and juicing, organic salad kits and organic salad bowls,” says Dole’s Arias.

Ready Pac Foods took the bowl concept and ran with it in its new elevAte line introduced last October.

“elevAte is a collection of non-GMO, gluten-free and organic Superfood salad blends. Flavors include Nutty Cranberry, Spinach•Pow, Sunny Caesar, Southwest, Kale Caesar, Blu•rugula and Go•Go•Goji and more,” says Simpson. “Like our Bistro Bowl Salads, the ingredients and salad dressing are packaged separately with a fork included for on-the-go eating. The packaging also explains the health benefits of the product with vibrant imagery and graphics to further engage the consumer.”

SELL MORE

Retailers can encourage customers to toss organic salad blends in their shopping carts with a combination of display and promotional strategies.

“We group all our organic salads together,” says Meijer’s Rozema. “Space allocation is roughly one-third since, for us, organics represent 34 percent of our total packaged salad sales. This compares to the national average of 24 percent. In the organics, blends lead the set.”

The organic salad set expanded from 2- to 4-feet to 8- to-12 feet over the past several years, says New Seasons Markets’ Fairchild. “This allows us to accommodate variety as well as different package sizes. All of our organic salads are in clamshells. Clamshells show and protect the product better than bags.”

A wall of packaged salads that are all green and all look the same can present a challenge to customers who are trying to find their favorite.

“We have been working with retailers to help their customers navigate this set,” says



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organic marketing ► salad blends



Samantha Cabaluna, managing director for Earthbound Farm brand communications. “One way to do this, for example, is through signage such as recipe ideas or flavor call outs. This has to be individualized depending on the retailer. Some stores have a clean-floor policy. Others may not, but even so, they don’t

want the set to look like a NASCAR race. A thoughtful plan that offers product call outs in new ways is important.”

Some retailers display organic salad blends in the prepared foods section of the store to increase visibility. “Our elevated line is optimized for vertical shelving at retail in fresh produce sections or anywhere there is a grab-n-go section,” says Ready Pac’s Simpson. “It is also perfectly paired with functional beverages and snack bars — making a great, guilt-free meal.”

Price promotions are effective at inspiring customers to buy organic salad blends at New Seasons Markets, says Fairchild. “We jump on board when suppliers ask us to participate in promotions. Otherwise, we will have some type of organic salad mix on ad an average of 35 weeks a year.”

At Meijer, “We promote both sizes (the 5- or 6-ounce and 1-pounders) at different

times — at least once per month,” says Rozema.

Organic salad blends do cost more than their conventional counterparts. “The average price difference between organic and conventional salad blends is \$1.17 — with conventional blends averaging \$2.80 and organic blends at \$3.97,” says Ready Pac’s Simpson. “All of our products are geared toward consumers who are looking for fresher options for day-to-day living. Of course, the organic salad blends reach a more health-conscious audience, but overall, all of our products are meant to give consumers the tools to make healthier choices.”

An innovative way Meijer promotes its organic salad blends is by demos and its Supermarket Dietitians. “We recently demoed Power Greens by using them to make smoothies in-store,” says Rozema. “Our Healthy Living team of dietitians posted recipes online at the same time. The dietitians have toured our suppliers and this helps them to promote these products even more effectively when they do television cooking shows, host educational programs and write blogs. In general, demos were a great way to sell the greens plus other smoothie ingredients such as bananas, apples and berries.”

pb

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State Of The Plate



Balsamic & Roasted Veggie Salad

PHOTO COURTESY OF RUBIO'S

Fresh produce is taking an increasingly large share of the fast-casual-menu pie.

BY JOHN LEHNDORFF

It's no longer enough for chain restaurants to offer inexpensive, mass-appeal fare served as rapidly as possible. Even a beer list and cushioned booths don't guarantee steady clientele.

A rapidly growing swath of the American population from elementary school kids to Millennials through Baby Boomers want more. They want simpler, healthy food that uses sustainable ingredients with transparent sources. They want more choice to fit the food to their individual needs. They are asking for more fresh produce.

It's a value proposition and increasingly Americans value what they find at fast casual eateries. It's not small potatoes. According to market research firm London-based Euromonitor International, Americans spent more than \$21 billion at fast casual restaurants last year including well-known national chains such as Chipotle Mexican Grill, Panera Bread and Five Guys Burgers and smaller regionals such as Sweetgreen (local and organic fare), Rubio's

(sustainable seafood), Pieology (artisan-style pizza) and Lemonade (seasonal California comfort food). They are eating away at the market share of traditional fast food.

Fast casual restaurants are generally defined by ordering at the counter, table delivery and a higher price point than fast food locations and perceived as offering fresher, more customizable fare. Fast casuals often tout locally sourced ingredients or house-made products like the pickles produced in each Good Times Burgers and Frozen Custard store in Colorado and apricot chutney at Georgia-based Fresh To Order. The segment distinctions are also blurring as sit-down casual chains start offering some fast casual service and even McDonald's experiments with a build-your-own burger.

Fresh produce may not yet be elbowing beef from the center of the plate — except for the occasional pan-seared cauliflower “steak” — but produce is everywhere on fast casual menus: on top of hot pizzas, pickled in sandwiches, caramelized on low-carb bowls and pureed in sauces, dips and dressings.

The challenge for fast casual operators is to make more kinds of vegetables and fruits palatable to a broader audience. That means that the days of dishing raw onions are over as kitchens amplify flavors through diverse techniques

including roasting, smoking, pan-searing, fermenting, grilling, pickling and frying.

Independent-fast-casual Motomaki in Boulder, CO, offers burrito-sized nori seaweed-wrapped rolls. Diners choose fillings such as salmon poke, softshell crab, banh mi pork and kalbi beef, plus an array of prepared produce including curry bell peppers, crispy onion, mango salsa, yakiniku eggplant, tempura-fried (or grilled) asparagus, kimchi cabbage, sesame bean sprouts, blanched spinach and daikon-carrot pickles.

PUTTING A FRESHER FINISH ON MEXICAN FARE

In Technomic's recent Consumer Brand Metrics report on how consumers rate U.S. restaurant chains on more than 60 attributes, Rubio's Coastal Grill ranked first among fast casual chains in “intent to return.” Headquartered in Carlsbad, CA, the chain has 194 restaurants in five western states. Ralph Rubio, co-founder of the chain formerly known as Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill, attributes some of that consumer loyalty to a change in philosophy.

“We took a stand about four years ago that we wanted to offer a cleaner and healthier product. We introduced bowls, added more

grilled seafood, and we're elevating the quality of our land proteins," he says.

He notes, Rubio's kitchens cook "un-refried" beans from scratch, make guacamole from Haas avocados, and chop Roma tomatoes, white onions, cilantro and jalapeños for salsa every day. Multiple colors of bell peppers, all dente for texture, are added to Rubio's grilled vegetable mix of zucchini, yellow squash and red onion with lemon juice and garlic. Chopped onion and cilantro mix is used as a "fresh finish" on tacos and other items.

The transition was not without its hurdles. "When we started adding Romaine to our burritos, we got a little pushback from longtime customers because it was a change. When we started 30 years ago, the most significant produce item on the menu was the cabbage we put on our fish tacos," says Rubio.

The restaurants still go through a ton of cabbage and Romaine, and red Butterleaf lettuce, was added to the Spring Mix. "It has a softer texture that goes really well with our grilled seafood," he said.

Rubio credits his 20-something children with encouraging him to cut back on carbs and red meat and to eat more whole grains and veggies. "They are just a lot smarter about what's in the food than I ever was at their age, and they are more interested in what goes into their bodies," he says.

FAST CASUAL LEADER:

Butternut Squash is up 140 percent in 2015. Additional drivers for increased produce utilization at fast casual operations include demands for healthier kids' menus and the fact that larger chains will have to post nutritional information — including all-important calorie count — on menus and in-store signage. Adding fruits and vegetables cuts calories and fat grams and, coincidentally, produce costs less per pound than most forms of protein.

"Fast casual restaurants using fresh produce have more of a competitive edge with the growing number of individually owned unique restaurants," says Katie Sutton, consulting chef at Food & Drink Resources, a Centennial CO-based restaurant test kitchen and innovation center. Among Food & Drink Resources' 2016 trend predictions: Diners will start to see complicated restaurant menu items with vegetables (especially beets) as the main focus.

Sutton expects the trend to continue "especially with the awareness on health, organic and sourcing so predominant among the population," she says, adding that the greatest challenge facing fast casuals is food safety from field to store.

"Fast casual restaurants using fresh produce have more of a competitive edge with the growing number of individually owned unique restaurants."

— Katie Sutton, Food & Drink Resources



Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Caramelized Onions



Tuscan Fresca with Grilled Chicken Breast Buff Bowl

TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF LEMONADE RESTAURANT GROUP.
BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY OF NOODLE AND CO.

According to the recent Datassential MenuTrends report, the quickest growing vegetables on fast casual entrée menus (in terms of percentage growth in 2015) were: Butternut squash (140%), cauliflower (80%), kale (41%), Garbanzo beans (35%), zucchini (35%), edamame (27%), baby spinach (25%) and beets (20%). Other produce items experienced 50 percent or more growth on menus over the past four years including shallots,

Cherry peppers, arugula, sweet potatoes, Dill pickles and fennel.

The produce-forward movement is so strong that Noodles & Company began offering noodle-free "Buff" versions of four popular noodle bowls in 2015. The Broomfield, CO-based chain with 488 restaurants in 32 states pitches nutrition in its menu description of the Buff Tuscan Fresca with Grilled Chicken Breast bowl:

"Grilled chicken breast and a load of delicious veggies like potassium-rich tomato, roasted garlic and red onion, tossed with olive oil and served on a bed of spinach, the wonder vegetable full of flavonoids. Topped with feta cheese. 300 Calories."

London-based Mintel Menu Insights reports the incidence of vegetables on all menus increased by 5 percent from 2012 to 2015 with cruciferous vegetables (cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts) experiencing the largest growth. According to Mintel Menu Insights, "Fresh" is a descriptor that resonates across generation and socioeconomic status." Although separate menus marked "vegetarian" grew by 66 percent on fast casual menus, these items are mainly marketed to "flexitarian" diners who are veggie-friendly.

Customization is a key fast casual appeal. The iconic three-unit dinner plate: meat plus starch and vegetable, is a foreign concept to many younger diners. They may have grown up on international takeout fare and a fluctuating "dinner" time.

The entrée isn't on the endangered list yet, but these fast casual diners tend to assemble meals from components formerly known as "small plates," "snacks," "appetizers," "side dishes," and toppers for salads, pizzas and sandwiches. Call them "the a-la-carte generation."

HOW GREENS GOT ON PIZZA

Back when Pieology Pizzeria opened in 2011, the fast casual eatery focused on pizzas customized with diners' ingredient choices and baked in a stone oven in less than three minutes. "We offered a limited number of vegetable toppings. All we had was a basic to-go salad. A lot has changed since then," says Richard Pineda, Pieology's vice president of supply chain.

The Rancho Santa Margarita CA-based chain now has 92 locations including 40 in Southern California. Technomic named Pieology the No. 1 fastest growing chain in the nation in 2015. Due to customer demand, Pieology introduced a build-your-own salad program in 2015, says Pineda.

"Customers start with a base of organic field

greens, Romaine hearts or spinach then they choose from dozens of vegetables and other toppings (including sunflower seeds, garbanzo beans and candied walnuts). So far, grape tomatoes are the most added salad ingredient. We offer five signature salad dressings,” says Pineda. The customization options echo the model proving successful for salad-based fast casual companies across the country including Sweetgreens and Mad Greens.

A funny thing happened when Pieology introduced the salad program and added a wider variety of produce items to the serving line. “The new salad toppings end up on the pizzas — including a lot of broccoli. People are getting very creative adding greens and lettuce to pizza after it’s out of the oven,” says Pineda. Pieology signature baking sauces include Buffalo, pesto and BBQ.

Pineda says the expanded menu allows the restaurant to cater to low-calorie, high-protein, vegetarian, vegan or Paleo diets as well as allergy concerns and really picky kids.

Food safety continues to be a primary concern among fast casual operators. “As we added more fresh produce, one of the things we’re proudest of is our third-party compliance by Fresh Concepts [Murrieta, CA]. They visit and test at our growers, distributors and stores and give us a lot of feedback,” says Pineda.

CHEFS EMBRACE THE FAST CASUAL BOOM

According to the Washington, D.C.-based

“The philosophy is that if it grows together it goes together; so spring crops such as asparagus and fava beans should be served with each other.”

— JoAnn Cianciulli, Lemonade Restaurant Group

National Restaurant Association’s *What’s Hot? 2016 Culinary Forecast*, chefs moving into the fast casual arena is the No. 2 trend overall in American eateries. One example is Alpharetta, GA-based Fresh To Order, which has nine Atlanta-area locations that serve chef-driven “fast fine dining” with dishes ranging from a Panini stuffed with grilled zucchini, onions and squash, olive salad, greens and avocado, to a vegan roasted corn and peanut salad.

Lemonade calls itself a “cafeteria,” but it’s far-removed from the antiseptic institutional feeding rooms of old. The Culver City, CA-based chain with 21 California locations was launched by Chef Alan Jackson, famous for fine dining in Beverly Hills. Lemonade opened six locations in the past 12 months and is expanding into Northern California in 2016.

“Lemonade was ahead of the curve,” says JoAnn Cianciulli, director of marketing for the Lemonade Restaurant Group. “Customers were saying they wanted convenient, affordable and tasty food that didn’t make them feel icky.”

In fast casual dining, that kind of diner crosses all the generations. “At lunch there are a lot of office workers, kids after school, and a lot of families and older folks in the evening. The Lemonade menu has good mac and cheese with beef to satisfy the guys,” she says.

The modern marketplace setup encourages diners to assemble a plate of 4-ounce portions from a broad menu of prepared dishes including snow pea “spaghetti” with corn, Cotija cheese and creamy lemon sauce.

Vegetables exclusively on Lemonade’s fall menu included wild mushrooms, pickled roasted beets, snow pea “spaghetti,” shaved Brussels sprouts, kumquat, Asian pear, Butternut squash, radicchio, kimchi vegetables, celery root, fresh horseradish and black kale.

“The philosophy is that if it grows together it goes together; so spring crops such as asparagus and fava beans should be served with each other,” says Cianciulli. Lemonade’s menu changes five times a year with a handful of always-there stalwarts like the house arugula salad. “If we took it off the menu, there would be a mutiny,” she says. That salad is topped with California figs, persimmon and Asian pear depending on the season.

Other perennial Lemonade menu all-stars include roasted cauliflower with golden raisins, almonds and curry, and pineapple chicken with green beans, coconut, jalapenos and jerk spice dressing, she says.

FAST CASUAL’S FUTURE IS PRODUCE-CENTRIC

It’s not a question of “mainstreaming” veggie-centric dining. The mainstream seems to be coming to the vegetables, fruits, greens, beans and grains. However, a reality check reveals there are still plenty of opportunities for growth. Subway Restaurants’ 2015 online survey conducted by Rochester, NY-based Harris Panel (National Eat Your Vegetables Day) about vegetable consumption by American consumers found 84 percent aren’t eating the USDA recommended vegetable servings a day. American diners don’t often eat vegetables, but when they do, about 65 percent preferred lettuce and tomato (and probably on a burger or simple salad).

However, there is hope. Mintel recently found that fully 75 percent of consumers (ages 25 to 34) surveyed in 2015 agreed they “enjoyed dishes that heavily feature vegetables.” **pb**

VEGGIE-CENTRIC DISHES ON FAST CASUAL MENUS

● **Black Bean Burger:** Black beans, rice, avocado, house-pickled jalapenos, lettuce, tomato, corn relish, horseradish aioli and honey mustard on ciabatta — Fresh to Order

● **Buff Japanese Pan with Marinated Steak Bowl:** steak over spinach, broccoli, carrots, shiitake mushrooms, sprouts, black sesame seeds, cilantro and sweet soy dressing — Noodles and Company

● **Hungarian Beet Sandwich:** pita bread, cream cheese dill spread, roasted and then fried beets, Caraway seeds, toasted walnuts, cabbage slaw, white onions and paprika — Clover Food Lab

● **Thai Garden Chicken Wonton Broth:** ginger-chicken wontons, broccoli, spinach, Napa cabbage blend, roasted

mushroom and onion blend and Thai chili vinaigrette with cilantro and sesame seeds in chicken broth — Panera Bread

● **Quinoa and Pico Salad:** quinoa, corn, black beans, tomatoes, jalapenos, onions and cilantro in lime vinaigrette — Corner Bakery Café

● **Grilled Gourmet Taco with Veggies:** grilled sweet peppers, onions, zucchini and yellow squash in corn tortillas with cheese, Hass avocado slices, red tomatillo salsa, cilantro and chopped onion — Rubio’s Restaurants

● **Kale Caesar Salad:** Romaine, baby kale, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, broccoli, Parmesan cheese, breadcrumbs and Caesar dressing — Lyfe Kitchen

San Francisco Bay Area Produce: Serving An Upscale But Diverse Market

WHOLESALE STAY SHARP BY KEEPING ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE TREND-SETTING, HIGH-TECH FOODIES AND EMERGING ETHNIC COMMUNITIES.

By Bob Johnson

As San Francisco added high-tech, biotechnology and medical research to an economic base that already included finance and a robust tourist industry, the city morphed into an upscale community with a median household income greater than \$75,000, according to the U.S. Census.

This region of relative affluence with an alternative cultural history led to a distinctive regional produce profile. A number of wholesalers built much, or all, of their business around supplying interesting and high-quality seasonal fruits and vegetables to the restaurants and retailers.

“In the restaurant business, people are very particular,” says Paul Weismann, president of Healthy Avocado, Inc., a Berkeley, CA-based wholesaler specializing in Mexican avocados. “Eating out is a big deal here. There is a lot of money, and people want fancy stuff. There are also specialty wholesalers here like Veritable Vegetable.”

Veritable Vegetable is a San Francisco wholesaler that follows a mission to be environmentally, socially and economically impactful in every aspect of its business. From rooftop solar panels, to diverting 99 percent of the company’s waste, to hybrid trucks and tractor-trailers.

According to stats from Golden Gate Restaurant Association combined with the U.S. Census, there is more than one restaurant for every 250 residents in San Francisco — the highest concentration in the country — and the industry developed rich relationships with nearby farmers.

“San Francisco has nearly 4,000 restaurants,



the most restaurants per capita of any U.S. city,” says Gwyneth Borden, executive director of the Golden Gate Restaurant Association, San Francisco. “In addition to great produce, San Francisco has great local seafood and meat. Sourcing locally and sustainably is often even of greater importance.”

The emergence of high tech also led to some of the highest housing costs in the nation, as the California Association of Realtors estimates it takes an annual income of \$268,000 to buy a median-priced home in San Francisco.

Even in Alameda County, on the traditionally working-class side of the bay, it takes an income of \$161,000 to qualify for the average home, which is 30 percent more expensive than in the nearby upscale Napa County Wine Country, and more than three times the national average.

This fast-paced gentrification remade San Francisco’s demographics as the city’s African-American population plummeted from more than 13 percent to less than 6 percent since 1970, according to the U.S. Census.

But the greater San Francisco Bay Area still has tremendous ethnic diversity with large Hispanic and Asian populations making up nearly half the residents of the two counties.

“We sell to Caucasians, a lot to Hispanic companies, and to Chinese customers because we get papaya, rambutan and longan [which is similar to lychee] from Hawaii,” says Weismann of Healthy Avocado. “We sell a lot to Chinese customers. In California, there are many Chinese people. They buy longan from China when it is available. They are even crazier about fruit than we are. We sell longan to wholesalers and one retailer mostly on the West Coast.”

Healthy Avocado ships and wholesales avocados as well as tropical fruits out of Michoacan, Mexico, from its spot at the Oakland Produce Market across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco.

HIGH-QUALITY WHOLESALING

Whether the produce is organic, ethnic, seasonal or all three, the San Francisco Bay Area is packed with consumers looking for interesting and flavorful fruits and vegetables.

“People are looking for new varieties,” says Paul Schumacher, president of Earthquake Produce Inc., located on the Golden Gate Produce Market. “They are definitely looking for high quality. They’re looking for flavor over appearance.”

Earthquake Produce displays photos of beautiful fresh limequats, kumquats, citrons and Melogolds on its Facebook page, but the feature entry is an article from one of the most liberal newspapers, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, on a new law enacted by the French Assemblée Nationale requiring supermarkets to give away unsold food.

"In San Francisco," says Schumacher, "we're a little more progressive."

The area is definitely at the head of the pack when it comes to embracing diets high in fresh fruits and vegetables and lower in animal fats. "Customers are less reliant on animal products, and they want the alternatives to taste good, not just look good," says Schumacher.

CULTIVATING A NETWORK

Earl's Organic Produce moved to a larger facility at the Market to handle business that keeps growing in the double digits.

"The San Francisco Bay area is kind of the capital of organic produce," says Earl Herrick, owner of Earl's Organic Produce, San Francisco. "The organic consumer is well traveled, well educated, and has a little more money. They are interested in healthy food, and willing to pay a little more for it."

Herrick got his start in 1975 selling fruits and vegetables out of a converted beverage truck at the Fulton and 10th Street entrance to Golden Gate Park, and the business has enjoyed steady growth to occupy 33,000

square-feet as the only 100 percent organic produce wholesaler at the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market.

"Two years ago, we expanded from one side of the building to a larger area on the other side," says Herrick. "We went from 20,000 square feet to 33,000. It gave us extra square footage for both warehouses and offices. We added a banana room."

The company's website bears witness to the strong presence of foodies with recipes for hot ginger Satsuma tea, persimmon and pomegranate fruit salad, as well as Satsuma cranberry sauce.

"We're continuing to grow," says Herrick. "We opened in 1988, and every year we've been here we've grown. We used to deliver to Sacramento, and now we go as far as Reno, NV. We used to go to Santa Cruz, and now we go down to Carmel. We have 10 trucks, and we mostly service retailers and some restaurants that are within a day of us. We've grown around 10 percent every year."

Earl's Organic Produce cultivated a network of more than 50 organic farmers in California — most of them are two hours or less from the San Francisco Market, and nearly that many in Mexico. But the organic sector was not always that ubiquitous.

"When I walked the market in the 1980s, organic was a joke," says Herrick. "Now everybody has something organic. If you don't have something on your shelves or menu that is

organic, you are behind the times."

Even before Herrick started peddling organic produce on a San Francisco street corner, Veritable Vegetable started a thriving business as a pioneer wholesaler sourcing produce for the natural food stores where organics first gained a foothold.

"Typical growth for us the past four or five years is 4 or 5 percent, but if you go back farther, it was double digits," says Karen Salinger, sales director and co-owner of Veritable Vegetable. "It's leveled out."

Veritable Vegetable sources organic produce, half of it from nearby Northern California farms, and distributes it to natural-food markets throughout most of the West and Hawaii.

"All the retailers we sell to are co-ops or independent natural food stores, like Bi-Rite Market and Rainbow Grocery Cooperative, Inc.," says Salinger. "Organic has become so ubiquitous, you can buy it at Safeway, Walmart, Costco, Target or Trader Joe's."

The San Francisco Bay area has not been entirely taken over by new-age foodies craving exotic fruits and vegetables grown locally, according to the USDA organic manual.

"We don't get much demand for organic," says Robert Bulawsky, owner of Banner Fruit Company, Golden Gate Produce Market. "We're doing a lot of berries out of California and Mexico, melons out of Mexico, citrus out of California, and a lot of apples out of the

THE PRICE WAS RIGHT FOR MARKET EXPANSION

The importance of fresh fruits and vegetables in San Francisco culture is evidenced by the city's willingness — as the booming high-tech and finance industries take real estate values to the stratosphere — to offer a discount on more land to the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market.

"We began a new 60-year lease with the City of San Francisco in 2013," says Michael Janis, general manager at the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market, located in the city. "It was a real significant year for the San Francisco Produce Market. It's extraordinary that San Francisco continued its commitment to this sort of business. With real estate off the charts, they even added 3 acres of adjacent property. We're pushing 25 acres now. The city did a fabulous job of understanding the need to do this in an affordable way."

An expanded market will allow for greater diversity in the businesses and services

available to the public. "The new San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market will allow for more space and a complete foodservice hub that can offer farmers-market-type merchants to service retail-type consumers," says Calvin Leong, vice president at San Francisco-based wholesaler, VegiWorks, Inc.

The first phase of the Market's refurbishing and expanding was a new building constructed to strict environmental standards. "In 2015, we opened our 82,000 square-foot LEED gold building," says Janis. "A LEED gold building for produce distribution is unique. It's everything from using material that had been on the site, building a very efficient HV system, and a number of other things. We're going to be doing a phase at a time over the years — rerouting roads around the facility, and refurbishing or redoing existing buildings."

This new building, which opened at the San Francisco Market last year, is testimony to the demand for produce that is sourced

locally, organic, or both.

"Our goal is to continue to make improvements to the market, so our businesses can grow, and new businesses can be added," says Janis. "Our new building is 100 percent full, and our existing market continues to be full. We're seeing strong growth in organics, and strong growth in local."

"One of our new businesses is Good Eggs. They bill themselves as a farmers market. It's eggs, flour or meat in addition to produce. You make out your list online, and they deliver to the Bay Area. Earl's Organic Produce also expanded significantly on the market."

Good Eggs, which is a regional online grocery platform, makes home or office deliveries of local organic produce, as well as dairy, meats, deli and bakery items, to upscale locations across the Golden Gate Bridge in Marin County, down the Peninsula toward Silicon Valley, and across the Bay Bridge to Berkeley and Walnut Creek. **pb**

Northwest.”

Banner Fruit was among the original businesses when the Golden Gate Produce Market opened in South San Francisco more than 50 years ago.

“The South San Francisco area is the strongest wholesale market in the Bay area,” says Bulawsky. “It is viable and ethnically diverse. We’re a third generation family business. We were one of the founders when this market [Golden Gate] opened in 1963.”

There is some produce export activity coming out of the San Francisco Bay Area markets, but it is limited. “We do them all — grocery stores, restaurants and exports,” says Bulawsky. “Only about 15 percent leaves the state.”

EXPANDED REACH

Export activity is limited in comparison to Los Angeles, which has location advantages and one of the largest modern ports in the world.

“Los Angeles is a hub,” says Weismann of Healthy Avocado. “They ship easily to Las Vegas and Denver, and they’re closer to Mexico. We ship to wherever we can find customers. A lot of it is to the East Coast, and some to the

West Coast. We export avocados to Japan, and we’re working on going to China.”

Weismann’s core business has steadily grown along with the increase in shipments to the U.S. of Mexican avocados, which have grown over the past decade from 76 million to 1.3 billion pounds.

“We’re selling avocados in more parts of the country than we were when I started in 2002,” says Weismann. “Now everybody buys them. There’s a big increase in the number of wholesalers who buy avocados. More than twice as many people are buying [avocados], because you have to have them. We have had good support in Mexico since 2002.”

Wholesalers at the terminal markets have seen increased demand for fresh produce, even among people who are not part of the organic movement.

“The doctors are all saying you must eat fresh fruits and vegetables,” says Peter Carcione, president of Carcione Fresh Produce Co., Golden Gate Produce Market.

Carcione is also the president of the Golden Gate Terminal Market, and son of the late Joe Carcione, who became well known extolling the virtues of fresh produce on local television and radio stations as the “Green Grocer.”

Peter Carcione witnessed a change in the produce market brought on by incredible improvements in the technology that keep fruits and vegetables fresh.

“When I first came here 45 years ago, this was a commission market, and a terminal market,” he says. “Most inventory came in on consignment. It came in hot, and you had to sell it the same day it arrived. Hydro cooling and vacuum cooling changed everything. We can ship around the world. Lettuce lasts a week; before it was a day.”

What has not changed is how buyers shop the market and the product available for purchase. “If you walk the market, you can look at the produce, touch it and smell it,” says Carcione. “Now we have fruit coming in from Chile, such as peaches, cherries and nectarines.”

NATIONAL CHAINS TAKE A BACK SEAT

One of the customers who comes to look, touch and smell the produce in the middle of the night is Gus Vardakastanis, who walks through the offerings at both the San Francisco Wholesale Market and the Golden Gate Produce Market in South San Francisco to source fresh fruits and vegetables for his fami-

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ly's three neighborhood markets.

Although the family sources some of its produce directly from a few nearby farmers, most of it comes from walks Vardakastanis takes at the wholesale markets since the 1980s.

"My dad goes to the produce markets in San Francisco and South San Francisco every morning," says Bobby Vardakastanis, who serves as general manager alongside his brother Dimitri of the stores their parents Gus and Georgia started after they immigrated from Greece in the 1980s.

"The owners of the facilities used to come down here to look at the produce and do the purchasing," says Bob Andrighetto, president of Market Produce Sales, South San Francisco. "Now I think for the big chains it's more corporate, and they're concerned more about the percentage than the quality."

Relatively small local market chains have come to predominate among customers at the wholesale markets.

"You had a lot of people who would come every day to buy produce," recalls Carcione. "Now the big retailers have their own warehouses. They don't come to the market. Now it's the smaller chains with a handful of stores or buyers for restaurants. They all sell to everybody. You don't just see Chinese vegetables in a Chinese market. He's going to sell to everybody."

There is a decidedly upscale trend in the major produce retailers in the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

According to the 2015 *Chain Store Guide's* market share report, Whole Foods Market has more than a 7 percent market share in the region and increasing; Costco has more than 16 percent; and Trader Joe's is at nearly 9 percent. When Whole Foods Market opened its fifth store in San Francisco — a city that is less than 50 square miles — the location was just four blocks from the Vardakastanis' store on Haight Street.

"The competition makes everybody a better businessperson," says Bobby Vardakastanis.

The family had already been offering organic produce at its stores since the 1990s, so the family responded to the new competition by expanding to include a coffee bar, deli and full-service meat counter, and soon after opened its third store on Harrison in the Mission.

"We sell organic at all three of the markets," says Vardakastanis. "Our new store in the Mission has a lot of younger people — many of them are newly married and starting families. Our store on Noriega has more larger families, and there are more single people at

the Haight."

With the national chains taking a backseat, and usually sourcing through their own distribution centers, the small chains and ethnic retailers have become an indispensable part of the business for wholesalers at the San Francisco area markets.

AN ETHNIC MIX

"Compared to 25 years ago, there are far more Asians and Latinos," says Schumacher of Earthquake Produce. "They are some of the

biggest shoppers at the market. We would call their specialty markets small by appearance, but they do a lot of volume in a small area."

Numerous wholesale businesses with core clientele among ethnic retailers and restaurants have grown at the wholesale market.

"At the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market, we have many ethnic produce companies, mostly Asian produce," says Calvin Leong, vice president at San Francisco-based wholesaler, VegiWorks, Inc. "Some are working side-by-side, and some are scattered throughout the



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SAN FRANCISCO MARKET PROFILE

market. Every company usually has a certain product that they are strong in that separates them.”

Many wholesalers catering to ethnic markets carry products in addition to fresh fruits and vegetables.

“More merchants are carrying a lot more other products than just fresh fruits and vegetables,” says Leong. “Many customers are looking for ‘one-stop’ shopping. So, it’s consumer driven. VegiWorks for example, carries a full line of dairy including eggs, egg white, and cheeses, and a full line of frozen products including purees, frozen ready-to-use fruits and vegetables, breads, noodles, etc. We also carry dried fruits, nuts, chilis, fresh and dried herbs, and a full line of Asian specialty products used by Japanese restaurants and catering companies.”

Wal-Mart has less than a 2 percent market share in San Francisco and Alameda counties, and is trending downward; while Target and Winco have just a 3 percent market share combined.

Safeway (Pleasanton, CA) still enjoys better than 27 percent market share but is not a factor at the three wholesale markets in the Bay Area, according to the *Chain Store Guide* report.

Many of the produce trends showing up nationwide came to markets in San Francisco a little earlier and are a little stronger.

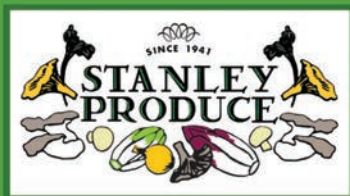
“Kale has been big the past few years — not so much 10 years ago,” says Vardakastanis. “We also have more packaged, value-added produce than we used to.”

The Vardakastanis find plenty of variety for their diverse customer base at the wholesale markets and a few nearby farms. “We sell the same produce at all three stores,” says Vardakastanis. “At the new store on Harrison, we sell more of the newer specialty items like gem lettuce or different types of mushrooms.”

The family also follows a common practice among San Francisco producer retailers, buying fruits and vegetables directly from a small number of nearby small farms. “We use some local family farms, like Knoll Farms and some other small farms,” says Bobby Vardakastanis. “The quality might be better, and you’re helping out a family farmer.”

Knoll Farms is a 10-acre patch in nearby Contra Costa County where fruits and vegetables are produced using a biodynamic system that emphasizes, not just the absence of synthetic chemicals, but also the interaction between plants and the soil. **pb**

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Hayes Street Grill

SEASONAL AND LOCAL ARE CELEBRATED AND PREFERRED BY CLIENTELE.

By Bob Johnson

Unique seasonal produce from nearby farms is the foundation on which Hayes Street Grill builds much of its menu.

“A lot of our produce is very particular to the farmers who grow it, and a lot of these items are simply not available any place else — like fresh, sweet green peas, young favas, green garlic, Cara Cara oranges and kumquats,” says Patty Unterman, chef and owner of the Hayes Street Grill. “Yes, we are always looking for special produce from our farmers.”

Buying local is popular everywhere, but in this San Francisco Bay Area restaurant, cuisine is uniquely wedded to the diverse harvest from Sacramento, Salinas and Pajaro Valley farms that are two hours or less from the cities.

“Our customers seem to enjoy the purity and simplicity of our local ingredient-driven food,” says Unterman. “We celebrate Sacramento Delta asparagus when it comes in late February, and we stop serving it when the harvest ends in May. So people wait all year to get this exceptionally sweet and juicy local asparagus. The same process happens with local apricots, chicories, tomatoes and artichokes. When they come in, we make dishes based on those items, and people are hungry for them because they haven’t tasted them.”

The demand for specialty produce locally sourced is so strong that Cooks Company Produce builds a wholesale business exclusively on serving relatively high-end restaurants in the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

“We serve restaurants,” says Rick Tombari, co-owner at Cooks Company Produce, San Francisco. “We define our customer base as restaurants that want produce that tastes good. Everybody wants produce that tastes good, and they want it from family farms.”

Tombari understands what the restaurants want because Cooks was born out of the frustration from not getting high-quality produce for a restaurant business.

“We started in the restaurant business and couldn’t get good produce,” says Tombari. “Our



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HAYES STREET GRILL

restaurant closed in 1987, and we’ve been doing this [wholesale business] for 31 years. We have 200 to 300 farmers who come to us with their best seasonal produce, and we sell to about 500 to 600 restaurants a day, six days a week.”

All of those 500-plus restaurants are within a fairly small area as the Cooks’ trucks only go as far east as Walnut Creek, as far south as Los Altos (both well under an hour away) and north to Calistoga in nearby Napa County.

“We have six coolers, and two of them are exclusively organic,” says Tombari. “This is the Bay Area, and people feel organic is better. This time of year, people have a love affair with chicories. We sell Savoy baby spinach, a curly leaf variety that we sell organically. We sell Page Mandarins and Mandarinquats. We sell [lots of] exotic varieties.”

Some restaurants, however, do not need delivery because they are so close to a uniquely San Francisco produce institution.

The Ferry Plaza Farmers Market is home to

more than 100 area farmers and artisan cheese makers, bakers, olive oil pressers, and other high-end food producers. The Market, which is open three days a week, is run by the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture as part of a campaign to connect city residents with nearby family, mostly organic, farmers.

“Our whole menu is based on what I personally buy directly from farmers two times a week at our Ferry Plaza Farmers market supplemented by direct delivery two times a week from [Watsonville, CA-based] Mariquita Farm,” says Unterman. “They email us a produce list, and we order two days in advance. We also buy from Pomponio farm. They also deliver.”

A very large majority of the produce that forms the backbone of the menu at the Hayes Street Grill comes from this familiar group of nearby farmers.

“I’d say 80 percent of all our produce comes

SAN FRANCISCO RESTAURANT PROFILE

directly from the farmers I mentioned,” says Unterman. “The rest comes from Greenleaf Produce in San Francisco, a company that started at about the same time that we opened Hayes Street Grill, 37 years ago.”

Unterman was among the people who envisioned and created the unique Ferry Plaza Market that connects San Francisco restaurants and nearby farmers.

“It was post 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, and the city was dead,” recalls Unterman. “Because of the earthquake, a double-decker freeway that ran along the Embarcadero had to be demolished, freeing up a big space in the middle of the Embarcadero in front of the Ferry Building. A group of us headed by Sibella Kraus [president of Berkeley, CA-based Sustainable Agriculture Education] thought we should put a farmers market there with the idea of linking urban restaurants directly with local farmers and regular buyers as well. But the success of the Market was the urban-rural linkage with San Francisco chefs.”

KINDRED SPIRITS

This intimate relationship with the most productive and diverse fruit and vegetable region in the country goes a long way toward defining San Francisco Bay Area cuisine.

“San Francisco built much of its culinary reputation from having amazing access to local produce,” says Borden from the Golden Gate Restaurant Association. “The success of our Ferry Plaza’s Farmers Market is in large part because restaurants source their products from those participating local farmers. Most chefs prefer to source locally and have relationships directly with local farmers.”

The relationship is often very direct, with restaurateurs discussing the menu with farmers *before* they plant.

“Restaurateurs generally work directly with farmers to ensure they have the supply of specialty crops they need,” says Borden. “There are so many items of greater or new popularity: various types of micro greens, heirloom beans and tomatoes, exotic mushrooms, Meyer lemons, Shishito peppers, sunchokes, French breakfast radishes, rainbow carrots and potatoes, persimmons and kumquats, delicata squash, Asian spices (like ginger), turmeric and lemongrass. Local farmers expanded their offerings, changed their crops of focus, and/or new specialty farms have emerged.”

The menu at many San Francisco restaurants varies with the produce that is in season locally. “San Francisco’s restaurant scene is very seasonally driven, so many restaurant menus only feature what’s in season,” says



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Borden. “Restaurants here believe good food comes from quality ingredients, which means working with produce when it’s in its prime, rather than serving tomatoes just because people like tomatoes.”

Change is the only constant when it comes to the produce in vogue at San Francisco restaurants.

“Many restaurants are looking for different products than a decade ago,” says Leong. “The food industry is very trendy, especially here in San Francisco. Chefs are always looking to do something different to compete with other restaurants.”

Hayes Street built a regular clientele of patrons of the extensive local arts scene who want to enjoy meals built around produce

harvested from nearby farms.

“I’d say 80 percent of our customers are local regulars who come to Hayes Street Grill before performances at the opera house, Davies Symphony Hall, SFJazz Center — and a number of other theaters in our neighborhood,” says Unterman. “We also get locals who live nearby and all sorts of people who work in the Civic Center.”

Unterman advises calling early before dining at one of the many generally small restaurants in the area.

“Go to our fantastic local restaurants of which we have so many that are truly brilliant and use tons of fresh produce,” she says. “But, you should reserve ahead, because so many are small and very busy.”

pb

Berkeley Bowl Marketplace

BUCKING TRENDS TO
MAKE ITS OWN WAY

By Carol M. Bareuther, RD

No planogram, no PLUs and no promotions. Plus, daily changing prices, variety specific signs handwritten each morning, and a willingness — actually a sense of public service by staff — to let customers know when a fruit or vegetable isn't yet at its peak. This seems like a list of what not to do if you want to be a successful produce retailer. Instead, these are some of the key qualities that set the Berkeley Bowl Marketplace apart from its competitors, and how the retailer earned not only a loyal following for the past 39 years, but a place on the map as a destination for produce shopping in the San Francisco Bay area.

Husband and wife, Glenn and Diane Yasuda, started the Berkeley Bowl as a small farmers market-style store in 1977. The focus was and is on produce, a passion of Glenn's, although meat, seafood, dairy and bulk foods have always been part of the mix. With Glenn's predominant passion for produce, you might think the word bowl in the store's name comes from the idea of a fruit or salad bowl. In reality, the first location at 2777 Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley opened in a converted bowling alley. Today, this store is housed in a renovated Safeway at Oregon Street, a move made in 1999. A second location, Berkeley Bowl West, opened in 2009 less than 2 miles to the west at the intersection of 9th and Heinz streets.

"We've always been focused on the trends and what people are buying," says Nicholas Christopher, a member of the store's produce buying team who worked for "The Bowl" for 17 years and was trained by Glenn. "One of the things that has made us so successful is that we listen to the customer. We have the ability to bring in an array of exotic and everyday fruits and vegetables. There's not the constraints here that the big chains have. We are able to adjust daily and seasonally."

There's a fascinating behind-the-scenes sequence of events that ultimately brings customers an incredible selection of conventional and organic produce daily. On the conventional side, it starts when the store's



produce purchasing team writes pre-orders in the afternoon and evening based on what's selling and customers' requests.

Then, a three- to four-member team of the Bowl's buyers make the rounds to a trio of wholesale produce markets — the Golden Gate Produce Terminal, the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market and the Oakland Wholesale Produce market at Jack London Square — arriving at the first location at 3 a.m. Here, buyers make the day's purchases based on both pre-orders and opportunistic spot buys as well as glean information about quality, seasonal forecasts and future availability.

The Bowl owns four trucks that follow the buyers and load the produce immediately after it's purchased for a trip back to stores. The best-selling items bought primarily at these wholesale markets are bananas, tropical fruits and vegetables, rambutan, kiwano melon and breadfruit as well as more mainstream items in the winter.

On the organic side, the Bowl's buyers purchase direct from a number of nearby small family farms. Selections include kumquats, rainbow carrots and Buddha's Hand citrus. The retailer arranges delivery by working directly with brokers to set up third party trucks that

transport the fruits and vegetables from farm to store.

“I couldn’t imagine just faxing my order to a wholesaler. It’s a huge disconnect. I’d feel like my hands were tied. It’s hard to imagine no direct communication with our wholesalers and our local farmers,” says Christopher.

The result of this aggressive sourcing method is an average SKU count of about 950 conventional and 350 to 360 organic fruits and vegetables. There’s everything from more than three dozen types of tomatoes, two-dozen-plus apples, nearly a dozen mango varieties and a half-dozen kinds of garlic. This selection generates anywhere from 10 percent of a store’s total sales in the winter to more than 20 percent in the summer.

“Customers rely on us to know when to buy something. We do the work for them. We understand seasonality, and if we decide to bring something in early, the workers on the floor will be honest and let customers know the item isn’t at its peak yet. That’s why we like to hire people with no experience. That way, they don’t bring bad habits from the bigger chains we need to break. We are unique in the way we run and our customers appreciate it,” says Christopher.

Produce is the main draw that pulls shoppers into the Berkeley Bowl. As such, fruits and vegetables get primary placing in prominent ever-changing displays in a sizeable section of the Bowl’s average 7,000-square foot of retail space. These produce displays showcase what’s new, what’s just in and what’s freshest.

“Customers know there’s a new show every day. As a result, they come in more often to see what’s available. That creates more impulse buys. We don’t advertise either in print circulars or on social media. Glenn has always believed it’s better to use money that would be spent on advertising to give customers the best prices. We’ve sold cases of mangos or navel oranges for \$5.50. There’s no song and dance. Customers come first. We handwrite signs daily and prices change daily,” explains Christopher.

Handwritten signage gives customers more than just pricing information. There are tips for usage as well as a varietal name for each fruit and vegetable. For example, you won’t find “red grape.” Instead, signs read Flame, Crimson or Red Globe. Christopher says the Bowl’s philosophy is to give customers as much information about produce as possible so shoppers can make informed buying decisions.

“You can’t put out one variety one day and another the next that may taste different and not expect customers to get confused and angry. You can’t fool consumers today,” says



Nicholas Christopher



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Christopher.

The emphasis on specific varieties and several of them mean that standard PLUs don’t work at Berkeley Bowl. Instead, the retailer created its own system that relies on specific checker codes. Newly hired checkers spend their first few days on the job reading and memorizing these codes. Codes, for example, may be a red or blue marking on a piece of fruit, a notch in the bottom on a pineapple, or a small slice on a zucchini. These marks are made by produce staff to assure checkers assign the right ring at the check-out.

“It’s a cumbersome system, but it allows us to seek out a number of unique varieties and pass savings along to customers,” he says.

The Bowl has a large value-added produce

program. There’s a salad bar located in the deli department, a pineapple corer in produce as well as large offerings of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables. The juice machine is a huge hit. Christopher says the stores sell more oranges as juice squeezed in-store than whole fruit. A signature item is fresh pressed pomegranate juice, made similarly to the way apples are pressed into cider.

“We are aware of our competitors (like Whole Foods Market, Trader Joe’s and Sprouts here in the Bay area) and know what they are doing. But we really don’t get concerned with number and let it overtake our main goal of doing our best for customers. That means outsourcing the best produce at the best quality and best price,” says Christopher.

pb

Bulking Up



Is a bulk-nuts program right for your produce department?

BY CHRIS AUMAN

The health benefits of nuts have been well established with studies that suggest adding nuts to a person's diet, regardless of the type, can contribute to heart health, help lower cholesterol and deliver a lot of nutrition in a pretty small and natural package.

While recent consumer trends have seen a preference for nuts that have been infused with intense bold flavors, such as Sriracha and jalapeño or roasted with honey, nuts by themselves have a variety of great flavor profiles. From salty or sweet, to creamy or fatty, nuts have a lot to offer as a standalone ready-to-eat snack or as a great addition to any snack mix.

The versatility of nuts is also well understood by consumers who use them chopped, crushed, halved and slivered for cooking, baking or finishing touches.

With a little promotion, attention to bins and creative POS materials, retailers can implement a successful bulk-nut program that will have an appeal to consumer trends toward healthy eating and wholesome products.

IS BULK BETTER?

Whether buying in bulk is better than purchasing packaged nuts is really up to the

individual consumer, and this preference can change by store location.

Consumers buy bulk for a number of reasons. Concern for the environment might be a factor guiding the purchase of one customer as the reduction in packaging materials creates less waste. For thrifty shoppers, a lack of a name-brand labels can mean a lower price. For adventurous home cooks looking to try nuts in a new recipe, they may prefer to purchase just a handful of nuts instead of committing to a larger package they have no need for.

While consumer-buying habits may differ, bulk purchasing can offer consumers control. More control in the amount they purchase and spend. Buying bulk also allows consumers to pick and choose product themselves.

"Customers like bulk, because they aren't limited to a certain quantity," says Moe Issa, owner of Brooklyn Fare, a Brooklyn, NY-based neighborhood grocer with eclectic options and a variety of prepared foods with one other location in Manhattan. "They can choose how much they want of what they want. Bulk gives more flexibility to the consumer."

This doesn't necessarily mean higher sales when shoppers choose bulk, however. "They buy what they want," says Issa. "Sometimes it [the purchase] is more than a packaged nut item, sometimes it's less."

PROVIDING SPACE FOR BULK

Some retailers may face restrictions that limit the amount of space they can dedicate

to bulk items. Others, like Brooklyn Fare, are able to devote a good deal of real estate to the bulk nuts category. How much? "A lot!" says Issa. "About 20 feet of space in our Brooklyn location is dedicated for bulk-nut dispensers and house-made nut butters of all sorts."

In addition to offering a choice for consumers, Amy Murphy-St Laurent, director of marketing for Sid Wainer & Son, headquartered in New Bedford, MA, sees bulk nuts as providing retailers with advantages packaged nuts do not. "Buying and selling nuts in bulk is more cost effective," she says.

Bulk displays need extra attention, however, and Murphy-St Laurent reminds retailers, "displays need to be rotated and cleaned frequently to ensure a great display."

Stephanie Blackwell, owner of Aurora Products based in Orange, CT, does not necessarily see any consumer preference for bulk over packaged nuts at her company, but she does see advantages for retailers.

"Bulk nuts offer the customer a self-service approach; whereas the consumer may feel that the product has been handled less and is straight from the farm."

The larger movement toward consumers looking for more locally sourced produce gives bulk nuts added appeal as an honest, unprocessed product that comes as exactly as advertised.

NUTTY HEALTH HALO

While most consumers may be aware of

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the health benefits of including nuts in their diet, POS reminders can only help stress this message at the retail level. For Issa of Brooklyn Fare, “We have small descriptive signs right up front describing each item. In terms of the health benefits of eating nuts, consumers are very well educated on the facts; most of the time, they know what they’re looking for and the health benefits associated with an item.”

Murphy-St Laurent stresses this fact as well, saying, “Most customers are aware of health benefits, but great signage, recipe and usage ideas are all ways to communicate to customers.”

For Blackwell at Aurora, she thinks while consumers may not know the specific health benefits of different varieties, they are generally aware of the health halo of nuts in general.

“Maybe they don’t know that almonds are rich in vitamin E and high in fiber; or Brazil nuts are rich in selenium that helps men’s prostates, but they do know that nuts are good.”

Issa sees proof of this in the numbers. “It is apparent by the sheer volume of nuts being sold. Consumers are very well educated on the health benefits of eating nuts, and they buy a lot of them.”

MERCHANDISING MATTERS

Merchandising has an important role to play in bulking up bulk-nut sales. For Issa at Brooklyn Fare, the store’s house-made nut butters provides in-store cross-merchandising opportunities.

“If a customer is looking for peanut butter and whole walnuts, they can choose between name-brand peanut butter or house-made Brooklyn Fare-branded peanut butter, and select bulk or packaged walnuts, all from the same area of the store,” says Issa. “It’s logical and more convenient.”

Blackwell has some recommendations to produce executives who choose to implement a bulk-nut program in their stores. “Make sure you get sealed containers to hold the product,” she advises. “Also, when a bin is empty, or close to empty, clean out the bin rather than just refill it. Last, but not least, rotate the product.”

David Lipson, president of Valued Naturals based in Dover, NJ, also advises retailers to stay on top of displays with dedicated staff who can, as he says, “Constantly fill the bins, clean them, take out the lollipop sticks that get thrown in there from kids — that’s a full-time job.”

THE SHRINK FACTOR

Keeping bins well stocked and tidy are important to generating sales, but in addition to the benefits, selling bulk does present some

challenges to retailers. Retailers can combat problems of shrink and contamination with a little due diligence.

“There are bulk bins that protect the product from contamination by keeping the product in tight containers,” says Blackwell. “Infestation and contamination can cause a lot of shrink. How much higher shrink is there in the bulk category? I don’t know the number or percentage; however, I imagine significantly more. That’s why bulk is not really inexpensive. There is a lot of shrink due to product falling on the floor, people changing their mind and leaving their baggie on the shelf, infestation that spreads across all bins, et cetera.”

THE RIGHT PRICE

While problems with shrink and staff requirements to keep bins clean, rotated and stocked is something retailers need to consider, Lipson at Valued Naturals also cautions executives to make a careful assessment of their bulk programs to ensure they are getting the product at a fair price from wholesalers.

“I think [retailers] should have [bulk nuts] well priced and compared against applicable lines from companies who provide a very similar program, such as pre-packaged. If they still find that bulk works well for them, then that’s excellent. If they don’t, then they should make a decision and they can regain a lot of linear feet.”

Making an assumption about price can lead retailers down the wrong path, so it’s definitely worth the time to pay close attention to the numbers.

As Lipson says, “Our retail program, which is very well priced, is geared toward the consumer. People often like to think the bulk will be cheaper, but it’s far in excess of what it should be, and that’s what typically slows down the product.”

He says if the price isn’t right, the convenience and control consumers are able to gain from bulk purchases will not make the program a success for retailers.

While selling bulk nuts may not be right for every produce department — either due to space constraints or the particular buying habits of the store’s demographics, a well planned, well priced program can yield benefits for both retailers and customers.

Like any other product, utilizing proper POS materials and maintaining clean, stocked displays are key to selling bulk nuts.

Educating customers about the health benefits of bulk nuts and emphasizing their versatility, utility and convenience will also help drive the program’s success. **pb**



The Human Factor Can Trump Technology

BY DON HARRIS

Many Monday-morning discussions revolve around new and innovative ways for using technology to advance retail sales. Management places a lot of emphasis on the capability of technology to make up for the need of additional personnel and/or expertise. In these conversations, management typically asks produce personnel why they don't utilize more technology within their department. Why it is so difficult to get other systems in place, or to work with other departments. This discussion can be one of the most exasperating conversations for a produce employee. As management looks on in disbelief, produce personnel try to explain the intricacies of its operation. Obviously, "they just don't get it"!

Historically, produce has never been an area that embraced technology as readily as many other areas in the store. This was thought to be a product of "old school" perceptions and traditional operations within the department. In actuality, this slow progression was due to the fact that produce does not neatly fit into confined spaces and follow static roles necessary to fit easily into technological solutions.

Management often finds the concept inconceivable that every excellent technological solution for other departments will not fit neatly into the produce operation. It is precisely this misunderstanding by management that creates wasted efforts and discontent among produce department employees as they try to fit a square peg into a round hole. While it is certain technology has its purposes and place within produce operations, it is not a silver bullet for the optimum operation of a department.

Typically, management roles its eyes every time produce indicates that it has unique needs and requires different types of rules for optimum operation. To understand what is needed to present produce well, requires a certain "feel" and the benefit of experience in working with various commodities to generate and perpetuate sales. To say produce is more of an "art" than operation has some truth as we have all seen operations that are beautiful and also generate increasing sales and improved perception in the eyes of the customer.

The most valuable asset of capability any produce operation can have is the ability to create a perception of freshness and quality in the mind of the customer. Technology can certainly plan a department's schematic based on the size of the department, but it has difficulty locating the products by natural color and appeal not just by sales numbers.

While a technological solution to schematics has a certain amount of autonomy and is simple to follow, it promotes mediocrity and sterility to the presentation by reducing the creativity and training of produce personnel. This is precisely why technology has its limitations when applied to the best possible produce operation.

There are many examples of each type of operation in the industry, we all recognize a tight, technology-driven schematic in a department when we walk in. Conversely, we all marvel at the beauty and functionality of a superior produce operation artfully and functionally presented to address the customers' needs and desires.

These night-and-day presentations are proof that the best way to sell produce and engage the customer is to utilize its natural beauty and appeal. All that one needs to verify this theory is the amount of produce in a shopping cart and the amount of time spent shopping the department. If you need further verification, simply ask a customer why they shop the department. Their answer, most likely, will be one of glowing praise for how fresh, well presented, and appetizing it looks. Additional comments would include, "It makes me want to buy."

Unfortunately for the industry, this type of thinking is out of favor, especially for the larger chains. Efficiency and labor control dominates management's thinking. Technology provides them with the solutions to make that square peg fit in the round hole. Yet the numbers and success of those retailers that continue to adopt the artistic aspect of fresh produce and its presentation continue to outperform anything technology has been able to accomplish. Perhaps a return to this artistic type of thinking in produce operations would help to reverse the overall trend of rising retail prices and declining volume. We could all benefit from looking beyond technology to what the true solution should be.

pb

Management often finds the concept inconceivable that every excellent technological solution for other departments will not fit neatly into the produce operation.

Don Harris is a 40-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.



Depression — It's More Than 'Being Under The Weather'

BY ALAN SIGER

Two weeks before Christmas one of my closest friends, Fred, died after a long illness; the death certificate may read suicide, but the real cause of death was his loss to a decades long fight with a chronic disease, depression.

I first met Fred about 30 years ago when he was the managing partner of a large regional accounting firm. We got to know each other very well, as we were both members of a Young Presidents' Organization Forum where participants learn from each other in a confidential environment by sharing best practices and the challenges in their lives.

Fred had a brilliant business mind, and was well respected by his peers and colleagues. Fred's journey from Ambridge, a mill town located outside of Pittsburgh, to becoming the head of the accounting firm was indicative of his acumen. Eventually, he left his position with the accounting firm to join a client's electrical distribution company as president, where he was able to successfully manage the sale of the company to an international buyer.

Fred then joined a regional financial services company where he specialized in mergers and acquisitions. In 2010, he left the finance world to try and enjoy life and devote his time and expertise to the nonprofit community. Fred was appointed to a board position of a large regional bank where he also served as the board's financial expert.

In 2011, Fred volunteered to help me with a search for a new controller for our company. After several weeks working with us, we came to the conclusion that the company did not need a full-time controller. We were blessed with an office manager whose financial skills were so strong that she performed most duties normally done by a controller. We decided the company needed someone on a higher level to manage finances, banking relationships, investments, and assist in long-range planning; late in 2011, Fred joined us as vice president of finance.

We became very good friends; he was Italian and began his accounting career at a firm with Jewish roots, while I was Jewish starting my produce career on the Pittsburgh Terminal Market, made up of mostly Italian-owned firms. We shared a love of golf; there were few things I enjoyed more on a golf course than finishing a round with a bit of Fred's cash in my pocket.

In the two-plus years Fred and I worked together, we accomplished a lot. He was instrumental in the hiring of our chief executive, Greg Cessna, who helped guide the company through a changing business environment. Fred and Greg's business and financial experience were a tremendous asset during the sale of the business; the three of us were a great team.

But, there was a dark side, too. I knew Fred suffered from depression, but until we worked together, I had never really been close to someone with the disease. He would be fine for a period of time — engaged, sharp as a tack, and a great sense of humor. Then I'd get a text or email telling me he was a bit under the weather and would not be able to make it to the office that day. That "under the weather" condition would last anywhere from a few days to a few months, sometimes requiring hospitalization.

Fred had been feeling great for more than 18 months when the final bout of depression struck in late October. This was the longest he had gone between episodes in many years. He had been doing so well, I think he felt he had finally beaten the disease; in my mind, that's what made this last episode so devastating. Fred was smart, he fooled his doctors, his caregivers, and his friends. He knew what he wanted; he was released from the hospital on a Wednesday afternoon and took his life on Thursday morning.

Fred had so much support; for example, a brother-in-law who lived nearby and was there for him at a moment's notice. He had associates at work who covered for him while he was off. Fred had a team of close friends who visited him and took turns taking him out of his house for a walk or a bite of food. He had the best doctors at a world-class university hospital; but in the end, none of that would save him.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates depression causes 200 million lost workdays each year — costing employers as high as \$44 billion. Treatment is by trial and error; "let's see if this drug works, if not, then we'll try another, or

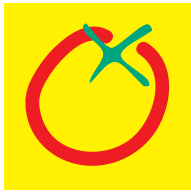
perhaps throw in a bit of electroconvulsive therapy." It's time society devotes the same resources to finding a cure for depression as we do to other life-threatening diseases.

Our employees are the lifeblood of our businesses. I'm certain that most have been there for our people when they or a family member experienced a medical crisis that threatened their physical well-being. It's just as important we're there for them in a mental health crisis and that our companies offer them access to the best mental health care available.

Fred had everything one could ask for in life, but could not escape what's been described as a cancer of the mind. Rest well my friend, I hope you found the peace in heaven you couldn't find here. **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.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates depression causes 200 million lost workdays each year — costing employers as high as \$44 billion.



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LOGISTICA

2016 Fruit Logistica Innovation Award

Organized by Messe Berlin GmbH in cooperation with the show's official country partner, Egypt, Fruit Logistica 2016 (February 3 to 5) was attended by 70,000 high-level trade visitors from more than 135 countries, and 2,891 exhibitors from 84 countries presented a complete market overview of the fresh produce industry.

Numerous industry innovations that propel the industry forward were showcased. Ten candidates were nominated for the coveted Innovation Award. Here is a review of the winner and the contenders (listed alphabetically by company from FruitLogistica.com).

WINNER



WORLD'S COCONUT TRADING IN SPAIN - Genuine Coconut

The Genuine Coconut is an organic coconut with a special patented opening, so consumers can enjoy the milk straight from its natural container. It is supplied with its own straw and provides a refreshing drink. Genuine Coconut offers 100 percent organic coconut water from green coconuts. The coconuts grow naturally in the heart of Thailand and are harvested at the optimum point of ripeness when the coconut contains a large amount of water with important nutrients and minerals. Thai Nam Hom coconuts are considered the best choice for quality, taste and flavor.



2BFRESH, ISRAEL - Pearl Herbs

Pearl Herbs are just a centimeter long with very short stems. They are ideal for garnishing and serving with other dishes. These tiny fresh herbs are available in more than 10 different varieties including basil, amaranth, sunflower, parsley and pak choi. They are extremely delicate in taste and suitable for all occasions, for immediate consumption, as well as for garnishing other dishes.



CAPESPAN, SOUTH AFRICA - Outspan Sam

The Outspan Sam campaign describes to children how fruit is grown. In four different videos, the path of the fruit is shown in all its different stages. The story is told by Outspan Sam, a figure specially developed for this campaign. The video clips can be accessed anywhere using the special QR code. The aim of the campaign is to promote knowledge and understanding on the part of young consumers and increase appreciation for healthy, fresh produce.



HORTIPLAN, NETHERLANDS - Harvest Automation

Green salads can now not only be grown automatically with the Mobile Gully system, but also harvested and packed by this new machine. The lettuce is automatically lifted out of the seed rail and then cut. Depending on the degree of automation, the salad heads can also be packed immediately into crates. With this breakthrough technology, similar methods are now available for leafy vegetables.



HORTKINETIX, GERMANY - QualyCheck

QualyCheck is a smartphone app using standardized forms to create and transmit quality control reports by Internet to a central database or as emails to selected recipients. QualyCheck works with standard text blocks and terminology

based on current official standards as well as the extensive practical experience of the product developers. Regular updates are provided automatically.



HZPC HOLLAND, NETHERLANDS -

Wow! Colourful Perupas®

Wow! Colourful Perupas are potatoes based on original varieties from the Andes. They offer a new and interesting product range as well as a diversity of taste, color and shape. Four varieties are currently available: Violet Queen – with dark purple flesh and the flavor of sweet beetroot; Double Fun – in two colors with violet and yellow flesh; Magenta Love – offering dark pink potatoes; Blue Star – with a striking marbled pattern and ideal for chips or mashed potatoes.



NORTHERN GREENS, DENMARK - Kitchen Minis® Tomato

Kitchen Minis®-Tomato is a small, compact and visually attractive cherry tomato plant for the domestic windowsill. It can produce up to 150 fruit all year. Its special feature is the particularly small size of the plant – only 9 to 11 cm wide and 35 cm high. The tomatoes weigh 8 to 10 grams and have a Brix value between six and seven, tasting sweet and aromatic.



PARMENTINE, FRANCE - Parmentine's Cup

Parmentine's Cup is a plastic cup with 250 grams of baby potatoes for cooking in the microwave. They are packed together with a basil-tomato sauce. The potatoes are already washed and ready to eat. Six minutes in the microwave, and you have a healthy, tasty low-fat meal. The yellow-fleshed potatoes have barely 90 kcal per 100g, the basil-tomato sauce only 20 kcal, and the chive-quark sauce around 70 kcal.



STOFFELS, BELGIUM - Automato

Automato is a POS "automat" with three boxes, which dispense different cherry tomato varieties into paper bags. Each box can be operated separately and has its own hopper. The consumer has the choice of one or more varieties. The Automato is a hygienic and playful idea for the youngest consumers, helping to interest them in new vegetable varieties.



TERRA NATURA INTL, NETHERLANDS - Enjoja

Enjoja is a unique, yellow-striped red pepper. It is also distinguished by its very aromatic, tangy flavor and pleasantly crunchy bite. These peppers also have a very high vitamin C content. Enjoja works well as a highlight in salads or as a snack with an appropriate sauce.



Extra Virgin Olive Oil — The Gateway To Greater Vegetable Consumption

BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER MS, RDN, FAND & CHEF SUVIR SARAN

Do you like hummus? If so, you like vegetables — and olive oil. In fact, fresh, high-quality extra virgin olive oil is what makes freshly made hummus so craveable and delicious. Yes, chickpeas and other legumes can be delicious on their own, but by pureeing them with olive oil, tahini, garlic and some salt, create creamy, irresistible deliciousness.

Combining vegetables with olive oil is a strategy most home cooks in the Mediterranean take for granted as one that will get people to eat their veggies. In fact, vegetable consumption is highest in countries like Greece where vegetables swim in olive oil. The Greeks even have a term, *lathera*, to describe vegetables cooked in generous amounts of olive oil, often with the addition of fresh herbs.

Unfortunately, here in the U.S. many consumers still think eating fat makes people fat, but research doesn't support this notion. The traditional Mediterranean diet, a moderate fat dietary pattern, contains about 42 percent of calories from total fat and 9 percent calories from saturated fat. Limiting saturated fat intake is important for health, but there's no reason to limit total fat intake — as long as total calories are in line with your weight management goals and saturated fat intake stays below 10 percent of total calories.

About half the calories in a commercially prepared hummus come from fat, yet fat-phobic American consumers made hummus one of the fastest growing snack trends in this country. Why? It's delicious, and smart marketers promoted its versatility (It's a snack! It's a spread! It's a dip!) as well as the many ingredients it contains that have positive health halos (e.g., chickpeas, olive oil and garlic).

The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans reinforce the recommendation to consume less than 10 percent of total calories from saturated fat, but there is no mention of limiting total fat. The guidance focuses on healthful dietary patterns with an emphasis on plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains.

So how do we get people to eat more fruits and vegetables? We say, "Think, cook, and eat like the Greeks!" (Well, actually, that's what Amy says. Suvir says, "Think, cook, and eat like an Indian!") Let's worry less about total fat, and focus on using healthful oils (such as extra virgin olive oil) in cooking. We want people to love and crave vegetable-based dishes, and we want our readers of this column to appreciate the many unique benefits of extra virgin olive oil, both in the cooked and raw forms.

Fresh Facts About Extra Virgin Olive

- Olives are fruit. Extra virgin olive oil is essentially fresh fruit juice.
- Maintaining the freshness and quality of extra virgin olive oil takes some effort and attention; the oil should be protected

from extreme changes in temperature as well as exposure to air.

- Packaging matters. Extra virgin olive oil should be packaged in dark brown or green glass bottles that have been flushed with nitrogen after filling to remove oxygen in the head space.
- Fresh is best. Extra virgin olive oil should be used within two years of the bottling date.
- Open bottles of extra virgin olive oil should be used within a few weeks of opening to maintain freshness and flavor.
- Age matters. Store shelves filled with olive oil that is more than two years old should be emptied; the oil has degraded, it won't taste good, and it won't convince any consumer to eat more vegetables.
- Extra virgin olive oil can be used for cooking; most home cooks don't cook at temperatures high enough to significantly degrade the oil or the beneficial polyphenols.
- Polyphenols are naturally occurring substances in extra virgin olive oil that have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and other potential health benefits.
- Extra virgin olive oil can be used for baking, too. The matrix of ingredients in baked items protects the oil from degradation during baking.
- Research shows both raw and cooked extra virgin olive oil offer health benefits.
- The polyphenol content of extra virgin olive oil depends on many factors, including olive cultivar, geographical location of the olive orchard, and growing conditions.
- A 2010 study by the University of California, Davis Olive Center showed the majority (69 percent) of *imported* extra virgin olive oils had significant sensory defects, indicators that the samples were oxidized, of poor quality, and/or adulterated with cheaper refined oils.
- Retailers who want to promote "local" foods should focus on selling extra virgin olive oil produced in the U.S. California is the largest olive oil producing state with one producer (California Olive Ranch) that has nationwide retail distribution.

Think about ways you can promote cooking with extra virgin olive oil in your produce department. You'll not only be promoting good health; you'll also be promoting great flavor!

pb

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND, is a farmer's daughter from North Dakota, an award-winning dietitian, a culinary nutrition expert, and founder and president of Farmer's Daughter Consulting LLC. Suvir Saran is an award-winning chef and restaurateur. Born in Delhi, India, today Chef Suvir lives on a farm in upstate New York.



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DIVINE OPPORTUNITIES

The year was 1986 when this photo of Terry Williams (far right) posing with a fellow United Fresh Convention attendee*, was taken at the Jimbo's Jumbos' booth on the trade show floor.

"We had a 10 by 10 booth that cost maybe \$800, and we thought we were in the big time," reminisces Williams about the convention and how trade shows have drastically changed.

Williams says Jimbo's Jumbos (now owned by Severn, NC-based Hampton Farms) would incorporate some type of event or signature imprint on each show he attended.

"In order to get people to stop by your booth, you had to get creative," says Williams.

Jimbo's Jumbos hosted a slew of events and guests at every conference. Visitors included Gaylord Perry (National Baseball Hall of Famer and pitcher for the San Francisco Giants), Jim "Catfish" Hunter (Hall of Famer and pitcher for the Oakland A's and New York Yankees), and the San Diego Charger cheerleaders.

One of the greatest activities the company set up was a free shoeshine station. "That was best for five to eight minutes to capture one-on-one time with customers and executives."

In regard to today's convention experiences, Williams has an entirely different appreciation. "Instead of time with buyers

or networking, all trade shows move the bar to the next level in educational purposes," he says.

"I see the next generation becoming the vocal parts of the industry. My position has changed from a growing and ambitious salesman to more of a mentor and coaching position. We hopefully leave the industry in better shape — just like each generation before us. I think we shouldn't be afraid of the generation ahead of us, but instead, be excited to mentor them to make the industry better and more well rounded."

Williams is extremely appreciative for the opportunities Jimbo's Jumbos granted him. It was his first job in produce from 1982 (when he was 27 years old) to about the mid-2000s.

"In 1994, Jimbo's Jumbos afforded me the time to attend classes on Fridays and Saturdays at Duke Divinity School for five years to further my education and follow my calling," says Williams who is now a pastor in the United Methodist Church and leads a congregation in Outer Banks, NC.

Williams also continued his career in produce by joining Clark- ton, NC-based Sachs Peanuts as a sales and marketing representative in the mid 2000s after Jimbo's Jumbos went through its acquisition process, and he remains there today. **pb**

**WHO'S THAT GAL? Are you able to help us identify the female in this photo? If so, we will update the text in our digital publication and give credit to the helpful party.*

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