

# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

## Price Chopper's MARKET 32 Reinvents SUSTAINABILITY



 WILL WEDGE  
producebusiness  
RETROSPECTIVE  
30 YEARS  
floralbusiness

### INSIDE

- PERISHABLE PUNDIT: CHIPOTLE'S MILLIONS IN FOOD SAFETY & MARKETING
- GEORGE'S DRESHERTOWN SHOP N BAG • ONLINE SHOPPING
- SUMMER MERCHANDISING • STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE
- SALAD DRESSINGS • SOUTHERN VEGETABLES • ORGANIC BERRIES
- CHERRIES • MANGOS • MICROGREENS • SNACK CHIPS
- UNITED BOOTH REVIEW • IFE BOOTH REVIEW
- PRODUCE PACKAGING PORTFOLIO 2016



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ITS OWN HOLIDAY!**

**NATIONAL**  
**EAT MORE  
FRUITS AND  
VEGETABLES** **DAY**



**MAY 26**

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Look for new fruit and vegetable recipes, tour map and information on our Healthy Living Challenge starting in May on [Dole.com/GetUpandGrow](http://Dole.com/GetUpandGrow)

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# produce quiz

## THIS MONTH'S WINNER



**JIM SCHOFIELD**  
**Chief Operating Officer**  
**Don Shapiro, Inc.**  
**Everett, MA**

Offering his expertise in personal wealth finance, Jim Schofield joined the produce industry about 20 years ago with Don Shapiro, Inc.'s Shapiro Produce — a produce distributor catering specifically to independent retailers in the Northeast.

Shapiro explains, "I was hired to revamp financials" and to take operations to the next level in order to grow business. "Today, we more than doubled our business in the Northeast," he says regarding the company's trajectory during the past 20 years.

Another stark differential that's unique to

Shapiro Produce's business model is the role a chief operating officer (COO) plays. "Today, versus 20 years ago, I spend more time on policy; for example, PTI, FSMA, sanitary transportation act ..." he adds, compliance, operations, and technology are primary responsibilities of the company for its customers.

"It's hard to classify ourselves," says Schofield. "We do so much more today. Independent retailers rely on us to do the handholding of operations. We are more than a distributor; we are the main contact for the owners of the store. We're bringing a different level of service than just backing a [delivery] truck up to the store."

It's an exciting job, and we're always aiming to stay ahead of the curve. As an umbrella perspective, we evolve with the world — whether it be in food safety or catering to an independent retailer's needs."

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

### WIN AN 8-PIECE PIZZA STONE SET

This deluxe collection features a 15"x14" ceramic pizza stone that absorbs moisture and disperses heat to ensure crisp, evenly cooked pizza. Use the included steel smoker box to add authentic wood-fired flavor. The set also includes a stainless steel grill rack, foldable pizza paddle, 12.5" pizza cutter, 9" pizza wheel, serving spatula, and a mid-arm length leather glove. The cookware can also be used for an in-door conventional oven or an outdoor grill to create your favorite calzones, breadsticks, flatbreads or quesadillas.



### QUESTIONS FOR THE MAY ISSUE

- 1) What two fruits "add up" to create the taste of The Flavor Tree's proprietary cherry? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What lettuce brand advertises 90 percent less water usage and fertilizer? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Which summer holiday is California Avocado Commission promoting in its ad? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What category of fruit does CyproFresh represent? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is the hashtag for Dole's touring health campaign? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) What two fruits are used to make the Paleo oatmeal on California Giant's ad? \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:  
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# Good Pesticide Policy Needs Good Science



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

In order for any farmer to be successful, he or she must wisely use all the tools available to harvest a bountiful crop: proper soil management; quality seed; a skilled labor force; and smart financial planning. But even if employed skillfully, all of these tools can be wasted if a crop is decimated by pests or disease. That's why any effective agriculture operation also relies on the proper use of crop protection chemicals to control damaging elements.

In the United States, for example, crops must fight against approximately 30,000 species of weeds, 3,000 species of nematodes, and 10,000 species of plant-eating insects. Farmers across the country know it is essential to use these chemicals wisely to maximize their benefits and minimize any negative effects. Responsible operators know that reasonable, science-based regulation of crop protection products is a good thing.

However, in recent years, the federal agency with primary jurisdiction over federal pesticide regulations, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has taken an increasingly harsh approach to the regulation of crop protection chemicals that threatens the ability of growers to successfully harvest a crop. More specifically, the EPA has been limiting or banning usage of a variety of chemicals based on either inadequate science or by using, at times, a less-than-transparent process.

The consequences of inadequately controlled crop pests and diseases can be far worse than just monetary loss. It is well understood that by 2050, there will be close to 9 billion people on Earth who deserve to be fed and clothed. According

to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, some 20-40 percent of potential global crop production is lost annually due to weeds, pests and diseases. The U.N. stated that malnutrition has "often irreversible consequences" for young children, and "severe pest outbreaks can be the main cause of starvation in developing countries, especially in areas dominated by subsistence agriculture."

If existing pesticide uses were prohibited, those crop losses could double, driving up food prices and increasing world hunger. If the EPA fails to adequately calculate and/or consider the economic costs of these impacts in its regulatory process, the consequences for agriculture and beyond could be significant.

How significant could federal policy regarding crop protection chemicals be to crop production? It is useful to consider one example of the EPA's recent regulatory overreach on just one class of pesticides known as neonicotinoids and their impact on bee populations. These chemicals, referred to as neonics, are used on a variety of crops including corn, cotton and citrus. In recent years, environmental activists portrayed neonics as the cause of Colony Collapse Disorder (the sudden disappearance of bees from their hives), even though there is widespread agreement that a variety of factors contribute to bee mortality, such as parasites and disease, lack of genetic diversity, and poor nutrition.

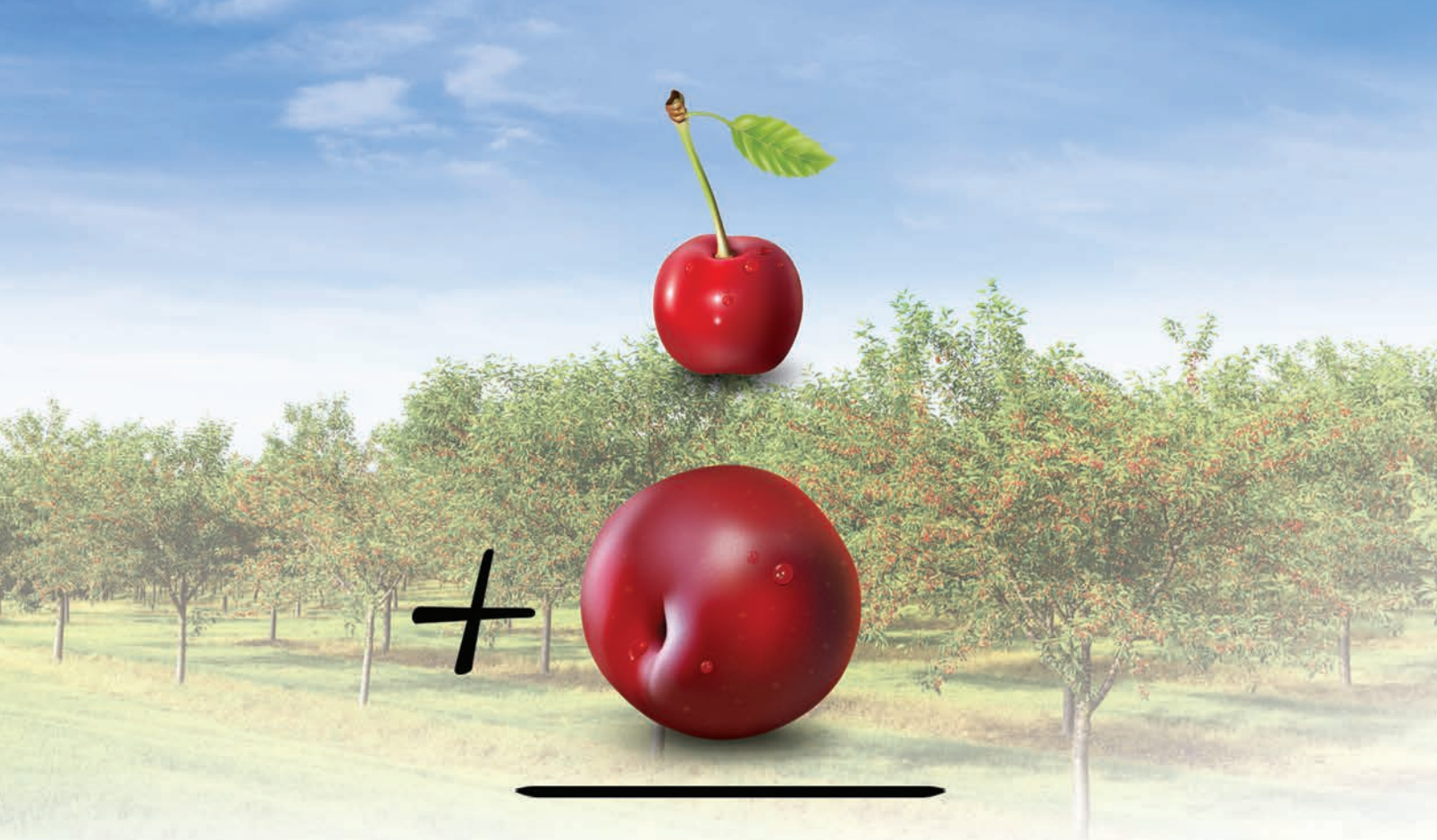
Earlier this year, the EPA released a study asserting a risk to hives when neonicotinoids come into contact with citrus and cotton crops; however, growers challenge the study's conclusions and methodology given the amount of pesticide that was

researched and the seeming arbitrary pesticide threshold that was tested. As a result of EPA actions such as this and intense pressure from the activist community, there is genuine concern within the agriculture community that neonics could be subject to a variety of punitive actions — including an outright ban.

The debate on neonics comes in the same time frame as other troubling EPA actions, such as proposing late last year to revoke the tolerances on pesticides such as Chlorpyrifos, despite the fact the EPA had previously indicated it would not do so. At the same time, the EPA convened a Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP) in April to consider studies on the health impacts of Chlorpyrifos. This meeting generated a great deal of concern in the grower community, because the kind of research the EPA will be considering offers associations only, not cause-and-effect relationships. And the raw data from the kind of study the EPA will be considering is seldom made available for regulatory scrutiny.

Agriculture producers are speaking out about the possible consequences of unwarranted regulatory overreach. Growers from across the agriculture spectrum met and will continue to meet with policymakers and regulators in Washington, D.C. to stress the importance of these products not just to their own operations, but to the broader impact of proper pest management.

Members of the fresh produce industry are working closely with their counterparts in other crop sectors to ensure lawmakers and regulators know that crop protection chemicals, when used as they should, are essential to feeding Americans and the rest of the world.



# Verry Simple Math



Add it up...the crunchy sweetness of a cherry plus the juiciness of a plum. *What do you get?* A delicious, flavorful new proprietary fruit available exclusively from **The Flavor Tree**. This mid-summer delight is gaining attention worldwide as consumers are enjoying this tasty wonderful new treat!





# What Is The Future For A Supermarket?

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Golub family and the Schenectady, NY-based Price Chopper organization are reimagining their stores and created the new concept, Market 32 — named after the year the organization started in business. The stores are beautiful, and you can learn a lot about them and the thought process behind them as they are honored with this month's Retail Sustainability Award cover story.

There are always multiple motivations in these types of efforts. On the other side of the state, Rochester-based Wegmans is a powerful organization, admired around the world for its stores, and it is rapidly growing up and down the East Coast. With stores now in Boston, it is easy to imagine Wegmans looking to fill in the space between Boston and Rochester, and that would involve opening stores in the capitol region of New York — Albany, Schenectady and Troy — long known as Price Chopper's home and heartland.

There are long-held rumors that the Golub and Wegman families — who have known each other for generations — intentionally minimized overlap, but with changes in retail, these things can't endure forever. So Market 32's upscale look and feel could be a preemptive act, hoping to establish a new image and positioning in New York's capitol region before Wegmans moves in.

Though Price Chopper's change in design and the way the stores are promoted are significant, it is the change in name that is so dramatic it raises questions as to the future direction of the industry. Naming a store "Price Chopper" is making a very explicit claim and promise to consumers. In fact, the retail stores of the Golub Corporation were originally called "Central Market," and famous for offering S&H Green Stamps, which essentially were loyalty points that consumers received in the form of stamps.

It wasn't until 1973 that the Price Chopper name was adopted as the company dropped Green Stamps and slashed prices.

Now Price Chopper has been moving away from discounting for years, and this new concept comes across as positively upscale — although it is worth noting that one of the frustrations of Wegmans is that its beautiful perishable and foodservice departments elevate the shopping experience so much that customers identify Wegmans in surveys as far more expensive than it actually is.

This decision to change names is Price Chopper's conclusion that going upscale is what shoppers will want in the future. The decision-making process, though, has to include defining who the Price Chopper customer will be in the future and, here, we may see the direction of the industry.

For years, supermarkets have been going upscale to differentiate themselves from Wal-Mart. The consultants' advice to become the "anti-Wal-Mart" was paid heed, so the emphasis was on high service, organics, foodservice — all areas where Wal-Mart was weak. In effect, retailers began to "compete" with Wal-Mart by not competing with

Wal-Mart and finding different, more upscale consumers. Safeway, for example, closed many stores in areas with lower demographics and renovated its remaining stores with its upscale "lifestyle" format — wood floors, warm décor and subdued lighting, etc.

With dollar stores moving heavily into perishables, and with Aldi being one of the fastest growing grocers in America, along with Lidl about to explode across the country, surely the name change is saying supermarkets in general do not expect to be able to compete on price with these formats. So they expect to lose the most price-sensitive clientele or all clients at moments in their life when they are highly price-sensitive.

**This decision to change names is Price Chopper's conclusion that going upscale is what shoppers will want in the future.**

Refocusing on the less price-sensitive clientele may thus be a brilliant strategy, but it may also pose its own challenges. *The New York Times* ran a piece following the Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing of Fairway Group Holdings. The title of the article: "No Longer a Market Like No Other, Fairway Fades." As always, in these situations, the bankruptcy was caused by many specialized factors including a rapid expansion that could not be sustained.

But *The Times* headline was onto something. There was a period when Fairway was something extraordinary, but if you look at chains such as Whole Foods Market, or independents such as

Eataly, chic concepts such as Mariano's, epicurean concepts such as Trader Joe's, new concepts such as Anthony Bourdain's proposed Food Hall on Pier 57 in Manhattan, even expanded organic and local offerings at every store in the country, it is really hard to be extraordinary and fabulous anymore.

Our cover story focuses on sustainability, and Market 32 is a tip of the hat to the mindful executive team behind the inclusion of sustainable practices in the rebranded stores. It is also a salute to the engaged and informed consumer, to the idea that consumers will make choices based on more than quality and price.

Of course, there are many other chains that claim their products and services represent something uniquely good and worth supporting. And more are coming. The competition will be tough.

Market 32 stores, though, are not typically located in trendy high-tech corridors, near universities or in high PhD demographics. As such, the emphasis on sustainability is a bet that tomorrow's consumer will care beyond these zip codes, that the mainstream is shifting, and we can expect an engaged and knowledgeable consumer to be the mainstream shopper at the supermarkets of tomorrow.

The Market 32 concept thus represents a leap of faith in consumers — and in our country. If they are right, it would be good for everyone.

pb





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Mann's Culinary Cuts® target uber-trending consumption trends such as carb-swap, Paleo, gluten free and Whole30®. These products are bringing incremental sales to the cut vegetable category\* and provide vendor consolidation opportunities. Is your cut vegetable section on the cutting edge? Stock Mann's Culinary Cuts®. Consumers want out of their recipe ruts.

*\*Mann's Culinary Cuts® Butternut Squash Zig Zags and Sweet Potato ribbons are two of the fastest selling squash and sweet potato items where sold - AC Nielsen 52 W/E 12/31/15*



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# UNITED FRESH CONVENTION | GLOBAL COLD CHAIN EXPO

JUNE 20 - 22, 2016 | MCCORMICK PLACE | CHICAGO, IL



**BOOTH #904 GLOBAL COLD CHAIN EXPO**  
**ADVANCE STORAGE**  
*Garden Grove, CA*

Advance Storage Products is the foremost pushback and structural rack supplier. Our Lo Pro Pushback sets the mark for safety, durability, performance and value. With state-of-the-art manufacturing and internal infrastructure, Advance has successfully completed thousands of refrigerated warehouse projects.



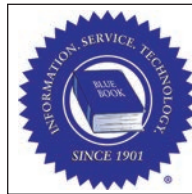
**BOOTH #1562**  
**ALLIANCE RUBBER COMPANY**  
*Salinas, CA*

Alliance is a family-owned business with a rich American heritage. Our simple, practical, and reliable rubber bands and ProTape® are used around the world for produce packaging.



**BOOTH #2019**  
**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 business information needed to grow and protect your business.



**BOOTH #1244**  
**CAITO FOODS SERVICE, INC.**  
*Indianapolis, IN*

ESI Group is currently constructing an 118,000-square-foot Greenfield facility for Caito Foods, distributor of fresh produce, in Indianapolis. This facility will increase Caito's capacity to process and package cooked foods for their customers.



**BOOTH #1821**  
**CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY FARMS**  
*Watsonville, CA*

Welcome to peak berry season at California Giant Berry Farms. Visit us to learn more about our summer program and sign up to be an insider to receive our bi-weekly crop newsletter featuring trends and forecasts on each growing region, promotional programs and company events.



**BOOTH #2458**  
**CALIFORNIA LEAFY GREENS**  
**MARKETING AGREEMENT**  
*Sacramento, CA*

The LGMA includes more than 100 members who are committed to protecting public health through this unprecedented program and are working hard every day to provide products that are healthy and safe.



**BOOTH #913 GLOBAL COLD CHAIN EXPO**  
**CIMCO REFRIGERATION**  
*Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

CIMCO Refrigeration specializes in the engineering, design, manufacture, installation, and service of industrial, process cooling, and recreational refrigeration systems. With key locations across North America and around the world, we provide unique cooling solutions. The NewTon refrigeration system uses ammonia and CO2, two natural refrigerants, for high-efficiency and energy-savings.



**BOOTH #1741**

**CMI**  
*Wenatchee, WA*  
 During the past 25-plus years, CMI has steadily grown into one of Washington State's largest apple, pear and cherry shippers and growers and continues to be a pioneer in new varieties, sustainability, creative packaging, and growing technologies. CMI offers exclusive brands such as Ambrosia, KIKU, Kanzi and organics in the Daisy Girl Organics Label.



**BOOTH #1205**  
**DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE,**  
**N.A., INC.**  
*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 #1826**  
**DRISCOLL'S**  
*Watsonville, CA*

Only the finest berries are packed under the Driscoll's brand. Delighting berry consumers with year-round availability of conventional and organic strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries. For more than 100 years, Driscoll's has been trusted and recognized for superior quality.



**BOOTH #1433**  
**EAGLE CERTIFICATION GROUP**  
*Dayton, OH*

EAGLE Certification Group has been providing accredited third-party certification services for international standards since 1994. EAGLE helps food manufacturers and suppliers improve business results through award-winning certification services and constructive feedback with a focus on continuous improvement, sustainability and customer satisfaction. Services include: GLOBALG.A.P., SQF, FSSC 22000, ISO 9001.



**BOOTH #1909**  
**FRESHWAY FOODS**  
*Sidney, OH*

Freshway offers a variety of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables to meet all of your fresh produce requirements. From custom blends to sliced, diced and julienned fruits and vegetables, we have what you need when you need it. We also offer guaranteed cold-chain transportation and logistics to support your perishable distribution.



**BOOTH #2403**  
**HEAT AND CONTROL, INC.**  
*Hayward, CA*

From conveyors and weighers, to metal detectors, X-ray inspection, and tray sealers, Heat and Control offers a wide variety of equipment for fresh-cut salads, fruits, and vegetables, and frozen foods. We also build produce unloading, transfer, storage, washing, and peeling systems.



**BOOTH #814 GLOBAL COLD CHAIN EXPO**  
**HENCH CONTROL**  
*Richmond, CA*

Pioneering custom-designed hardware, specifically for industrial refrigeration, since 1989. Monitors and controls all points of your refrigeration facility. Efficient control through advanced algorithms — reducing energy, increasing profitability. Versatile, robust, and modular — change is inevitable, HENCH Control makes it easy.



**BOOTH #1711**  
**HOLLANDIA PRODUCE**  
*Carpinteria, CA*



For unmatched quality, uniformity and roots-on freshness, try Hollandia Produce living lettuce and leafy greens. Our Live Gourmet and Grower Pete's Organic brands are hydroponically greenhouse-grown.

**BOOTH #2320**  
**KEY TECHNOLOGY**  
*Walla Walla, WA*

Key Technology designs and manufactures process automation solutions for the processing of leafy greens, broccoli, carrots, diced/sliced fruit and many other fresh-cut products. Our solutions integrate digital sorting, specialized conveying, and processing/preparation systems to ensure food safety, efficiency and rapid ROI. Ask about VERYX, the new standard in fresh-cut sorting.



**BOOTH #2515**  
**KRONEN**  
*Cohoes, NY*

From small innovators to large multinationals, fresh-cut professionals worldwide rely on Kronen machines for improved product quality, higher yields and reduced labor costs. Whatever your application, we will have trained, knowledgeable staff on hand to help with choosing the most cost effective and efficient machine for Trimming/Inspection/Conveying; Coring/Peeling/Slicing; Washing/Drying/Packaging.



**BOOTH #1862**  
**MARKET FRESH PRODUCE**  
*Nixa, MO*

Market Fresh is committed to offering the most innovative, fresh, and consistent produce program available in one brand. Our brand believes in developing best in class packaging, products, and service to our customers. We will provide the highest quality produce and customer service available.



**BOOTH #1238**  
**NATUREFRESH FARMS**  
*Leamington, Ontario, Canada*

NatureFresh Farms is producing locally grown greenhouse tomatoes in Ohio, 365 days a year. Reducing food miles with fresh tomatoes picked, packed, and shipped to your store in less than 24 hours — now that's fresh.



**BOOTH #1418**  
**NATURIFE FARMS**  
*Salinas, CA*

Naturife Farms is an industry leader in producing healthy and delicious fresh berries and value-added berry products. With our wide selection, commitment to quality and food safety, year-around availability, and a focus on innovation, Naturife Farms is suited to be your total berry solution.





• GET UP •

# AND GROW!™

together

Dole is making healthy living a team sport in 2016! For the second year in a row, we're launching a nationwide summer tour and providing unique new recipes and action-inspiring incentives, all to challenge Americans to get healthy together by eating more fresh fruits and vegetables.

Here's how:

## TOUR



Free recipe samples, fun activities, and gifts with purchase at over 400 tour stops this summer!

## CHALLENGE



Our new Healthy Living Challenge encourages consumers to join together in eating and living healthier for a chance to win culinary experiences.

## RECIPES



Developed by our Culinary Nutrition team, our newest fresh fruit and vegetable recipes are ideal for sharing with family and friends this summer.

## LEARN



Armed with the latest fruit and vegetable insights and meal prep tips from the Dole Nutrition Institute, eating healthy together has never been easier.

Visit [Dole.com/GetUpAndGrow](http://Dole.com/GetUpAndGrow) for more information. #GetUpAndGrow

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# UNITED FRESH CONVENTION | GLOBAL COLD CHAIN EXPO

JUNE 20 - 22, 2016 | MCCORMICK PLACE | CHICAGO, IL



## BOOTH #1811 NATURESEAL, INC.

**Westport, CT**  
Fresh-cut shelf life extension: for maintaining fresh cut produce qualities and controlling pathogens in produce wash water, NatureSeal has you covered.



## BOOTH #1643 NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

**Trenton, NJ**  
The New Jersey Department of Agriculture represents New Jersey's diverse produce industry. For 30-plus years, Jersey Fresh has been the brand for promoting quality produce to those buyers interested in sourcing New Jersey farm products.



## BOOTH #1540 PERI & SONS FARMS

**Yerington, NV**  
Peri & Sons Farms—Certified Sustainably Grown white, yellow, red, sweet and USDA organic onions. More than 350 million pounds are packed and shipped from our family-farms in Nevada and California annually.



## BOOTH #1211 GLOBAL COLD CHAIN EXPO PLUS LOCATION SYSTEMS

**Huntsville, AL**  
PLUS Location Systems provides active RTLS solutions that improve productivity, safety, security, and compliance through ultra-accurate real-time location tracking of personnel, vehicles, and assets in warehouses and distribution centers. PLUS' activity analysis software extracts and presents visualizations and alerts for key operational metrics via custom GUIs and APIs for common ERP/WMS systems — resulting in a substantial ROI.



## BOOTH #1311 POWERED AIRE

**Greenville, PA**  
Powered Aire Inc. manufactures stainless steel air curtains for cold storage applications. Air Curtains help reduce frost buildup at cooler/freezer door openings; reduce fog that forms when doors open; and keeps doors/floors dry. Ideal for insulated sliding, high-speed fabric, hard panel, loading dock, ground level, swing and main doors.



GLOBAL COLD CHAIN EXPO

## BOOTH #627 PRIMECOMPOSITE

**Denver, CO**  
PrimeComposite Jointless and Saw Cut Free Concrete Floors: this product is a revolutionary high-tech approach to concrete production. Using high dosage-rate steel fiber reinforcement coupled with proprietary anti-shrinkage concrete additives and special quality-management systems, we are able to produce PrimeComposite Jointless and Saw Cut Free concrete that is tougher, stronger, economical and ecologically friendly.



## BOOTH #1432 PRODUCE BUSINESS

**Boca Raton, FL**  
PRODUCE BUSINESS delivers marketing, merchandising, management and procurement insights to retail and foodservice buyers. Its 31-year relationships with leaders worldwide is extended online through *PerishablePundit.com* and *PerishableNews.com*, in addition to The New York Produce Show and Conference as well as The London Produce Show and Conference.



## BOOTH #1531 PRODUCE PRO SOFTWARE

**Woodridge, IL**  
Produce Pro is a fully integrated software solution providing real time inventory, traceability, reporting and accounting capabilities for wholesale food distributors, terminal markets, growers, processors, and importers. Powerful software solutions together with perishable food industry expertise and business consulting provide customers with efficient support and service.



## BOOTH #1743 PROGRESSIVE PRODUCE

**Los Angeles, CA**  
Progressive Produce provides customers a national supply of Americas Asparagus year-round. Progressive has thousands of acres of farm-fresh asparagus grown throughout the "Americas" in Mexico, Peru, California and Washington, which is available in bulk and retail packages.



## BOOTH #2021 RED SUN FARMS

**Kingsville, Ontario, Canada**  
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 that your customers get the healthy delicious greenhouse vegetables they're looking for all year long.



## BOOTH #1226 RENAISSANCE FOOD GROUP

**Rancho Cordova, CA**  
Renaissance Food Group is a national fresh food company that creates, markets and distributes high-quality products for consumers via the retail and foodservice channels.



## BOOTH #1450 SENSITECH INC.

**Beverly, MA**  
A leading provider of supply and cold chain visibility solutions, Sensitech Inc. tracks, monitors, and protects the quality and integrity of their temperature-sensitive products across complex supply chains and provides real-time cargo transparency from origin to destination.



## BOOTH #1809 SILVER CREEK SOFTWARE, INC.

**Boise, ID**  
Makers of Visual Produce an accounting program targeted for the fresh produce industry, Silver Creek Software offers unique capabilities to produce wholesalers, distributors, packers, brokers and grower customer menus, contract pricing, lot control, route accounting, Visual Internet Online ordering, landed cost, Traceability Solutions and much more.



## BOOTH #2223 STEMILT GROWERS

**Wenatchee, WA**  
Stemilt Growers is a family-owned grower/shipper of fresh apples, pears, cherries and summer fruits. The company is excited to showcase its World Famous Cherries and leading consumer brands, Lil Snapper kid-sized fruits and Fresh Blenders apples at United Fresh.



## BOOTH #2010 SUN BELLE INC.

**Schiller Park, IL**  
Sun Belle, a certified member of the Woman's Business Enterprise (WBE), is a leading brand and distributor of fresh berries throughout North America, Europe and Asia. Our emphasis is on quality, value, service and innovation with four company-run distribution centers in the United States delivering conventional, organic and Demeter-certified biodynamic berries year-round. Additionally, Sun Belle distributes a full line of greenhouse vegetables and specialties east of the Mississippi.



## BOOTH #2611 TRIANGLE PACKAGE MACHINERY COMPANY

**Chicago, IL**  
Triangle is a U.S. manufacturer of vertical form fill seal (VFFS) bagging machines, combination weighers, and depositing systems. Our X-Series Baggers are available with heat sealing or Ultrasonic welding. And, Model XY-RJ features an easily rotatable sealing jaw to run various bag styles, including pillow bags, gusseted bags, three-sided seal and Doy bags.



## BOOTH #1746 WESTMORELAND SALES/ TOPLINE FARMS

**Leamington, Ontario, Canada**  
Westmoreland-TopLine Farms is a grower/packer/shipper of premium gourmet hothouse produce and now includes USA Grown Cucumbers and TOV and soon to include Organic TOV and Organic Grape Tomatoes.



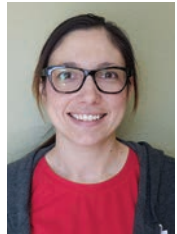
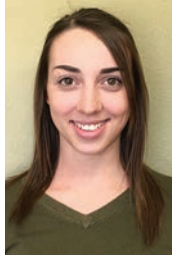
TRANSITIONS

MARKET FRESH PRODUCE  
NIXA, MO



**Otis Chamblee**, VMI (vendor managed inventory) Specialist has recently taken on new responsibilities in logistics and procurement, where he will now report to Stacy Holthaus, director of procurement. Chamblee will be responsible for product orders, and he will monitor and track orders to ensure on-time delivery.

**Kristyn Head** will be an administrative assistant reporting to Adam Faust, director of operations. She will provide assistance with administrative operations as well as assistance in expansion of marketing and sales efforts in the Southeast. Head recently graduated from University of Missouri-Columbia with a degree in Mass Media Communications and a minor in Business Administration.



Market Fresh hires **Courtney Rivera** as a VMI specialist where she will report to Brian Morris, Director of VMI. Rivera will be responsible for ensuring timely and accurate fulfillment of orders to ensure customer satisfaction.

TRANSITIONS

INDEX FRESH  
RIVERSIDE, CA



**Joseph "Mark" Buhl** is named Index Fresh's director of sales and international business development. Buhl represents the third generation of his family to work in agriculture. In his new role at Index Fresh, one of his missions is to raise awareness globally about avocados.

**Bobby Fingerlin** joins the sales team. Bobby is a California native with a strong sales background. Coming to Index Fresh after years of working in sales, Fingerlin was immediately excited to align himself with an avocado packing and marketing brand.



**Evangelina Kaudze** becomes food safety and compliance manager. In her new role, Kaudze is responsible for developing and updating policies and procedures for food safety, and ensuring that every company with which Index Fresh partners meets Index Fresh's social responsibility standards.

TRANSITIONS

POTATOES USA  
DENVER, CO

**Jason Davenport** of Arvin, CA, is elected to the Potatoes USA Executive Committee. He will be serving his first year on the board as co-chairman of the Domestic Marketing Committee. Davenport is a graduate of the University of Idaho, Moscow, ID, and holds a bachelor of science degree in plant science. He is a member of the Western Growers Association, serves on his local Boy Scouts of America district and council leadership, has been president of the Mortar Board and was a 2010 participant in the Potato Industry Leadership Institute.



**Mike Pink** of Mesa, WA, was elected chairman of Potatoes USA. Pink is serving his fifth year on the Board. In 2014-2015, he served as co-chairman of the Board's International Marketing Committee. He previously served three years on the International Marketing Administrative Committee. Pink Farms has been a part of the Washington potato industry for the past 26 years.

**Doug Poe** of Connell, WA, is elected to the Potatoes USA Executive Committee. He will be serving his fifth year on the Board as co-chairman of the International Marketing Committee. This will be his first year on its Executive Committee. During 2014-2016, he served as a member of the Board's Administrative Committee and on the International Marketing Committee. Poe has been growing potatoes for the past nine years. The name of his company is Poe Ag, LLC, and he also works as a farm manager at RHD, Inc.



TRANSITION

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE  
NASHVILLE, TN

**Tom Womack** will continue his service in a new role as deputy commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. Womack is well-known and highly respected in the agricultural community, having spent the majority of his tenure with the Department as its spokesman and director of communications. Womack obtained his bachelor's degree in government from Western Kentucky University. He is also a 2003 graduate of the Tennessee Government Executive Institute. A former state secretary and strong supporter of the Future Farmers of America, Womack has been recognized by the National FFA Organization with the Honorary American FFA Degree and currently serves on the board of directors of the Tennessee FFA Foundation.



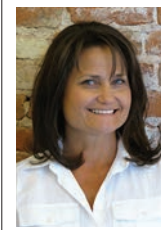
TRANSITION

THE OPPENHEIMER GROUP  
VANCOUVER, CANADA



One of the country's leading fresh produce sales, marketing and distribution companies announces the promotion of **Steve Young** to the role of sales director for Canada. Young, who has been with Oppy since 2008, served as sales manager at the company's Calgary location for the past four years. Previously, he worked as a sales representative at Oppy Vancouver, bringing account management experience with Sunkist with him into the role. As sales director for Canada, Young will return to Vancouver in August to oversee and support Oppy's Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto sales teams, and lead the company's Canadian sales strategy in tandem with vice president of Canadian sales, Walt Breeden.

TRANSITION



RIVER FRESH FARMS  
SALINAS, CA

River Fresh Farms hires **Lisa Robyn** to lead the sales team, work directly with buyers, and support the ongoing growth of the company. Robyn comes to River Fresh Farms with three decades of agricultural expertise in Salinas Valley and Sacramento. Her prior experience includes roles as procurement and marketing manager, sales liaison and product manager for a handful of large foodservice and retail distributors. She specializes in building lasting industry relationships, monitoring produce forecasts and consolidating purchases and transportation for faster delivery to customers.

ANNOUNCEMENT

AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO  
TEAMS UP WITH TABASCO  
FOR CINCO DE MAYO

Irving, TX-based Avocados from Mexico (AFM), announces a national partnership with Tabasco to spice up sales in time for Cinco de Mayo with its Fiesta Del Fuego campaign. The promotion is designed to increase consumption by providing recipe recommendations for numerous delicious meals and snacks that can be prepared with Avocados From Mexico and Tabasco.



ANNOUNCEMENT

PRIME TIME INTERNATIONAL  
CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Prime Time International (Coachella, CA) now one of the largest year-round growers, packers and shippers of multi-colored peppers in North America, is celebrating its 25th anniversary. To thank its dedicated and loyal customers, Prime Time is randomly placing visible red envelopes in Prime Time produce boxes throughout the summer. Those lucky winners who open the box simply need to complete the form and return it in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope to Prime Time to receive a limited edition commemorative pure silver coin and a polo shirt. Winners will be listed in select Prime Time print ads, on the website and on Facebook.



**NATIONAL MANGO BOARD ELECTS NEW 2016 OFFICERS**

ANNOUNCEMENT



(L-R) Danny Pollak, Chris Ciruli, Joella Shiba, Greg Golden, and Jorge Perez

Orlando, FL-based The National Mango Board (NMB) elected new officers who will lead the board and fulfill their duties and responsibilities as dedicated members and in accordance with the Commodity Promotion, Research, and Information Act of 1996, and the Mango Order. Greg Golden of Mullica Hill, NJ, will serve as chair, and Joella Shiba of Los Angeles, CA, as vice-chair. Serving as Secretary is Jorge Perez of Sinaloa, Mexico, and elected as treasurer for a second term is Chris Ciruli of Tubac, AZ. Danny Pollak of Sea Girt, NJ, will serve as ex-officio. The NMB officers, together with the rest of the board members, will continue to uphold the NMB's mission to increase consumption of fresh mangos in the U.S. through innovative research and promotional activities, while fostering a thriving industry.

**FRESH SOLUTIONS NETWORK'S SIDE DELIGHTS OFFER SPRING/SUMMER PROMOTIONS**

ANNOUNCEMENT

Fresh Solutions Network (FSN), San Francisco, announces its seasonal, in-store promotions, for retailers to celebrate the bright taste of spring and hot summer grilling with free-standing, promotional themed merchandise displays, and coordinating point-of-purchase signage for



Side Delights Potatoes. During the month of May, FSN offers potato salad recipes for spring events using QR codes on the in-store displays.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**RIVERIDGE ADDS MICHIGAN-GROWN ASPARAGUS TO PRODUCE OFFERING**



Riveridge Produce Marketing (the Sparta, MI-based vertically-integrated apple grower, packer, marketer and shipper of Michigan apples) is committed to promoting Michigan agriculture. This year, the company expands to market and sell a large volume of fresh Michigan asparagus. Each spear is snapped by hand, so the vegetable is fully edible — no need to trim large end pieces. Riveridge plans to use that message through marketing support in radio ads and billboards in select markets and media and blogger outreach. Additionally, Riveridge is refreshing packaging and creating new approaches to make the asparagus purchase and cooking even easier for the end consumer.

Produce & Floral Watch are regular features of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a high resolution image to: Managing Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at info@producebusiness.com

**VAN GRONINGEN & SONS ADDS ORGANIC WATERMELONS AND MIXED MELONS TO SPRING LINEUP**

ANNOUNCEMENT

Van Groningen & Sons, Inc. of Manteca, CA, adds organic seedless and organic mini personal-sized watermelons to its spring lineup shipping from the Imperial Valley of California. Harvest begins around May 10 and will continue through June. These two organic items will complement the company's diverse assortment of conventional melons — including seedless and seeded watermelons, mini personal-sized watermelons, cantaloupes and honeydews. The company will also add a few new varieties of conventional mixed melons — including orange flesh honeydew, Galia, Hami and Canary melons.



Jesse Leyva, grower relations/quality assurance for Van Groningen & Sons, inspects a newly planted block of organic seedless watermelon in El Centro, CA.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**INLINE PLASTICS LAUNCHES NEW CONTAINERS**

Inline Plastics (Shelton, CT) launches SquareWare food containers, the newest members of the company's breakthrough Safe-T-Fresh line of patented tamper-evident products that ensure product protection. This new line of 4-inch containers has a one piece hinged clamshell design. The single SKU offers efficient inventory management compared to 2-piece containers, while increasing efficiency, output, and productivity for food processors when packing. SquareWare containers are leak resistant and lock in freshness, safeguarding their contents from packing to the consumer's home.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**INDIANAPOLIS FRUIT CO. PROMOTES FRESH LABELS AND PACKAGING**

Indianapolis Fruit Company, Indianapolis, IN, announces its redesigned labels and packaging for its Garden Best and Garden Organic lines of fresh-pack items. A new color scheme allows consumers to quickly differentiate conventional and organic items by using purple-highlighted packaging and labels for conventional fresh-pack items and orange-highlighted packaging and labels for organic products. In addition, labels now use a white background to enable easier reading of the product description. The new packaging and labels feature the distinctive leaf design that consumers have come to associate with their favorite high quality fresh-pack produce under the Garden Best and Garden Organic brands.



**MEASURE TO IMPROVE DESIGNS UPDATED WEBSITE**

ANNOUNCEMENT



Measure to Improve (Salinas, CA) debuts a new and improved website. Offering the industry a comprehensive set of solutions for all sustainability needs, the company's new website helps guide clients through a proactive approach from farms to facilities, surveys to soils, water to waste, and energy efficiency. Measure to Improve cultivates a strong, dedicated team, including sustainability experts from all different backgrounds to help organizations measure, improve, and credibly promote its sustainability efforts.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**OCEAN MIST FARMS INTRODUCES SEASON & STEAM ARTICHOKE**

Ocean Mist Farms (Castroville, CA) is expanding its award-winning Season & Steam line of fresh convenient vegetables with cleaned and ready to cook fresh artichokes. Ocean Mist Farms Season & Steam fresh vegetables are unique in that the package technology allows user to open the bag prior to cooking, pre-season the contents to their flavor preference, reseal with the zip-lock and steam by microwave all within the same bag.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**BALOIAN FARMS COMPLETES SOLAR POWER INSTALLATION**

Baloian Farms (Fresno, CA) completes the solar system installation, comprised of 3,360 panels at its headquarters. The grower, packer, and shipper of bell peppers values sustainable farming practices and energy conservation. By the end of the year, solar power production will account for approximately 63 percent of Baloian Farm's energy use at the facility.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**MUNGER BROTHERS, LLC AND HORTIFRUIT S.A. MERGE**

Naturipe Farms partners, Munger Brothers, LLC (Delano, CA) and Hortifrut S.A. (Santiago, Chile), announce the memorandum to merge the Munger's berry business with Hortifrut, S.A. As a result of this merger, these industry leaders will form a consolidated global berry organization with operations in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, California, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Europe, Africa and Asia.



ENJOY  
IT'S FROM  
EUROPE

THE EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORTS  
CAMPAIGNS THAT PROMOTE HIGH  
QUALITY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS



  
**Snack a fruit!**  
*Deliciously Fresh Citrus*

*Start your day with a fruit  
for more energy, balance,  
vitality and taste in your life!*



CAMPAIGN FINANCED WITH AID FROM THE  
EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS



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CITRUS



INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXPO

JUNE 20-22, 2016

MCCORMICK PLACE, CHICAGO, IL



BOOTH REVIEW

**THE INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXPO** is promoted as North America's largest business-to-business trade show for the floral industry, uniting mass market retail buyers, florists, suppliers, media, and other industry professionals. IFE 2016 be co-located with United Fresh, FMI Connect and Global Cold Chain Expo in Chicago at McCormick Place. The combination of these powerful events bring together cross-category retailers from high-volume, mass markets and mid-size grocers, to independent operators from the local, national and international markets. The Education Program is on Monday, June 20, and the two days of exhibits featuring more than 200 exhibitors, will be held on June 21 and 22. For more details on the event produced by Diversified Communications of Portland, ME, see [www.floriexpo.com](http://www.floriexpo.com). (Booth numbers subject to change.)

**BOOTH #611**  
**ALDERSHOT GREENHOUSES LTD.**  
*Burlington, Ontario, Canada*  
 One of North America's premier potted blooming producers – Aldershot Greenhouses Ltd. unsurpassed commitment to quality has made us a top producer of potted blooming plants in North America. Long lasting blooms for home and office, Aldershot Greenhouses Ltd. potted plants continue to perform with excellence.



**BOOTH #262**  
**ARIZONAEAST**  
*Minotola, NJ*  
 Are you a succuler for succulents? Could you just KISS a cute little cactus? (Maybe not, 'cause that would hurt.) Do tillandsias tickle your fancy? (Read: air plants, if you're more apt to their common name.) Are you ready to hedge your bets on some lucky bamboo? Well then, you've come to the right place. See our terrariums, planters, container gardens.



**BOOTH #941**  
**ARPELLINI EXPRESS LINES INC.**  
*Palm City, FL*  
 Look to us for scheduled LTL service. Since 1945, Armellini Logistics, a family-owned perishable logistics business, has specialized in the transportation of flowers. We offer the best freight service and performance handled with complete care -- specializing in temperature controlled shipments of perishable products across America.



**BOOTH #1022**  
**A-ROO COMPANY**  
*Strongsville, OH*  
 For more than 40 years A-ROO has created marketing, merchandising and packaging solutions for the floral industry. We have containers and vases, decorative packaging, display fixtures and accessories, films, sleeves and wraps, pot covers, ribbons, bows and picks. Offices in Ohio, Florida, Texas and California provide service to North, Central and South America.



**BOOTH #1058**  
**AVERY IMPORTS/ WILLOW GROUP LTD.**  
*Batavia, NY*

Whether you are a garden center, florist, greenhouse, nursery, designer or gift store, Avery Imports offers a variety of more than 1,000 different items to choose from.



**BOOTH #636**  
**BAY CITY FLOWER CO.**  
*Half Moon Bay, CA*  
 Family-owned Bay City Flower Company — more than 100 years of growing! We are known for producing the most diverse assortments of unique, high-quality flowering plants in the country. Our aim is to keep our customers' floral displays fresh, interesting and colorful.



**BOOTH #626**  
**BAYVIEW FLOWERS**  
*Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada*  
 More than 40 years of experience, we specialize in potted plants, dish gardens, indoor tropical foliage along with cut greens and fresh cut flowers. Our vases, containers and home décor items will entice your customers. Count on us for quality and innovation to keep your floral department fresh and inviting.



**BOOTH #165**  
**BGI**  
*Saint James, FL*  
 BGI Fertilizer is the premier manufacturer and distributor of GAIN Fertilizers, a powerful line of species specific formulas researched, developed and used by commercial growers and universities across the country. Simplify the buying process and ensure spectacular results for your customers with the GAIN Family of species specific plant foods.



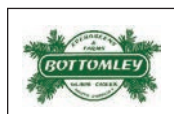
**BOOTH #855**  
**BLOOMQUEST LLC**  
*Englewood, NJ*  
 BloomQuest supplies roses and spray roses directly from Kenya to retail partners in the U.S. We have an exceptional trading relationship with Kenya and work closely with a number of specially selected farms in Ecuador. This enables us to offer our customers the best possible flowers in the industry.



**BOOTH #570**  
**BOTANICAL INTERESTS INC.**  
*Broomfield, CO*  
 Retailers choose Botanical Interests' high-quality, untreated, non-GMO seeds. Meet your customers' needs by offering certified organics, heirlooms, micro-greens and sprouting seeds. Botanical Interests has a successful track record in grocery markets and natural health stores. Guaranteed sale programs, space-saving display options, and in-store service available in most areas.



**BOOTH #1015**  
**BOTTOMLEY EVERGREENS & FARMS**  
*Ennice, NC*  
 Bottomley Evergreens will help you meet all your live Christmas decor needs including garlands, wreaths, bouquets and centerpieces. We pride ourselves on providing the highest quality and service available to our valuable customers. Be sure to see what's new at Bottomleys.



**BOOTH #900**  
**BURTON + BURTON**  
*Bogart, GA*  
 burton + BURTON will showcase 2017 Valentine and Spring products at this year's IFE show. Come by to see the newest designs in balloons, floral containers, ribbons, picks, and more! burton + BURTON is a family-owned and operated business, serving the floral industry since 1982.



**BOOTH #200B**  
**COASTAL NURSERY/MONTEREY BAY HEATHER**  
*Watsonville, CA*  
 Come Experience the difference in the California Pavilion. Visit Coastal Nursery/Monterey Bay Heather. The company has been growing quality plants since 1981. Come visit our booth and see for yourself our new and exciting holiday designs for 2016.



**BOOTH #426**  
**CHRYSAL USA**  
*Miami, FL*

Chrysal Americas is an international company offering a multitude of products for the complete nutrition and care of fresh cut flowers for growers, wholesalers, florist and supermarkets in the United States, Canada and Latin America.







# INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXPO

JUNE 20-22, 2016

MCCORMICK PLACE, CHICAGO, IL

## BOOTH REVIEW

**BOOTH #811**  
**DECOWRAPPS**  
*Doral, FL*



Deco Wraps is a leading supplier of distinctive packaging options for fresh flowers and potted plants. We offer prompt service, simplified logistics, and competitive pricing. We create products that are always fresh and innovative. Come visit us and see our exciting new items.

**BOOTH #408**  
**THE ELITE BOUQUET**  
*Miami, FL*

Located in the heart of Miami, Elite also has four other U.S. locations covering the surrounding regions of New Jersey, Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles. Elite's primary imports are roses, spray roses, gerberas and alstroemeria. See Elite for bouquets, consumer bunches, cut greens, fresh arrangements, grower bunches, fresh cut and specialty cut flowers.



**BOOTH #648**  
**ENCORE FLORAL MARKETING**  
*Grand Rapids, MI*

We will showcase a selection of color bouquets, arrangements and balloons. Importing allows us to bring together product from countries around the world into our unique offerings. In addition, our Miami and Dallas facilities enhance our distribution opportunities nationwide.



**BOOTH #467**  
**FLORAL BUSINESS** *floralbusiness*  
*Boca Raton, FL*

The quarterly FLORAL BUSINESS magazine is a supplement in the March, June, September and December issues of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Editorial exclusively focuses on marketing, merchandising, management and procurement. PRODUCE BUSINESS — the largest circulation publication in the industry — is mailed to more than 18,000 produce and floral executives each month.

**BOOTH #438**  
**FRESHBLOOMS**  
*Sewell, NJ*



FreshBlooms is an accomplished floral importer and full service distributor dedicated to servicing all facets of the floriculture industry. We present an extensive variety of premium fresh cut flowers from our worldwide farm sources while providing custom-made promotions, innovative product lines, hardgoods, and integrated logistics. FreshBlooms brings it all together.

**BOOTH #435**  
**GALLERIA FARMS**  
*Miami, FL*

We are one of the largest growers of chrysanthemums and specialty flowers in the world with over 100 hectares in production. Galleria Farms is a solution and service provider of premium floral products to mass retailers and supermarkets.



**BOOTH #750**  
**GOLDEN FLOWERS**  
*Miami, FL*

Since 1989 Golden Flowers has been dedicated to importing and distributing fresh-cut flowers throughout North America from our exclusive group of farms. An innovative floral company that develops long term relationships based on mutual trust and understanding and by partnering in business growth through tailored solutions, offering farm-direct flowers.



**BOOTH #404**  
**HIAWATHA CORPORATION**  
*Shelton, WA*

Hiawatha Evergreens, a pioneer in the floral industry, has been exhibiting at the Super Floral Show/IFE for 25 years. We've been supplying fresh Christmas greens, Western greens and Moss products from the Pacific Northwest since 1938. Stop by to see our greens and our new products.



**BOOTH #417**  
**HI-RISE BALLOONS & FLORAL SUPPLIES**  
*Austin, TX*

Want to increase balloon sales and reduce costs related to helium, inventory, and labor? Of course you do! Visit our booth to learn how Hi-Rise can help.



**BOOTH #244**  
**HOMESTEAD GROWERS**  
*Vineland, Ontario, Canada*



See the wonder of the potted Calla Lily at Homestead Growers Niagara. Our inventive and fun booth theme will inspire your creative juices to pump up your own floral department! Fabulous colors and amazing quality will be showcased.

**BOOTH #455**  
**JETRAM SALES**  
*St. Louis, MO*

JetRam's Jetwrap Delivery System has given thousands of florists the ability to wrap their arrangements quickly and efficiently. The combination of box and sleeve dramatically improves any arrangement and protects them from weather and transportation damage. Our products work together seamlessly to give florists a fast, efficient, and professional look.



**BOOTH #871**  
**KENNICOTT BROTHERS**  
*Chicago, IL*

Kennicott Delivers! Customers know it takes more than flowers to grow their business. The Best Brands of Bunches, Bouquets, Botanicals, Christmas Greens and Supplies delivered via DSD to 10 states and warehouses across the country. Kennicott Brothers--your trusted local floral source. Let's visit and explore mutual opportunities.



**BOOTH #1063**  
**KOEN PACK USA INC.**  
*Miami, FL*

We specialize in containers and vases, films, sleeves, wraps and pot covers. Especially known for our innovative packaging for potted plants and bouquets, we have a large inventory of sleeves, sheets, picks, bags and other accessories to enhance the look of your final product.



**BOOTH #651**  
**MEI**  
*LaGrange Park, IL*

Since 1996, MEI has been dedicated to the development of floral merchandising concepts, formats, unique fixtures and efficient refrigeration systems to maximize sales and bring profits to the retailer's bottom line. Stop by to discuss how MEI's creative merchandising concepts will help your sales grow.



**BOOTH #638**  
**MEYERS FLOWERS**  
*Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada*

With 15-plus acres of greenhouse space and over 50 years of experience, Meyers is the premiere choice for quality potted flowers. Our floral products range from spring bedding plants to holiday crops such as Poinsettias and Easter lilies. We are very accommodating with our variety of weekly flowers and promotional programs.



**BOOTH #1065**  
**MICKY'S MINIS FLORA EXPRESS**  
*St. Louis, MO*

Micky's Minis specializes in growing and shipping two inch miniature potted plants. Our plant selection includes roses, violets, mums, kalanchoes, azaleas, poinsettias, assorted herbs, cactus, succulents and foliage plants. Plus we offer a great line of seasonal and holiday accessories. Stop by our booth to see what's new!





INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXPO

JUNE 21-26, 2016

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BOOTH REVIEW

**BOOTH #556**

**PENANG NURSERY INC.**  
*Apopka, FL*

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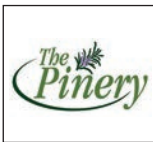


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# A Clear View Of Transparency And How It Builds Trust

BY CHARLIE ARNOT, CEO, THE CENTER FOR FOOD INTEGRITY

If you increase transparency, you will increase trust. The Center for Food Integrity's (CFI) latest consumer trust study provides the statistical data to prove it.

Research conducted in 2015 was the culmination of three years of work on the concept of increasing food system transparency. Consumers are asking for greater transparency and varying attempts were made to define it. CFI's research not only defines the concept but provides a clear path to effectively address growing skepticism about food.

In a nationwide online survey of 2,000 people, CFI's 2015 study explored transparency as it pertains to:

- Impact of Food on Health
- Food Safety
- Environmental Impact
- Labor and Human Rights
- Animal Well-Being
- Business Ethics in Food Production

To identify the practices consumers associate with demonstrating trust-building transparency, survey participants were asked to rate a list of practices in each area. Here are some highlights:

**Impact of Food on Health and Food Safety** – Consumers rate these two categories as the most important. For these issues, they want information on the product label. That includes all ingredients regardless of quantity, allergens, preservatives and whether ingredients were derived from GMO seed. For other issues, engagement and access to information are key themes. Consumers want to be able to engage via the company's website, and they expect information to be provided in easy-to-understand language.

**Environmental Impact** – Consumers want the opportunity to ask questions about environmental performance via the company website, and they want answers provided in simple language. When regulations are violated, corrective actions should be provided on the company website.

**Labor and Human Rights** – Consumers

want the opportunity to ask questions about labor practices and human rights via the company website, and they want answers provided in easy-to-understand language.

**Animal Well-Being** – Results of third-party audits on animal care should be shared on the company website. Consumers want the opportunity to ask questions via the company website and they want answers provided in simple language.

**Business Ethics** – Consumers want companies to accept responsibility on the company website for all business activity. They also expect whistleblowers to be protected.

Consumers were also asked who they hold most responsible for demonstrating trust-building transparency. The study shows consumers look to food manufacturers to provide transparency in all aspects of food production — whether it's safety, impact on health, or on-farm animal care. Farmers were second in all aspects, and nearly tied, in the Environmental Impact category.

Some transparency activities are more important to consumers than others. This research provides insight into which activities are most important, which is valuable information for food companies when developing plans to address consumer questions and concern. For example, providing food safety audit results by a third-party verifier is a stronger indicator of transparency than providing cooking instructions on a package.

While the research shows the highest level of consumer concern is associated with the issues of Food Safety and the Impact of Food on Health, this study proves that consumers expect companies to be transparent about all six topics tested. Consumer trust in products, people and brands depends on it.

## Transparency Index

Having explored the concept of increased transparency for three years, CFI is developing an index to give companies and orga-

nizations the tools needed to effectively demonstrate transparency. A beta test of the index was conducted by: Campbell Soup Company, ConAgra Foods, DuPont, Kroger, Monsanto, Phibro Animal Health, Smithfield Foods, The Hershey Company and Tyson Foods.

The beta test results revealed strengths as well as opportunities for companies to better provide information important to consumers. Companies received high marks for providing information about the impact of food on health, food safety, environment and business ethics via company websites. Areas of opportunity include companies' performance in responding to consumer inquiries and providing information about how they verify practices.

## Demonstrating Transparency

Merely making policies available to the public isn't enough, as they only articulate motivation. When it comes to transparency that actually increases trust, sharing specific practices was most predictive of trust in five of the six areas. Providing consumers concrete examples of practices by actually showing and talking about what you do is key to being transparent.

Practices are also a reflection of a company's internal motivation and a demonstration of a company's values in action. And, as scientifically proven in CFI's trust model in 2006, shared values are three to five times more important than sharing facts or demonstrating expertise when it comes to building trust.



*The Center for Food Integrity (CFI) was established to build consumer trust and confidence in today's food system. CFI leads the public discussion to build trust in today's food system and facilitate dialogue with the food system to create better alignment with consumer expectations. Visit [FoodIntegrity.org](http://FoodIntegrity.org) for more information.*

# Reason For Skepticism

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

**I**t is hard to know what to make of a study such as this. Part of the problem is that the sponsors of the study are very opaque as to the methodology. It is an Internet-based survey, which — it is claimed — is representative of the U.S. population. But how these people were solicited, how non-Internet users are represented, how self-reported characteristics were verified, and how deep they went to ensure these 2,000 people represent the U.S. population — religion, ethnicity, education, income, etc. — is left unclear.

And there is reason for skepticism. The study is sponsored by an organization with decided interests. They didn't go out and hire Gallup or Cornell University to design and conduct the survey.

The big problem with this research may be, however, that the very nature of asking questions about people's desire to receive information doesn't allow for a value-neutral response. For example, saying "no" to the question may imply that the person being surveyed is being judged as a bad person for not saying "yes."

Consumers may perceive being asked if they would like to receive information as a question of their virtue as citizens, parents and spouses. After all, if respondents say they really have little interest in reading about the way laborers are paid, doesn't that make them negligent citizens? If they are not interested in reading about food safety on the food they are going to prepare for their children and families, doesn't that make them lousy parents? And if they don't want to invest time in studying the business ethics of various firms and doing a deep dive into how these companies treat animals, doesn't that make them just callous people?

We know that despite the constant repetition of the claims that people want to know all these things, there is precious little evidence that the broad masses of consumers changed their purchasing habits to align with these supposed demands of consumers for transparency.

**It may well be that consumers would like transparency, specifically because most consumers don't know and don't care about certain topics.**

The evidence we do have indicates consumers change purchasing habits mostly in response to specific negative events. So, if a supermarket is found to be buying from slave labor, it may impact sales. On the contrary, we can't find any impact on consumer purchases when one supermarket is more generous than another on pay, vacation or other benefits.

Another issue is consumer ignorance. On the Internet, it is easy to find videos of talk show hosts and others interviewing people on the street about GMOs. Even on such a hot-button issue, the videos are humorous — specifically because it is easy to find people who swear they are actively avoiding GMOs in their diet, but also have simply no idea what a GMO is, what the term means, or why or how GMOs might be bad for us.

Recent studies indicate about 80 percent of the population wants mandatory disclosure of GMO in food — a seemingly powerful endorsement of the transparency agenda The Center for Food Integrity is promoting. Seemingly ... but then one has to recognize that Professor Jayson Lusk of Oklahoma State University's Department of Agriculture Economics conducted a survey finding 80 percent of Americans also want disclosure about their food containing DNA! And more than half of the respondents answered "false" when confronted with the statement: "All vegetables contain DNA."

How seriously can we take survey

responses in which consumers claim they desperately want transparency on things they know nothing about?

Now, none of this is an argument against transparency. It may well be that consumers would like transparency, specifically because most consumers don't know and don't care about certain topics. They may figure that others, such as activists, will monitor these disclosures and will make a big fuss if something is wrong. For uninformed shoppers, this may be a prudent approach.

For producers and retailers, the argument for transparency may not be directly related to sales. It is more like the argument for an open kitchen in a restaurant. The official reason may be theatre and to enhance the experience of the guests, but *sotto voce*, the argument is that if you do everything in public viewing, you are much less likely to see bad behavior occur or to find bad conditions tolerated.

So for companies that want to do the right thing — that want to institutionalize best values and best practices — keeping these efforts transparent makes it more likely they will be sustained.

Sustained efforts over long periods of time do build trust. So although consumers are probably overstating their real interest in knowing the details, and consumers probably think better of companies that behave transparently, producers and retailers looking to build trust are advised to operate transparently.

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Phone: (508) 657-ISGA (4742)  
Email: office@isga-sprouts.org  
Website: isga-sprouts.org

#### MAY 5 - 7, 2016

##### SIAL CHINA

Conference Venue: Shanghai New Int'l Expo Centre, Shanghai, China  
Conference Management: IMEX Management, Inc., Charlotte, NC  
Phone: (704) 365-0041 • Fax: (704) 365-8426  
Email: EricH@ImexManagement.com  
Website: imexmanagement.com

#### MAY 11 - 13, 2016

##### EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM

Conference Venue: Dallas Fort Worth Airport Marriott South, Dallas  
Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE  
Phone: (302) 738-7100 • Fax: (302) 731-2409  
Email: acalhoun@pmafoundation.com  
Website: pmafoundation.com

#### MAY 21 - 24, 2016

##### AMERICAN FOOD FAIR

Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago  
Conference Management: National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), Arlington, VA  
Phone: (703) 259-6120 • Fax: (703) 934-4899  
Email: aff@naylor.com  
Website: nasdatradeshow.org

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Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago  
Conference Management: National Restaurant Association, Washington, D.C.  
Phone: (312) 853-2525 • Fax: (312) 853-2548  
Email: nra@experient-inc.com  
Website: restaurant.org/show

#### JUNE 5 - 7, 2016

##### THE INTERNATIONAL DAIRY-DELI-BAKERY ASSOCIATION (IDDBA)

Conference Venue: George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston  
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Email: iddba@iddba.org • Website: iddba.org

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Phone: (707) 967-1100  
Email: mark.p.linder@gmail.com  
Website: ciaprochef.com

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Website: florexpo.com

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Conference Management: Food Marketing Institute, Arlington, VA  
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Email: Sales@fmi.org  
Website: fmiconnect.net

#### JUNE 20 - 23, 2016

##### UNITED FRESH

Conference Venue: McCormick Place Convention Center, Chicago  
Conference Management: United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C.  
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Email: jtoner@unitedfresh.org  
Website: unitedfresh.org

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Conference Venue: Jacob Javits Convention Center, New York City  
Conference Management: Specialty Food Association, New York City  
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## RETROSPECTIVE

### RETAILER WILL WEDGE OFFERS INSIGHTS FROM HIS 30-PLUS YEAR PRODUCE CAREER

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**F**resh fruits and vegetables were relegated to the back of the store when a teenage Will Wedge started his retail produce career, which was in 1979 at Hannaford Supermarkets — the 186-store chain headquartered in Scarborough, ME, operating in five New England states. Wedge spent 20 years in retail and 12 years at the corporate level with Hannaford in positions that ranged from store manager, merchandising specialist and category manager to director of fresh merchandising. He left Hannaford in 2011 to fulfill his dream of operating his own supermarket. Today, Wedge is the owner of Will's Shop 'n Save, in Dover-Foxcroft, ME, where

he is joined by wife, Melissa, and daughters Emily and Abby.

#### Where were you in 1985?

I was a young U.S. Air Force officer at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Prior to 1985, I was a produce clerk at the Hannaford in Millinocket, ME, during high school, and at the Stillwater store when I was in college at the University of Maine.

#### What was the produce department like in 1985?

Customers did not ask for organic items; they never heard of COOL [Country of Origin Labeling], and they accepted a limited variety of fruits and vegetables. Supermarkets did not value produce departments as they do today. For example, many produce departments were located in remote parts of the supermarket; whereas, today, they are first and often the largest departments.

#### How would you characterize the overall retail environment in the mid-80s?

Very bland. There was limited education for produce leaders, limited variety ("what you see is what you get") and an undervalued department. For example, the department was built to the rear and a big store might have 400 to 500 SKUs. Mushrooms, tomatoes, tropicals and other categories were limited. If consumers wanted apples, they only had only four to six varieties to select from. Today, produce sales on average are 11 percent of total store sales, the department is often first in line for consumers, and the average store has 800-plus SKUs. This comes from a renewed focus on produce, better technology, better logistics so that consumers can buy far more commodities from

around the world and enjoy a better breadth of selection.

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

Things changed slowly in the late '90s and went into over-drive in the early 2000s. Great companies such as Wegmans and Hannaford took a leap into the new world and led the way for others to follow. Stores went from 400 to 1,000-plus SKUs. Customers were introduced to produce variety and higher quality. White cauliflower became orange and purple, and customers learned about the nutrients found in all the different colors of cauliflower. Consumer demand was the key driver. Technology and logistics continued to improve on the delivery of high-quality products to all parts of the county. Living in the Northeast, it is remarkable that I can get the best quality strawberries from our friends at Limited Edition [from Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce] in California. When they arrive to my small store in mid-Maine the quality is outstanding because the product was shipped property and the cold chain was protected.

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

Good to great companies built teams of fruit and vegetable experts. These companies also traveled to the fields and built relationships with growers. These companies invested in moving produce, giving more space to produce and sourcing new fixtures to best merchandise these new products. For example, when I was the director of produce at Hannaford, I traveled to South America, Central America and all parts of North America visiting growers and reviewing all modes of transportation (rail, tractor trailers, vessels, pick-up trucks, and air). Listening to the growers, they wanted nothing more than to see their product arrive to



Will Wedge



my stores in excellent condition. My customers wanted nothing more than to purchase high-quality produce. The interesting note is that most customers have no idea what goes into picking a banana in Costa Rica and shipping it to the Northeast. However, this same customer knows a fair price for a high quality banana is 49-cents per pound. The entire supply is taken for granted, yet it should be seamless to the consumers.

### How would you describe the produce department today?

Passionate and focused. What I've seen over the past 10-plus years is night and day compared to the early 2000s. Today, the industry is coordinated and focused on educating customers, buyers and growers.

### What was the greatest lesson you learned about retailing over the past 30-plus years?

Customers value produce and have been starving for high-quality fruits and vegetables for years. Most supermarkets are doing a great job with quality, variety and being seasonally appropriate.

### More specifically, what have you learned about retailing produce as an owner of your own supermarket?

It is all about education. For example, I sell fresh fruit to two local elementary schools using money from the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program grant. I introduced children to Clementines from Spain in the winter, first-of-the-season California strawberries in April, and delicious apples such as the Pink Lady from Washington. Parents tell me they appreciate us introducing their children to fruit they normally never taste.

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

Food safety measures, education to consumers and affordable fruits and vegetables. When I listen to customers in my new role as a retailer (owner), I hear loud and clear they value high quality. They want produce to hold up at home on their cupboard or in their crisper. They want a selection and want to know which items are the best in nutrients for their families. They will pay more if they believe it is a value and good for their family. How this product arrives to my store in great condition at an affordable price is the key.

### What are challenges holding the industry back?

The cost of goods. For example, most recently, a school wanted Honeycrisp apples. The cost was \$82 for a case, whereas Pink Lady apples were only \$41 for the same size case. The children did not get to try the Honeycrisp.

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

Produce is a great industry for a career if you are not afraid of hard work. It is a demanding industry for a buyer or grower. If you're a type A personality and have a strong work ethic, then you will love it. If you are laid back and value

a lot of time off, then produce is not for you.

### What advice would you give young retailers entering the produce industry?

Get your hands dirty. For example, walk the process from seed to fork to best appreciate what it takes. I traveled to Central America to work on a banana plantation, watched the pallets loaded on a vessel, met the vessel in the Port of Wilmington, watched the bananas gassed at our distribution center, loaded the bananas on a tractor trailer and stocked the product at retail. **pb**



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# Chipotle Announces Intent To Spend \$10 Million On Food Safety And \$50 Million On Marketing

**W**e've written about Chipotle's food safety travails, and we recently received a letter from a top food safety expert who questioned what the chain's reactions said about our society and its values:

*A successful restaurant chain suffers a series of catastrophic food safety outbreaks during the late summer and fall of 2015 that sicken people in numerous states throughout the U.S. In 2016, it begins a campaign to repair its brand. No one in the industry questions this approach, and the company's reaction to its problems is as laudable as it is understandable. ...*

*In an age when Wall Street, not Main Street, often determines business outcomes, the company's crisis control strategy is nothing less than what most Americans would expect of it. If a company must be saved, its brand must be saved, and if its brand is to be saved, its image must be changed, and in order for its image to be changed, a significant financial investment is required. So it is that an examination of the company's reaction to its problems is less a commentary on its own priorities than it is a commentary on our nation's priorities. ...*

*So it should come as no surprise that the restaurant chain announced earlier this year that it was planning a substantial marketing push, specifically that it "expects to spend at least \$50 million in the first quarter of 2016" alone on "marketing, promotion, and public relations efforts. ...*

*At the same time, the chain is "pulling out all the stops to win back diners, including \$10 million in food-safety*

*spending ... to help its smaller suppliers produce safer meat and vegetables. The money will be used to provide help with education and the implementation of... new food-safety standards. ... Yet, the company hasn't quantified the other food safety efforts.*

*The \$50 million and \$10 million figures were widely reported in the media, but it may be a further commentary on our society's priorities that no one in the popular or the trade press has questioned the ratio of those two huge monetary figures. Even the most powerful news ombudsmen did not take notice of the fact that media outlets are the beneficiaries of massive marketing and public relations budgets. So, whether intentional or not, it isn't surprising that the press didn't pick up on the ratio.*

*In fact, the way in which those two financial investments were reported by the press says a great deal about how they are perceived. Notice that the restaurant chain "expects to spend" money in repairing its image — suggesting something understandable and not the least bit extraordinary, while at the same time it is "pulling out all the stops" in improving its food safety training — suggesting a huge and monumental effort to prevent the problems that caused its damaged image in the first place.*

*And this too says much about our nation's priorities. The degree of focus that buyers pay to food safety pales in comparison to their oversight of quality. And this is an issue far broader than just food safety — as a society we spend huge amounts of money reacting to*



*James F. Prevor*

**JIM PREVOR**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

*problems of all kinds, but a veritable pittance attempting to prevent them.*

*What threatened the restaurant chain described above was a series of food-borne illness outbreaks. What made the chain successful was its ability to respond to consumer demands. So why should we be surprised that it will invest more money in one month alone on public relations than it will in the next few years on food safety education for its suppliers? And who do we have to blame for that firm's accurate reflection of society's priorities? No one other than ourselves.*

\*\*\*\*\*

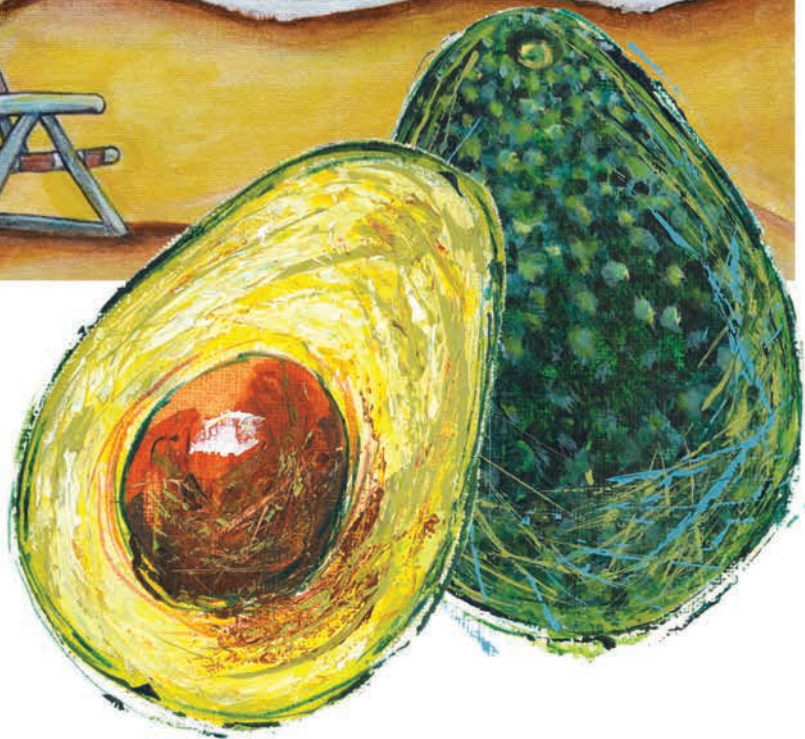
It is a thoughtful piece and well worth pondering. At first glance, it certainly seems as if our society would be better served with more spending on substance — in this case, enhancing food safety — as opposed to marketing.

Yet, it is not so obvious when one digs deeper. Although, of course, one can always spend more, the question is whether spending more will produce a better outcome. On this premise, we have little evidence. We would question the efficacy of spending even \$10 million on educating smaller suppliers. Indeed that expenditure sounds to us more

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like marketing, an effort to persuade consumers that Chipotle uses lots of small, local producers, than a serious food safety effort. Our experience is that these smaller suppliers, to the extent they fail on food safety, do not do so out of ignorance, which could be ameliorated with additional education. They do so because of three things:

**1) The cost of food safety efforts is often lower per unit as producers grow.** So if testing water every day is essential for proper food safety practices, a farm of 2 acres can do the daily water test at half the cost per unit produced of a 1-acre farm. As farms grow, the advantage is daunting.

**2) Dedicated food safety personnel put a priority on food safety.** If there is a multi-tasking farmer trying to do a lot of things, the priority of, say, harvesting before it rains or the freeze sets in, leads to neglect of food safety efforts. In other words, it is not that the producer doesn't know the rules and needs more education; it is that playing by the rules imposes a cost on small producers — not getting the crops harvested before the freeze hits, for example — that is not true of larger operations with dedicated food safety personnel.

**3) Self-interest is more of a conflict for smaller producers.** Even if we all agree that fields showing evidence of animal intrusion ought not to be harvested for food that is going to be eaten raw — the execution of this rule has wildly different impacts on large and small producers and is so likely to be executed differently.

If Dole has a harvesting crew in Salinas, CA, it is easy enough to direct the foreman to withdraw the equipment if he sees any evidence of animal intrusion. Dole doesn't typically own the field, and the foreman gets paid either way. Plus, Dole has many diverse businesses and so can make money in many ways. A small farmer has his few acres of greens; he sees a pig run through the field. He has enormous incentive to turn a blind eye to that pig. This field is all he has; if he voluntarily turns it under, he may well go bankrupt.

None of these three points depend at all on ignorance — they depend on financial facts that more training will not alleviate.

We also do not see the marketing expenditure as excessive. The population of the United States is about 320 million. Divide a \$50 million marketing expenditure by the population, and one is only talking about spending about 15 cents per person. That is pretty reasonable if one has a message to get across.

Our biggest problem is not with the amount of marketing expenditure. It is, instead, with what is being communicated in the marketing. Basically, ever since Johnson & Johnson had its Tylenol Crisis back in 1982, the goal of companies with safety issues is the same:

**Step One:** Recall everything. There were seven deaths, all in Chicago, all as a result of capsules, yet the company recalled all Tylenol.

**Step Two:** Identify the cause. Because the contaminated bottles came from many different factories, yet all the deaths were in Chicago, production tampering was ruled out. Instead it appeared that the bottles on the shelves had been tampered with.

**Step Three:** Develop a prevention program. The company developed a new "triple-sealed" package.

**Step Four:** Reintroduce the product. Once the problem was solved, the company did heavy price promotion and marketing to reintroduce the product and gain back market share.

Equally, Chipotle has made various changes, but there is little certainty that the changes it has made will actually prevent future problems.

It hasn't done seemingly logical things such as insisting that all produce be audited to GFSI standards and be PTI-compliant, nor has it announced changes in Key Performance Indicators to prioritize food safety.

Focusing on these types of steps ... and then marketing to consumers about the changes that have been made makes perfect sense.

And we do not believe that talking seriously to one's customers and prospects is trivial or unimportant. But in Chipotle's case, top executives were sent out to "reassure" consumers, not to communicate the truth. So you wound up with headlines, such as this one from CNBC: "Chipotle Execs: There is No E. Coli in Chipotle Today."

And instead of talking seriously to consumers about the costs of effective food safety programs and thus educating its consumers, Chipotle made statements such as when the founder, Steve Ells, claimed 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 Ells 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," Ells told The Associated Press at the beginning of a day stopping by Seattle restaurants to talk to employees about new food safety rules." [Source: The Orange County Register]*

So instead of marketing to consumers in a way that makes them more literate in these issues and prepares them to understand the costs of effective food safety programs, Chipotle makes unreasonable assurances: "no E. Coli in Chipotle"; and unreasonable promises: "Chipotle will not raise prices to cover the cost of new food safety procedures."

We hope Chipotle will invest all that is necessary and appropriate to maintain proper food safety standards. We then hope it will invest its marketing dollars to raise the sophistication level of its customers so they recognize and appreciate what value is created through these expenditures.

Ignorant people will want unobtainable things. So they will want food that is both the safest and the cheapest.

Since no restaurant can deliver this, smart restaurateurs will want to raise consumer literacy, so those consumers won't be wooed by cheaper competitors.

Marketing expenditures such as this are great investments for the companies that make them and serve broad societal interests in having a more informed populace as well.

**pb**



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# George's Dreshertown Shop n Bag

A neighborhood store relishes three decades of providing quality produce to its community.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE'S DRESHERTOWN SHOP N BAG

In a sleepy suburb of fast-paced Philadelphia, one neighborhood market builds on a legacy of quality and loyalty. George's Dreshertown Shop n Bag in Dresher, PA, remains an innovative and growing part of its community's food needs through its focus on two crucial aspects. "Our foundation is our quality and our customers," explains George Endrigian, who owns the market with wife Ana.

The store was opened in 1977 by George's father, Peter, under the name Dreshertown Shop n Bag. It remains in the same original location though it has been remodeled twice. "This store has always been a key part of this community," says Endrigian. "We're proud to be here and to have served our customers for so long."

About a decade ago, the Endrigians added "George's" to the store name to better reflect

its personal relationship with the community. The store's formula for success combines hand-picking suppliers for quality to meet evolving customer demands. "We go out of our way to provide the best quality produce and value to our customers," says Endrigian. "Sometimes our competition chooses cheaper produce but I refuse to do that. I want my customers to go home and be happy with their purchase. That's why we've been around for almost 39 years."

George's customers feel a sense of ownership in the store, evident in how both customers and employees call each other by name. "Since we're a neighborhood store we have a lot of customers who have been with us for generations," says Endrigian. "Some of our current customers started coming here as kids with their parents. We're actually into third-generation customers now."

The store serves a wide customer base in

age, ethnicity and lifestyle. "Around 40 percent of our customers are younger and 60 percent are seniors," says Endrigian. "We serve professional singles, families, retirees, and a mix of ethnic origins."

Despite the store's 38-year legacy, it has not remained stuck in the 1970s. Upon first stepping into the store, the customer is greeted with the sounds, sights and smells of food, comparable to any urban gourmet market.

## Inviting Produce

The prepared foods section flows shoppers through and into an open, colorful fresh produce department. Produce is a focal point of the store and has been since the store opened. "From my dad's days until now, produce plays a crucial role," says Endrigian.

The produce department occupies about 2,400 square feet of the 23,000 square feet

of total store selling space. Produce contributes a minimum of 14 percent to total store sales on average. "It can hit higher peaks in the summer and at holiday time," says Kevin Carlin, store manager.

The department is lined on each side by refrigerated cases and features three 12-by-6-foot refrigerated islands in the middle. All the cases have separate temperature controls, something crucial to the department. "We are very strict with our temperature controls in the displays," reports Nancy Grace, produce manager. "It's important to ensure items are displayed at the correct temperature so we make sure we have the cases set according to what's on display."

The right-side refrigerated case shows off apples and other colorful fruit. On the left, the department's 10-foot wet rack displays impeccably fresh and perfect lettuces and herbs. Right next to the wet rack, 19 feet of packaged salads and other packaged items lure shoppers.

The abundantly stocked section carries about 600 items. "Variety is important for us," says Carlin. "Our customers like variety and are frequently interested in new and unique items. We put a lot of items in a limited space because we want to ensure we have what our customers want. We don't want them to have to look for something somewhere else."

## Creating Atmosphere

George's produce merchandising is all about creating an inviting atmosphere. "Display and placement are crucial elements to our merchandising," explains Grace. "We're always looking at what grabs the customer's attention, what draws the customer to the product."

Over the years, the produce department has collected a variety of eclectic bins and crates to incorporate into the displays, as evidenced by a large wooden bin full of cantaloupes. Smaller wooden crates and rustic items dot the large island displays calling attention to berries, unique citrus items and tropicals. Hand-made chalkboard-style signs lend to the farm-market atmosphere.

One of the store's most dramatic displays includes use of a huge wooden wagon covering one of the island displays. "We use the wagon in the summer to really emphasize the local, farm feel," says Grace. "Customers love it."

## Sourcing For Quality

George's purchasing strategy is simple: buy the best product from whomever has it at the time. It results in an extensive and varied

## "Some of our current customers started coming here as kids with their parents. We're actually into third-generation customers now."

— George Endrigian

source pool. "Our commitment to getting the best means we have a large number of suppliers," says Endrigian. "We source a lot from Four Seasons (of Ephrata, PA) and Procacci Brothers (of Philadelphia) as well."

Purchasing responsibility and decisions lie mainly with produce manager Grace. "I pick and choose for quality and variety reasons," she explains. "We take the best from each source we can get. Our customers are demanding, and we always want to meet their high expectations."

George's buys directly from local growers in-season. "Our local programs are so exciting," enthuses Grace. "We love finding these gems and being able to bring in the best quality at peak flavor. Our two local apple orchards often deliver late in the afternoon or early evening because the apples were just picked that day."

One local program for George's showcases potted flowers sourced from a farm in neighboring town Horsham. "It's a small, family-owned operation and our customers love knowing the flowers they buy come from just up the road," says Carlin.

Sometimes customers even help source. "[Our relationship with] one of our apple growers, Weavers (in Morgantown, PA), resulted because a customer came in and told us we had to try these apples," explains Carlin. "We found the farm, tried the product, loved it and now have a very successful program with them."

## Catering To Customer Demand

George's longevity in the marketplace is due in part to its willingness to adapt to customer needs, including an interest in organic products. "Over time we have increased the number of organic items and we definitely see demand growing," he says. "We hope to expand more in the future."

Organics are displayed in a 10 linear-foot refrigerated rack. "We tried to integrate organics with conventional but didn't feel

it was very effective with our customers," notes Endrigian. "We went back to offering an exclusive organic section and find this is more successful for us."

George's offers several store-prepared and branded value-added items. These include nuts and dried fruits as well as fresh orange juice and cut fruit. The juice and cut fruit are attractively merchandised around a smoothie counter where customers can purchase made-to-order smoothies. "We also core pineapples for customers," says Carlin.

The store maintains a 16-by-6-foot island salad bar including a wide variety of salad ingredients, pasta salads, hot entrees and soup in conjunction with its prepared foods section.

## The Value Of Good People

True to its relational nature, George's relies heavily on experienced employees to communicate with customers. Carlin has worked at the store for more than 38 years, while Grace is in her 20<sup>th</sup> year, and assistant produce manager Joel Singer touts 50 years experience in the business. "Most of our employees are long term," says Carlin. "There is great pride and commitment in working here."

George's emphasizes interaction between store personnel and customers as its first front for marketing. "We get comments on how our employees are so helpful to customers," says Endrigian. "They're always interacting with them, showing them how to pick out the right item and giving them advice."

The store utilizes marketer-supplied recipe cards and some POP but stresses the importance of sampling. "Demos draw customer attention to the product and when they sample, the taste convinces them to buy," says Grace.

George's uses social media tools to communicate with customers about local produce or other good deals. The store also runs commercials on cable channels including Food Network and Bravo and puts out a weekly circular with the entire back page devoted to produce.

Yet, despite all these modern tools, the store's best promotion medium is still the oldest – word of mouth. "Our customers are our best advertisement," says Endrigian. **pb**

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### GEORGE'S DRESHERTOWN SHOP N BAG

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The company's commitment to supplying the fresh produce industry with reliable and innovative packaging solutions began with used equipment and borrowed space in the back of a south Texas carrot shed. Over

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Customers have the choice of multiple closure options including drawstring, Kwik Lok and zip closures, and the response has been very positive. Executive vice president, Aaron Fox, says, "We're always exploring options that extend shelf life and allow for easy automation, so both ends of the supply chain benefit."

For example, when the Fox Fresh Mesh Combo bag was introduced, it worked on customers' existing machinery, so no new equipment had to be purchased. It also extended the shelf life of the product with the increased ventilation. The Fox Combo Ultra Shield bag is another creative design that dramatically decreased potato-greening and ensured a longer shelf life by blocking nearly 100 percent of visible light when displayed with the film side up.

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All the company's containers are FDA-compliant for direct food contact, and are used in the produce, bakery and foodservice markets. Inline Plastics has manufacturing and warehousing facilities in Shelton, CT; Salt Lake City, UT; and McDonough, GA; as well as an R&D facility in Milford, CT.

Inline is dedicated to developing innovative new products directed by the voice of the marketplace and committed to providing world-class service to its customers. One of Inline's most well-known innovations in packaging design has been the development of the first thermoformed clamshell containers that are resistant to in-store tampering without the addition of a wrap-

around label or a shrink band. The Safe-T-Fresh® lines of clamshell containers feature a leak-resistant seal and are tamper-evident and tamper-resistant upon closing. The containers incorporate a unique tearstrip called Safe-T-Gard®, which is removed by the consumer to gain access to the contents of the container, but discourages tampering in retail outlets. Safe-T-Fresh® containers are ideal for cut fruit, deli, salads, snacks, salsa, sandwiches, bakery products, and are available in round or rectangular styles in 6-ounce through 64-ounce sizes.

In response to customer demand for unique, innovative, and reliable packaging options, Inline extended the Safe-T-Fresh® line to include the new SquareWare™ line of tamper-evident 4X4 square containers. The SquareWare™ line includes five popular sizes (8, 12, 16, 24 and 32 ounces) and is

targeted to grab-and-go options such as cut fruit, deli and snacking applications. SquareWare's™ eye-catching design and clarity makes these containers highly visible and emphasizes freshness, encouraging impulse purchases.

A group of packaging automation systems tailored to handle and container packing process supports Inline Plastics' line of containers. Experienced engineering staff are happy to assist customers with the integration of the automation systems into their current processes and facilities.

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*Let our packaging allow your produce department managers become your on-site masters of merchandising. Increase your sales and profits with packaging and props that can be used season after season, "year after year."*



# PRICE CHOPPER'S MARKET 32 REINVENTS SUSTAINABILITY

BY MIRA SLOTT



This year's PRODUCE BUSINESS Retail Sustainability Award recognizes a chain-wide rebranding mission emboldened by sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

**P**rice Chopper's first rebranding in 40 years resonates in a modern, fresh store concept. The Golub family-owned, 137-store chain headquartered in Schenectady, NY, introduces Market 32 — where sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) overtly and tacitly ground the foundation.

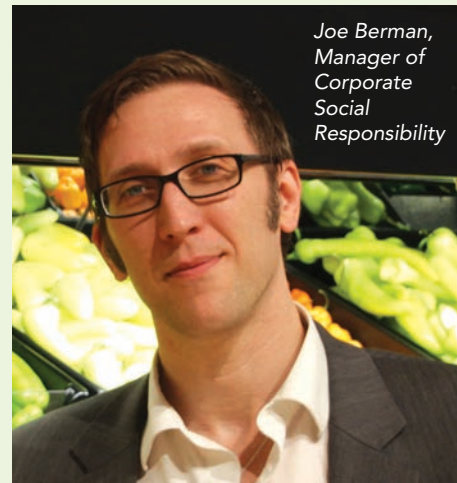
Embraced by company-wide stakeholders, this foundation rises through the fresh produce department, revitalizes and reinvents the supply chain across a wider sphere — from innovative local farm sourcing networks and smart environmental footprints to ambitious food waste reduction and food recovery partnerships to elevate communities. The \$300 million chain-wide conversion plan will span across the company's six-state territories.

Market 32's not-so-obvious nomenclature of a retailer is inspired by Price Chopper's founding in 1932. In fact, of the "32

Reasons to Love Market 32," which are teasingly promoted in wall signage for consumers to spot throughout the store, reason No. 1 is, "Your Community Partner"; and No. 2 is, "We're at Home with Local." Fresh produce indubitably plays a winning hand in that ranking, explains Rick Reed, vice president produce and floral merchandising, and a mastermind in pursuing innovative programs with a dedicated team.

In its enterprise to bolster GAP-certified, locally grown produce offerings, the chain embarked on a groundbreaking system of local farm sourcing hubs, which converge and fan out through its centralized distribution infrastructure.

Until now, the inventive scheme incubated under the industry's radar, explains Reed. However, the industry implications for food safety and locally grown sourcing integration — if replicated as a model nationally — could be transformative. Reed says he is not concerned about losing the competitive edge in its



Joe Berman,  
Manager of  
Corporate  
Social  
Responsibility

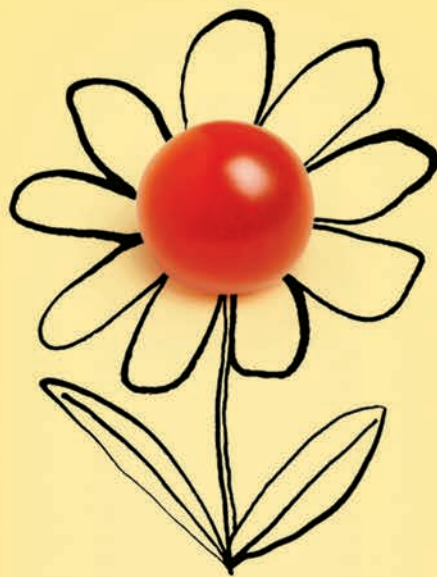
exclusivity: "We are looking at the greater good. The reality is everybody should have the benefits of this hub mechanism, because one of the common threads through the sustainability story, not only for this company, but on an industry level, is a pre-competitiveness and open conversation across the board." [Editor's note: We will dive deeper into this sophisticated

hub program and related drivers in the June issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*].

**PRODUCE DEPARTMENT EMBODIES STORE'S VISION**

"Receiving *PRODUCE BUSINESS*' Retail Sustainability Award is symbolic in telling a story of what the future holds for us as a company," says Joe Berman, manager

of corporate social responsibility, whose credentials include LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), AP (Accredited Professional), and GGP (Green Globes Professional). "Sustainability and its prevailing presence and importance to the produce department conveys an integral part of that story in this new incarnation of what we are becoming."



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During a visit to the headquarters, Berman thought it important to walk our editors through the retailer's progression: "to tour some traditional Price Choppers representative of where we came from, to set baseline expectations, to see transitional Price Chopper stores making strides in sustainability (iterations in the development process), and then to fully appreciate where we're headed with Market 32."

He certainly was right. When we



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entered Market 32, the contrast was profound, and even more so when we examined the changes closely. For perspective, we also visited the company's eccentric Market Bistro store — an experimental "design Rubicon, a one-off specialty super store," used as a testing ground. [Read more under "New Design Equals New Sustainability" on page 40.]

**SUSTAINABILITY EPICENTER**

Berman describes his role as the company's sustainability touch point or epicenter for thought leadership, strategic development and connectivity among corporate executives who come to the table and work collaboratively on different areas of reform.

"I'm the catalyst for that integrated product collaboration, exploring alternative methodologies with the experts in



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charge of the different areas. However, in terms of the ultimate feasibility, program development and implementation, their execution is where the rubber meets the road. The strategic partnerships I have, and that we share throughout the fabric of the organization, are really what enable sustainability to work effectively. That's my role and where I live," says Berman.

Outside of those responsibilities, Berman oversees the sustainability aspect of building construction and handles the certifications deemed appropriate for each project — whether it be Market 32 or Price Chopper stores moving toward more sustainable approaches in phases, which include LEED and Green Globes (an environmental assessment and ratings

system operated in the U.S. by the Green Building Initiative in Portland, OR).

"We have about a million square feet of certified green building here and a really strong focus on high-efficiency building design and systems," he says. "The rest is fully collaborative with all company executives involved in sustainability, constantly pursuing best practices and considered

## NEW DESIGN EQUALS NEW SUSTAINABILITY



Encapsulating the firm's new brand identity in Market 32 involves ingenuity and clever tradeoffs, according to Mike Kopchik, director of design. His mission is to amalgamate innovative consumer-centric design space, shopping flow, marketing, and aesthetics with sustainability initiatives.

"The guidelines on that brand vision are rigorous and better defined than the organically developed Price Chopper brand as it exists," he explains.

"When I came to work for this company seven years ago, we were building our first retail pilots, and the design departure was a day-and-night difference from the traditional Price Chopper stores," says Kopchik. "Over the arc of maybe 10 stores, we recognized we were a totally different company than when we started on this arc, and there was this real brand evolutionary process leading to our decision to launch Market 32. We needed to formalize this new identity and take it to the next level of who we wanted to be as an organization," he says.

From a sustainability standpoint, "we are much more into refrigerated produce than

we ever were with our new store design," says Rick Mausert, director of non-resale purchasing. For example: changing from traditional orchard bins to refrigerated, self-contained, linear orchard bins, which are configured in satellite displays on the sales floor.

"These refrigerated bins provide produce with a little more integrity and longer life. We were always into European-style merchandising, but we moved away from that [style] with perishable product," he says.

Benny Smith, vice president of facilities, is one of the founding members of the EPA GreenChill Partnership, an effort with food retailers to reduce refrigerant emissions and decrease impact on the ozone layer and climate change.

The chain is a multiple gold and silver GreenChill winner, explains Joe Berman, manager of corporate social responsibility, adding, "We were one of the first to build a green, more efficient Co2 cascade refrigeration system in North America."

From a design standpoint, "at a typical grocery store, you have a run of refrigerated

cases, and they all blend in together," says Kopchik. "When you start pulling products out and put them in different fixtures strategically placed with intuitive adjacencies, you change the shopping paradigm. You walk around them and meander through the area, and you get a better sense of the variety of offerings available.

"These refrigerated satellite displays separate the massive options," he says. "We can differentiate and highlight products — local, organic, featured seasonal items, etc. — and the flexible format gives us the opportunity to deliver more product information through clever, targeted signage regarding where it's sourced, sustainability traits, nutritional values, and healthy recipes to address the rapidly evolving food diet."

As Berman puts it, "Consumer demand for that knowledge drastically increased due to the social media and digital revolution, and for us to not provide it as a progressive food retailer would be a real missed opportunity to connect with our customer base. We developed a strong health and wellness program, and we're emphasizing it as part of



approaches on how to go to market," and just as importantly, he emphasizes, "how to balance those efforts that are financially measurable with social benefits that are harder to quantify to realize our overall vision."

Fortunately, those benefits often overlap: the business case for CSR can be good for the environment, and also

reduce costs, he says, speaking of the Golub family's insight that profitability and CSR are not contradictory concepts, and are actually deeply dependent on each other. This precept has been a mantra of Jerry Golub, former chief executive and now vice chairman of the board, who heads a new board finance committee focused on conversion of Price Chopper

stores to the Market 32 banner. Scott Grimmatt was named chief executive and president last January to spearhead the company's Market 32 chain-wide gradual rollout across New York, Vermont, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

In the produce department, strategies that simultaneously improve



our shopping experience and brand identity in a conscientious way."

He points to a prominent, bright Power Greens display in the produce department inviting shoppers to join the superfood trend. "You have to know your community, tailor product offerings based on demographics and psychographics, and directly speak to the needs of that specific market," says Berman.

"Produce is an extremely featured department, elevated to new heights in the Market 32 platform. It's full of surprises, and depending on where you shop, you're guaranteed to see something in there you've never seen before," he says.

"Design is a fluid dynamic, and there are so many inputs to consider as to what makes a space worth being in, worth gravitating toward, what makes it a high-experience environment, and a sophisticated one," says Mausert. "We weren't even using this language when we first started this endeavor seven years ago, but the dialogue around the designing of that space and the heightened awareness of its importance in

brand identity has really become satisfying. The world changes, it evolves, and you need to respond to it ... this is why Market 32 really was created."

#### LIGHTING THE WAY

Market 32 accentuates product lighting. It is not really an effort to enhance or change the look of the product; it is actually an effort to show the product in its true light, bringing out its real color and characteristics, explains Kopchik.

"The reality is just two or three years ago, the initial commercially viable LED lighting presented grocery items quite well, but it didn't do a great job on fruits and vegetables; it was very cold-like, and the color was all wrong. What is so remarkable is in a five-year time period, LEDs went from prohibitively expensive to the most cost effective technology you can embed and to a vast variety of lighting bandwidths and colors," says Kopchik.

"Now, instead of that 100-foot-candle ambient light uniformity you get across the entirety of the sales space, we are able to

target the lighting in a much more conscientious and effective way. Instead of expending all of the energy to create the ambient light throw, we are using only the energy we need to use to direct the light to the product itself," he explains. You walk into the space and see it immediately because the emphasis in terms of lighting is on the product."

As far as skylights, Kopchik says he's personally not a great fan after weighing the pros and cons. "When you bring all the light in from the ceiling, you see everything from way up high supporting the décor or refrigeration piping, and all kinds of other things. When you start throwing light on all that, it draws the eye there instead of down where the product is, and you don't have as much control over it."

There is always an aesthetic question you have to ask when designing something, in addition to the science behind it. "Some of the newer supermarkets are looking like a warehouse space. There is probably a sustainability component involved in that decision, but there is also an aesthetic look to it as well," he adds. **pb**

energy efficiencies, food safety, local grower sustenance, and consumer-centric merchandising also tie into various sustainability initiatives.

"In prioritizing investments, we take many variables into consideration, and there is no one standardized methodological approach. ... You have the umbrella, and you want to do the right thing, but of course labor, shrink and margins are always top of mind," says Berman. "So if the change either positively impacts those things or doesn't negatively impact them, we have a good chance of success — making sure store level teammates know the why of what they are doing as opposed to just the what is key to getting that buy-in."

For instance, Price Chopper is diverting landfills with 85 percent to 90 percent of waste generated in stores through redistribution, reuse, recycling or composting. The chain also recently entered into a partnership for food recovery with Feeding America — the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief organization, with a network of 200 food banks and 60,000 food



pantries and meal programs providing food security and support services to communities spanning the entire country.

"This company is extraordinarily focused on being really engaged stewards within the communities we do business in, and this is an aspect of socially responsible business we wanted to make sure we developed and deployed as effectively as possible," says Berman, noting very

complex and robust conversations on just how to evolve the Feeding America partnership and food donation platform.

Produce is a core component in Price Chopper's Fresh Food Recovery Program, according to Pam Cerrone, manager of community relations, who recently celebrated her 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the company, and oversees the Feeding America initiative. This collaboration fits

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In the produce department, strategies that simultaneously improve energy efficiencies, food safety, local grower sustenance, and consumer-centric merchandising also tie into various sustainability initiatives.

within the broader CSR umbrella, and the vast panoply of philanthropic causes and targeted neighborhood partnerships adopted by the chain's top leadership and fostered through its 22,000 employee "teammates" living within the communities they serve.

"Produce seems to be the part of the Fresh Food Recovery Program consistent across all the stores in significant volumes

being executed without a problem," says Cerrone. That's quite a statement, considering the numerous hurdles to overcome: "various operational issues, getting the right people involved and on board ... there is risk management, insurance, legal, the community-relations side and logistics partnerships with food banks and food pantries," she explains.

"The process of taking the food

deemed no longer saleable off the shelf is part of the store's day-in and day-out activities; getting people to understand and embrace doing something differently with it after it's in the backroom involves a learning curve," she acknowledges. "A main obstacle was confronting perceived difficulties and fears people had about what could potentially be a problem when donating food we're saying is not sale-

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**FOLLOWING THE FOOD**

Price Chopper's partnership with Feeding America is exemplified in several pickups throughout the week at the back end of each store, where Darren Dyer (pictured above), who is one of the drivers from the local food bank affiliated with Feeding America, receives unsaleable produce and other perishable foods collected in banana boxes in store.

After they make their rounds to several stores, drivers take truckloads of food to the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York in Latham, where the food is repacked within the food bank's modern refrigerated warehouse. Joanne Dwyer, director of food industry relations and Kathleen Samaniuk-Hayes, administrative assistant (above right photo), are part of the team that coordinates the delivery to the food bank as well as redistribution of food to various groups in need.



able; it is just a mentality ... we can still do something with this food and feed and nourish people with it."

In a broader sense, the industry still grapples with a lack of standardization in how something is selected at the store level to go into the Feeding America system.

"It is difficult in the absence of a normalized set of quality criteria — not just for us, but for any retailer trying to make the same kinds of subjective value judgments," says Cerrone. "Feeding America is in the process of putting together industry-level guidance on what those decision-making criteria should look like."

At the same time, Reed points to the strong mechanisms in place at the company by which decisions are made around food resource recovery and diversion to food banks due to its standardized quality control infrastructure.

"One of the things I think is really important to emphasize around our local sourcing hub system is you are not going to get the idiosyncrasies of subjective

value judgements, where each individual store is making those decisions. There's consistency in the quality assurance and a core competency that normalizes the process."

**EXTENDING COMMUNITY**

The chain relishes its determinative role in the retail sustainability community,

"A main obstacle was confronting perceived difficulties and fears people had about what could potentially be a problem when donating food we're saying is not saleable. ..."

— PAM CERRONE,  
MANAGER OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS

where business competitors join forces to advocate mutually beneficial sustainability solutions. Price Chopper is the longest standing founding member of the Arlington, VA-based Food Marketing Institute (FMI), serving on sustainability and energy executive committees since its inception.

"The challenges that 2,000-store retailers have, and the challenges that 137-store retailers have, are not radically dissimilar," says Berman, "although, they may scale differently, and the solutions at scale may mechanically manifest differently. What we end up seeing at a national level is a really extraordinary information-sharing and best-practice effort between the sustainability practitioners operating across the industry. It helped to drive sustainability through the supermarket industry," he says.

A salient part is also trading information on what didn't work so others can circumvent those pitfalls. "This is a close-knit community with some of the best folks I ever met. We work and play really well



compost management to businesses throughout Eastern New York and Western Massachusetts).

"The first state we really got involved in was Vermont, because it was the first state in our trade footprint with regulatory food waste separation, segregating, and composting or alternative landfill diversion. But before that, we did a pretty major test up in Warren County, NY, with six stores," explains Mausert.

While the trial went well, the vendor would have had to make a huge GAP investment to comply with some arduous state legislation. "That really stymied growth into the business," he says, noting the business model is still difficult for organizations that exclusively compost.

Mausert adds that trying to monetize compost and moving it into a marketable end product is a relatively challenging task, and there is market development



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together," says Berman.

Extending that community further, Price Chopper executives refine sustainability constructs with federal, state and local government agencies, NGOs, private sector companies, university ag extension programs, and industry associations.

Composting strategies exemplify that maneuvering, adjusting to fluctuating legislative requirements, vendor relationships, methodologies, and logistics variables state by state, according to Rick Mausert, director of non-resale purchasing, whose tenure with Price Chopper goes back to 1974 as a senior in high school.

"We are trying to get to a point where composting is cost-neutral," says Mausert, noting successful composting programs in around 45 stores currently, with a dedicated push to expand that number. The comprehensive commitment manifested through its composting program for organic food waste at corporate headquarters by partnering with Empire Zero (a nonprofit providing food waste and

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work needed for the globalization of post-composted materials.

That's where the infrastructure development piece comes into play. "Vermont had a lot of challenges around implementation of its composting regulations, because it didn't have the infrastructure to

be able to handle the food scrap volume that was coming out of commercial food retailers. That [factor] is something we expressed concerns about in New York and in other markets where we faced this kind of legislation activity," says Mausert. "To that extent, we know we are compliant

with state food waste separation and landfill diversion requirements in three states, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut," he says, adding, "we are strongly considering pilots in New York."

The chain recently became a U.S. EPA Food Recovery Challenge (FRC) partici-

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# SYSTEMATIC EDUCATION

Ellie Wilson, senior nutritionist, plays a key role in conveying the importance of health components to consumers. She is also an important liaison with all the stakeholders, staying deeply connected to the grower community, government and private health organizations to translate legally allowable claims and cutting-edge health and wellness developments.

To further guide consumers toward smart eating choices, the chain incorporates the NuVal Nutritional Scoring System, which utilizes an algorithm to assign foods a score from 1 to 100 based on its content of more than 30 nutrients. The criteria integrate data from a range of sources including The Institute of Medicine, the FDA, USDA National Nutrient Database, and World Health Organization. Vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fiber and other food components associated with health add points to the score, while “negative” nutrients, such as sugar, sodium, trans fat, and cholesterol bring down the total.

“Produce is our framer for the NuVal system. We can really enforce with those scores that the produce department is the best place to be when it comes to nutrition in the store,” says Wilson.

“I think it’s very much a selling point,” contends Joe Berman, manager of corporate social responsibility. “It’s the only sort of inclusive nutritional metric I have seen that really facilitates purchasing decisions. It definitely gives a lot of attention to the produce department — one of our primary value propositions that we’re best in fresh — and generates consumer confidence in what they are buying,” he says. **pb**

“Produce is our framer for the NuVal system,” says Ellie Wilson.



partment. The FRC consists of organizations that pledge to improve sustainable food management practices and report results. The FRC is part of EPA’s Sustainable Materials Management Program (SMM), which seeks to reduce the environmental impact of materials through their entire life cycle.

“We formally adopted the EPA’s food waste reduction hierarchy as the core of our program,” says Berman. “The first thing we are working to do is reduce our shrink and our overproduction of product. The second thing is we are far more aggressively donating unsalable, but still edible, food by salvaging whole-food products with produce items increasingly viable to that undertaking.”

“The legislative paradigms that allow

for organizations like ours to participate in food donations changed a lot over the past five to 10 years, with modifications to Good Samaritan laws. Thirty years ago, we started off donating food to pig farmers because that was what was allowable, now we’re dancing through very sophisticated legislative frameworks to provide food where it is most impactful and in a much more conscientious, structured way,” says Berman.

## MANAGING SHRINK

In that food waste reduction hierarchy, “whatever we have to decide, whether it is to donate, to repurpose, to compost, or to send product to the dump, my first job is ensuring that main number keeps

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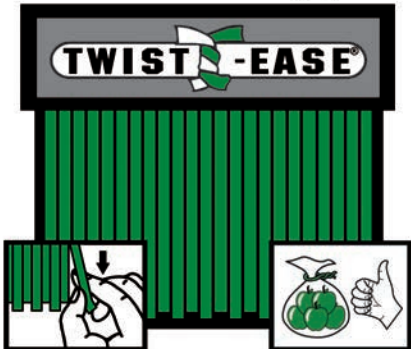
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shrinking," says Pat Iannotti, director of shrink administration and 30-year veteran with the company.

"Obviously our shrink control is in two components: fresh and center store. Just our fresh exposure is about \$85 million, and our center store is about \$18 million. You add them together, and we have more than \$100 million of exposure in shrink. As an organization, we recognize we need to pay attention to shrink," he says, noting, his position didn't exist two years ago. "We really didn't focus on shrink, we focused on margin. We said, 'Well, if you hit your budgeted margin, then your shrink is probably in line, and you're doing a good job.'

"I think about the creation of the shrink position from a lean management

perspective; it is one thing to go chasing incremental sales — and every organization does go and chase them — but if there is a hole in the bottom of the bucket, you are basically pouring your incremental sales into a capital investment structure that is leaking out the bottom through an uncontrolled shrink," says Iannotti. "The best way to address that issue is to plug the hole in the bottom of the bucket, so your incremental sales actually are additive as opposed to something that just sort of normalizes things to balance out the losses."

From a fresh produce perspective, minimizing shrink is challenging and complex, explains Iannotti. In transitioning to Market 32, parameters change — from the way it is structured and merchandised





to many other variables including product shelf-life impacts. For instance, "we have to learn how to manage those displays to maximize sales and reduce shrink ... the spectacular monument of peppers may look great, but if you have too much product on display, then it may not be good for business," says Iannotti.

"Our produce folks here in the office do a fantastic job of helping us minimize shrink," continues Iannotti. "They are very hands-on, and very much involved in the education of the team, even though it is merchandising and operations. In some chains, I am sure those are two silos. Here, we try to bring them together and work as closely as possible."

According to Iannotti, the chain developed a comprehensive shrink audit system



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# SUSTAINABILITY ON THE ROAD AND BACK AGAIN



**R**einventing the chain's identity is personified in a uniform, recognizable brand imagery and a cohesive, contemporary aesthetic, explains Berman. "The Farm Just got Closer" campaign is intrinsically Market 32," says David Schmitz, director of transportation. Trailers carry award-winning banner graphics starring the different produce items on their routes. The message optimizes the fresh, local, and environmentally friendly sustainability platform, according to Schmitz.

That platform intersects with the chain's main warehouse/distribution center, explains Schmitz. The chain is committed to cradle-to-cradle reclamation, recycling, and repurposing programs. This macro-level material management for the food industry incorporates many produce-related elements — ranging from corrugated items, to the thin films and stretch wrap packaging, to plastic produce bags, floral buckets, and wooden watermelon bins.

"We are kind of unusual in that we have a centralized facility to handle resource recovery, so we're not exclusively dependent on the waste community to manage the waste load," says Schmitz. "We have a way of connecting with the recyclable materials waste flow, and that puts us in a better position to control how those materials are remobilized into the market."

Market development for post-consumer recycled content material has been very much at the core of our resource recovery efforts since the beginning of the 1990s, says Berman, noting the chain's pioneering efforts in that regard.

"There is definitely an awareness at the industry level that packaging is going to

need to move toward more cradle-to-cradle, sustainable, closed loop system-oriented packaging designs and materials," says Joe Berman, manager of corporate social responsibility.

"What every food retailer is seeing in the market is this sort of low-level percolation of movement toward legislation around plastic bag bans, for both environmental and commercial reasons," he says. "The stores have a robust program teaching our customers they have an outlet to participate in sustainable practices that are not a ton of work for them," says Berman. "Ultimately, you can't legislate behavior. That being said, we are starting to see a shift in mentality, which also connects with our Market 32 concept."

Shaun Gonzolez, vice president of advertising, is another company legacy employee with a 27-year tenure and is also part of the team on the ground floor of the Market 32 concept. "Watching it come to life in front of our eyes; we have come a long way in a fairly short period of time, and now we need to just accelerate this transformation," he says.

"This new direction actually represents some evolutionary and revolutionary steps forward in sustainability and corporate social responsibility, tying into the reality of how the food industry is dramatically changing for a whole list of reasons," says Berman. "What's remarkable about this journey for the company is it really has in some way fundamentally touched every aspect of the business."

"The paradigm is shifting and there's an intrinsic process of self-discovery we're going through as an organization, which is really exciting," says Berman. **pb**

for all departments, adding nine positions in the loss prevention department and zone specialists that conduct audits and help to execute strategies. "We had a shrink budget this year for the first time. We set out to reduce our shrink between 7 and 8 percent, and we're on target to hit that," he says.

As for shrink, don't assume that direct local delivery would have a better shrink than something shipped from further away, explains Iannotti.

Using corn as an example, "it is picked, refrigerated, and put on refrigerated trucks. The local farmer may bring it to you on the back of his pickup truck after he stopped at 10 other spots, with product out of refrigeration for three, four, or five hours," he says. "Our food hubs have stringent food safety protocols. The biggest barrier to bring in local produce through direct store delivery was there was no real normalized food safety protocol," says Iannotti.

Reed elaborates: "The narrative on local is that there is no food safety standardization. We require a minimum of GAP certification from our growers," he says. "We encourage the larger growers to get SQF-certified [FMI's Safe Quality Food program]. They must be GAP-certified, but we really want SQF, and we won't entertain any sort of contractual obligations for our hubs unless they have it and all other infrastructure that is necessary for us to bring a truck and load product."

"Quality is certainly a top priority of mine," says Reed. "If part of what we are talking about is sustainability, the amount of food wasted across the supply chain — just based on the longevity of the product — is definitely something I think improves through our hub system. It is about standardization of the process, and that is what this infrastructure allows for. In doing that, you are eliminating all of the variables that could conceivably compromise the products." **pb**



# Internet Food Shopping Hits Stride

Online supermarket sales are rising, and a number of options can provide growth opportunities for produce.

BY LISA WHITE



PHOTO COURTESY OF INSTACART



PHOTO COURTESY OF MYWEBGROCER

In retail, timing is everything. The same rings true for online retailing. There have been many starts and stops over the years as online retailers have come and gone, but many industry experts concur online food shopping is coming into its prime.

One-quarter of global respondents are already ordering grocery products online for home delivery, according to a recent survey by New York City-based research firm Nielsen, and more than half (or 55 percent) are willing to use these services in the future.

Yet the report showed a smaller number of consumers are ordering groceries online for pickup at a store or other location, with just one in 10. Even fewer (less than 10 percent) order online for curbside pick-up. Still, Nielsen reports more than half of global respondents are willing to use these online options for pick-up as opposed to delivery in the future, which demonstrates the potential of these services.

It's mainly younger generations shopping online for supermarket goods. Nielsen reports, of those surveyed, 30 percent of Millennials

(ages 21 to 34) and 28 percent of Generation Z (ages 15 to 20) say they're ordering groceries online for home delivery; compared to 22 percent of Generation X (ages 35 to 49), 17 percent of Baby Boomers (ages 50 to 64) and 9 percent of what *Time* magazine coined the Silent Generation (ages 65-plus).

There has been an obvious shift in the climate not seen in years past. In a recent *Wall Street Journal* report, it was announced that 27-year-old Peapod Inc. is using technology to shore up customer loyalty and improve fulfillment. The company's customers span 12 states and Washington D.C., but reports Boston, Chicago and Washington D.C. are its only profitable markets. With the pending merger of Peapod parent Ahold NV with Delhaize Group, markets may expand in the southern U.S. — although New York is Peapod's next target market, according to the report.

## **Instacart** INSTACART

Los Angeles-based Super King Markets, which has six locations in the state, was one of the first retailers to join online

retailer Instacart two years ago, along with Whole Foods Market and Ralphs Grocery Company.

"We were not looking to invest heavily in online services and found Instacart to be a great third-party partner," says Jake Fermanian, Super King Markets' director of purchasing and marketing. "In addition to being easy to use, the thing we appreciate most is the Instacart catalog file for implementation, which includes product information and images."

To create the retailer's online profile, Instacart draws from its catalog of photos. If a product is not listed, a company representative will visit the store to shoot a photo.

When orders come in, Instacart sends a personal shopper to the store to buy product. The only difference is the transaction is flagged as originating from Instacart. Retailers pay a fee for each transaction. In Super King Markets' case, a fixed percentage is charged per transaction.

The chain can decide on its pricing and whether to mark up for online items to offset Instacart fees. Customers also pay Instacart a

delivery charge. The online service provides transaction reports to its retailers each week.

With this service, customers can order groceries either online or through Instacart's smartphone app. After inputting their zip code, customers are informed which retailers are available based on location, and then they choose the stores to shop. Products are chosen and placed in a virtual cart, paid for online, and a delivery time is chosen.

The benefit of this type of service is customers can choose the exact brands or products they prefer as if they were shopping in the store versus using an online grocer service that may have a more limited offering or varying availability.

"Right now, we are in 18 metropolitan areas, and we're just hitting the surface, since grocery is a huge industry," says Sophie Kleinert, Instacart's corporate communications associate. "Our business model sets us up well, since we're not dependent on warehouses or a fleet of drivers."

If there are produce availability or quality issues, the store contacts Instacart to make substitutions when needed.

"This service is definitely an added value to our customers, and we expanded our customer base since joining Instacart," says Fermanian. "Convenience goes a long way, and one-hour delivery is guaranteed."

The premium for Super King Markets' products is about 10 percent per order. "If someone is building a basket with \$50 worth of items, the premium is only \$5," says Fermanian. "Many find paying \$5 to save a couple hours and avoid the inconvenience of going out is worth it."

Yet, there is still a large demographic that prefers to see and touch products, particularly produce, and who don't trust others to shop for these items.

Super King Markets doesn't currently have statistics on the sales growth due to its Instacart collaboration, but it's obvious the momentum is growing.

"Our store is more of an experience than the average supermarket, since we offer more international goods and increased interaction with staff," says Fermanian. "But we are satisfied with the extra business we're getting."

Instacart's customer base includes a wide demographic, but skews heavily toward busy moms, the elderly and young professionals.

"Online shopping fills different needs, and it's our partnerships that make us unique and are the backbone of our business," says Kleinert of Instacart. "What separates us is we can mimic the shopping experience and truly offer delivery on demand."

In terms of produce, Instacart shoppers are trained to learn how to pick ripe products and identify bruised fruit.

"To help with a seamless experience, customers can live chat with shoppers on our app to provide recommendations or substitutes," says Kleinert. "For example, if someone prefers green bananas to ripen at home, they can relay this to our shoppers."



#### MYWEBGROCER

MyWebGrocer, based in Winooski, VT, which currently works with 100-plus U.S. retailers, integrates a back-end commercial system using its database of production information from

major manufacturers. It can host a retailer's website and will design it, if needed. The technology also integrates with supermarket point-of-sale systems.

"We're a standard software partner like a POS or logistics system," says Barry Clogan, senior vice president of MyWebGrocer's business consulting services. "We charge retailers a flat fee based on the number of stores, we set up the program, and they run it and expand it to more stores as needed."

With this program, store managers receive a list of MyWebGrocer orders and arrange for pickers to select products using the company's picking software. Ambient products are selected first, then chilled items, and frozen foods are last.

When customers place orders from the retailer's site, they can include requests detailing what they want — such as hard avocados instead of soft. The platform allows customers to place and amend orders online as well as pick a time slot for delivery or choose a time to collect groceries from the store.

"With these programs, what's important is understanding the reasons and motivations for shopping online," says Clogan. "These shoppers want convenience, range and quality."

MyWebGrocer's target demographic is young families who don't want to drag young kids around the store. These consumers also tend to have bigger baskets.

"Within that young family, there is a lot of school lunches as well as produce and dairy, which outperform in these demographic categories," says Clogan. "Online grocery basket spends are four times higher than in the store, and this is due to the higher participation of

## ■ THE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL ONLINE RETAILING

Although the online sales landscape can be challenging, especially with increased competition in recent years, there are certain steps retailers can take to help ensure success.

Nielsen, a New York City-based research firm, provides insight into capitalizing on online sales opportunities.

- **Establish credibility and exceed expectations:** Since customer service is just as important online as it is in person, retailers should utilize strengths to exceed consumers' expectations during every interaction, especially the first impression. This includes implementing quality

assurance programs for items that may be damaged during delivery as well as addressing fulfillment issues and adhering to delivery and pickup windows.

- **Make it easy:** Websites and apps should be both functional and easy to use as well as readily accessible. Slow loading and complicated ordering processes will deter potential customers.
- **Know the market:** Be well-versed in demographics, operating costs, the competitive landscape and consumer preferences to ensure the needs of the market are met.

- **Understand shopping occasions and consider specializing:** To test the waters, retailers can begin offering a limited menu of products and then expand over time — rather than going for an all or nothing approach. This strategy is ideal because some categories and shopping occasions are better suited to e-commerce.
- **Consider alternative ordering and distribution tactics:** While experimenting with formats and features that build basket size, retailers should also consider working with third-party specialists to better leverage services, labor and investment. **pb**

families that spend more on food.”

Clogan knows the online retail business from both ends of the spectrum. For 17 years, he worked with Tesco’s \$4.5 billion online grocery business, which he says averages 31 million orders annually.

Clogan says the online grocery business is slow-moving in the U.S. compared to Europe, but it picked up in the past 12 to 24 months. This increase is mainly due to increased and enhanced digital experience platforms allowing retailers to better engage with customers.

“People use smartphones and tablets more, so retailers need to be present where customers are,” says Clogan.

Experts say online grocery experiences should involve a multi-channel initiative where customers can pick up groceries — either at the store or at another location — or have them delivered. This is best combined with a digital marketing service, which targets customers with personal offers and promotions to help drive revenue through digital traffic for retailers.

“This monetizes the website by working with CPGs (consumer packaged goods) to provide relevant marketing and products for customers,” says Clogan. A data element can then be used to better engage customers and find out what they want and need for more targeted future promotions, he says.

Although supermarkets are traditional brick-and-mortar businesses, an increasing number of retailers are experiencing greater success when adapting to industry changes and customer behavior — especially where convenience and value are factors.

“With more customers online, when retailers want to engage with shoppers, it’s a strategic move to invest in an online presence,” says Clogan. “Stores can reflect brand values through online shopping experiences — just as in the store — and make sure service permeates.”

Quality, too, is a factor, especially when it comes to produce. MyWebGrocer shoppers switched from using hard totes to softer trays for produce during picking, and the company altered the packing method to better protect more delicate items.

“It’s important to pay attention to quality, freshness and how products are presented to customers,” says Clogan. “Managing substitutes is an important element in produce, and because these products are a significantly large driver of online shopping, this is a big focus.”

Other online retailers enhanced operations to emphasize freshness and quality. For example, to compete with AmazonFresh,

FreshDirect and other online grocery businesses, Peapod built a 400,000-square-foot fulfillment center, according to a recent *Wall Street Journal* report in April. In the produce Kool Room, trained employees choose individual tomatoes and onions — rejecting specimens they would not pick for themselves.



### FRESHDIRECT

Unlike Instacart and MyWebGrocer, New York City-based FreshDirect is a 15-year-old online fresh food grocer

sourcing products from suppliers that are stored in its warehouses.

It is currently doing business in the Northeast corridor, including New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware and Philadelphia. FreshDirect takes orders up until 11 p.m. for next-day delivery.

The company’s facilities include a full-scale kitchen with a production facility and bakery. Cooks develop recipes from scratch for its semi-prepared and fully prepared meals.

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meat and seafood,” says Eric Stone, FreshDirect’s district merchandising manager for perishables. “Freshness and quality are paramount, because we’re to blame if the experience is not what the customer expects.”

The company developed relationships and works directly with farmers, ranchers and fishermen internationally, including hundreds of growers. For example, Stone’s team was recently looking at bananas at a fair-trade farm in Ecuador.

FreshDirect created a produce rating system using stars, with five stars being the highest quality. The company’s quality assurance team conducts taste tests daily to assess flavor profiles.

“We’ve seen extreme success in that it shifts consumer buying behavior into products that are rated the best,” says Stone. “We’re in tune with customers, we study data from them and how they interact with certain products.”

In terms of produce, FreshDirect focuses on unique as well as seasonal items, concentrating on regional and local fruits and vegetables when possible.

A specialized team monitors the company’s in-house and inbound produce daily. FreshDirect’s trucks are dispatched directly to local farms for deliveries, and produce is stored in five different temperature-controlled rooms catering to product requirements.

“The way we work with our partners and our direct sourcing model enables us to keep the cold chain from farm to customer,” says Stone. “We also work with growers, seed companies and genetic companies to find new produce varieties with taste profiles that are unique.”

analyst, predicts at the current rate of adoption, the U.S. meal kit market could grow by as much as \$5 billion during the next decade.

One meal kit provider that is on a growth trajectory is Blue Apron, located in New York City. In business since 2012, this fresh ingredient and recipe delivery service provides customers with items that may or may not be available in their local supermarket.

“We handle all of the sourcing ourselves and have three fulfillment centers,” says Beth Forster, Blue Apron’s national farm sourcing manager.

Like FreshDirect, Blue Apron has relationships with farms and focuses on direct sourcing. It also utilizes a developed crop-planning program in conjunction with farmers.

“We’re particularly excited about interesting and specialty vegetables and have these items specially grown for us, such as rutabagas and sour derkins,” says Forster.

Blue Apron developed an internal communication system with the approximately 150 partnering farms, and it also has a team of staff members that works directly with growers.

“We can include items farmers want to grow on our menus,” says Forster. “Plus, we’re always looking to expand our farmer network and find new ingredients that we can include in our meal kits.”

The company works with its partners at medium and large farms by first learning what they’re interested in growing and then matching up with the seasonality and volume requirements.

“We consider ourselves a supermarket for customers that provides high-quality artisan ingredients,” says Forster. In terms of sourcing produce, “this is a relatively new model, and we’re excited about the response we receive from farmers.”

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PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION, CALIFORNIA STRAWBERRY COMMISSION AND CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPE COMMISSION

Summertime — when fruit is available in abundance — is all about vacations, outdoor celebrations and sporting events. Not only does fruit complement these events, it is also the perfect antidote for a hot day. It makes a great topping for ice cream and as an ingredient in smoothies. Cherries, grapes, blueberries and watermelon are fun to eat, loved by kids and right at home on family picnics. Sales soar in produce departments in the summer, but it's no vacation from effective promotions and marketing opportunities.

**MAXIMIZING SALES DURING SUMMER MONTHS**

Nothing conveys the feeling of summer like the Golden State, as Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the California Avocado Commission, headquartered in Irvine, CA, points out. "The summer months are peak season for California, and it's an opportunity to let shoppers know California avocados are available on display," she says.

Communicating California to consumers is

# HOT FUN IN THE summertime

Good merchandising practices provide perfect cure for seasonal blues.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

a great way to promote the fruit commodities grown in the state, and DeLyser recommends retailers emphasize this selling point with signage calling out their origin. DeLyser also notes the summer holidays are great opportunities to promote and display California avocados. "Summertime picnics and parties also fit naturally with a consumer's image of California," she says. "We've seen lots of creative summer-themed displays built by produce managers." To help retailers loyal to the fruit, the CAC provides marketing support,

which includes point-of-sale materials.

Summertime is good for mangos too. Rachel Muñoz, director of marketing for the National Mango Board, headquartered in Orlando, FL, suggests produce departments use colorful displays to catch the shopper's eye. "Mangos are beautiful and colorful, so build big displays and shoppers will be attracted. Retailers with loyal mango buyers may want to carry more than one size." Placing mangos next to stone fruit also builds sales. Muñoz points to the Board's 2015 store display test which



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revealed merchandising mangos adjacent to stone fruit during the summer months had a 45 percent net impact on mango volume and dollars. This was compared to a control panel where mangos were displayed in the tropicals' set.

While consumers know fruit has a well-deserved reputation as a healthy food product, they are often confused about what to look for during the selection process. "Promoting health benefits is a consistently great way to spur sales," says Juliemar Rosado, director of retail operations and international marketing for the National Watermelon Promotion Board, based in Winter Springs, FL. "Another quick way to maximize sales is to educate customers on selection."

Some consumers may not be as confident in picking the juiciest melon, but Rosado has an easy way to spot the best. "I like to say look, lift, turn. First, look at the watermelon and make sure it's symmetrical and free of any major dents, gashes, or bruising. Second, lift it up. A watermelon should be fairly heavy for its size at 92 percent water. Last, turn it over and look for a creamy yellow spot often referred to as the ground spot to show where it sat on

the ground and ripened in the sun."

While there is a mobile app for testing ripeness, nothing beats seeing and feeling when selecting a watermelon. Better yet, real-life "Watermelon Queens" have been a great in-store promotion to ensure successful sales. "These young women are smart and educated and bring something unique to the produce department as well as the ability to educate that hesitant customer on how to choose the best watermelon."

For Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission headquartered in Fresno, CA, the most effective way to sell more grapes is to promote them with front-page ads. "Research shows for the spring/summer grape season, retailers need to promote grapes from California three to five times per month and doing so can increase sales by 30 to 57 percent. Make sure the grape ads include two or more varieties of grapes as that will help increase grape sales as well."

"Northwest cherries are the No. 1 dollar-per-square-foot item in produce departments during their peak," says James W. Michael, vice president of marketing, North America for



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For optimum sales, Cindy Plummer, vice president for domestic marketing from the California Table Grape Commission, says, “retailers need to make sure they are stocking the grapes preferred by shoppers. Research shows that 94 percent of primary grape shoppers prefer grapes from California more than other origins, when grapes are priced the same.”

Northwest Cherry Growers and the Washington State Fruit Commission, both headquartered in Yakima, WA. “Last season 67 percent of our crop shipped in just 30 days. Retailers should have a plan for solid promotion now in order to ensure they get their share of the potential sales. Proactive retailers can grab the lion’s share of cherries in their territories if they act early.”

According to Chris Christian, senior vice president for the California Strawberry Commission headquartered in Watsonville, CA, peak availability for California strawberries is May through July, with weekly shipments averaging 5 to 7 million flats per week. “Summer is an ideal time to maintain primary displays of strawberries and promote frequently with other berry category segments,” says Christian. “Advertising strawberries with another berry type can drive a 140 percent increase in berry pound sales. A mix of feature ads, TPR’s and in-store promos is most effective.”

## AN ABUNDANCE OF OPPORTUNITIES

“Display, display, display.” That’s DeLyser’s advice, and what better way to sell fruit than to let the fruit sell itself? The CAC provides retailers with POS support and merchandising bins to display avocados, which can lead to supplemental sales. “Displays of avocados

encourage purchases of complementary produce and other items, so avocados should be high on the list for summer fruit displays.” DeLyser points out basket rings are 36 percent higher when avocados are included than when they are not in the basket and during the California avocado season this figure jumps to 44 percent.

“Displays are very important for grapes as consumers buy with their eyes,” explains Plummer. “Make sure the display is refreshed frequently and is large enough. In order to obtain optimum sales results, target an average of at least 25 square feet of space devoted to grapes from May through August. Space allocation of more than 25 feet can generate up to 63 percent more dollars per store per year than sets under 18 feet.” Plummer also suggests signage with prominent price and origin as well as price cards and danglers to help decorate the display.

For Mangos, the NMB suggests POS tools to educate consumers. “Many of our POS offerings focus on the main barriers to purchase,” says Muñoz, “which are how to cut and how to judge ripeness. One of our most popular items is a 30-by-24-inch plastic banner that folds down for shipping and distribution and makes a big splash at the display. We also offer recipe header cards and tear-pad sets for all seasons.”

## “Displays of avocados encourage purchases of complementary produce and other items, so avocados should be high on the list for summer fruit displays.”

— Jan DeLyser, California Avocado Commission

The NWPB provides similar tools for watermelons by offering a retail kit detailing information on consumer research, resources, health and nutrition. “We also have a variety of POS materials available to retailers such as posters, stickers and recipe cards as well as retailer education videos and literature,” says Rosado.

Let’s not forget berries. Mark Villata, executive director for the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council cites a recent *Interactions* report that found 96 percent of shoppers prefer to spend their money at retailers that offer in-store product demos over stores that don’t. This has led 81 percent of shoppers who experienced a demo product to purchase that item on impulse. “The amazing versatility and appeal of blueberries makes them an ideal product to feature in demos,” says Villata. “As consumers ride the smoothie craze, retailers like Whole Foods Market have begun showcasing fresh and frozen blueberries in smoothie recipes. Other interesting, simple-to-demonstrate dishes include blueberry salmon flatbreads served with avocado and jalapeño; blueberry turkey burgers served with blueberry ketchup; or blueberry s’mores made with peanut butter, banana and graham crackers.”

“The Northwest Cherry Growers maintain a variety of point of sale materials to support our promotions, but the real key to cherry sales is visibility,” says Michael. “Most of those lucrative incremental impulse sales are spurred by the emotional reaction that happens when shoppers see a display of beautiful cherries, echoing the fresh, vibrant summer they just stepped in from.” Michael recommends putting cherries up front and in high-traffic areas to capture that summer feeling.

### CROSS-MERCHANDISING

“Blueberries pair well with the myriad foods, so the cross-merchandising opportunities are endless,” says Villata. “Some center-store and dairy staples that work well for cross-merchandising include hot and cold

cereals, pancake and waffle mixes, yogurt, cottage cheese, whipped cream, cakes and baked goods. Other, less traditional uses are being devised by creative consumers which includes use in pickling, served with meat and seafood entrees, paired with cheese or mixed in with quinoa, rice or couscous.”

Villata recommends retailers present consumers with a one-stop area for their summer supply needs and recommends cross-merchandising with plastic ware for

on-the-go snacking at summer sporting events. Of course, grilling is a favorite summer activity, so cross-merchandising with grilling and outdoor dining supplies will tie the two together in the minds of shoppers planning their next grilled meal.

“Grapes from California are a versatile and healthy addition to almost any dish from grab-and-go eats, to indulgent comfort foods, to light and healthy twists on old favorites, to a satisfying snack all on their own,” notes



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**“It may also be advantageous to remind shoppers freezing blueberries at home is incredibly simple and a great way to keep a cool, snack-ready stash of fruit on hand.”**

— Mark Villata,  
U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

Plummer. As an example, she suggests cheese and wine paired with grapes or crackers and bread with cheese and grapes. “Grapes are an excellent add-on to salads such as a chicken salad rolled in a tortilla to give it a fresh burst of flavor. Grapes also pair well with dark chocolate or frozen as ice cubes in a drink to cool down on a hot summer day. To emphasize their portability, don’t forget to merchandise with portable containers.”

#### BURNING LIKE A HEAT WAVE

El Niño is expected to continue through the summer and into the fall, and while 2015 was plenty warm, 2016 could be even hotter. While this will result in a lot of air conditioning sales, it also provides a marketing opportunity for fruit. What should produce retailers be thinking when temperatures rise? “Think cool and creamy,” says DeLyser. “Retailers can suggest usage ideas such as salads and cold soups with California avocados, frosty smoothies and stuffed avocado halves. Smaller avocados are perfect for individual snacking.”

Muñoz sees mangos as ideally suited for

warm weather. “Mangos are so juicy and delicious, they really hit the spot during a hot summer day. Mangos are very versatile and can be used in salsas, smoothies, salads, spicy dishes, sweet dishes, breakfast, lunch and dinner.” Consumed simply as a snack, mangos won’t heat up the kitchen.

What beats the heat better than hydration? Rosado provides the answer when she points out, “You can’t spell watermelon without the word water. Watermelon is a great hydrator at 92 percent water. Whether in a recipe, as a juice, or in slices or chunks, it is a great way to cool down when the summer months get hot. Retailers can use this to their advantage.”

Incorporating simple, refreshing blueberry recipes is a cool idea too. Villata suggests

“smoothies, ice cream, sorbet, or frozen blueberry-lime squares will appeal to consumers seeking relief from the summer heat.” As he also points out this isn’t an assumption, it’s been tested. The USHBC commissioned a study that found 71 percent of consumers surveyed said they would consider blueberries as a smoothie ingredient. “It may also be advantageous to remind shoppers freezing blueberries at home is incredibly simple and a great way to keep a cool, snack-ready stash of fruit on hand.” Villata suggests retailers “encourage consumers to freeze their own blueberries to keep as a refreshing, pop-able snack to take to the pool and to sporting events.”

Plummer offers a similar tip for grapes as a way to beat the heat by freezing them to enjoy



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## “In order to obtain optimum sales results, target an average of at least 25 square feet of space devoted to grapes from May through August.”

— Cindy Plummer,  
California Table Grape Commission

as a refreshing snack when the temperature rises. Her advice: “Rinse grapes under running water and drain well. Pick the grapes off the stems or place full clusters on a cookie sheet

and put in the freezer. After two hours, grapes will be ready to eat.” Plummer also suggests using frozen grapes as ice cubes.

“Last year our growers faced a once-in-400 years heat wave, statistically speaking, so they’re no stranger to the challenge of heat,” says Washington State Fruit Commission’s Michael. “Boosting late season sales with “Buy Now, Freeze Now” messaging is a great on-trend way to double the ring while also reaching that group of Nielsen research-identified Late Season Shoppers — those who only buy at the end of the season because they realize it’s their last chance for the seasonal treat.”

Christian has this advice for retailers dealing strawberries and the heat, “Keep displays stocked with fresh product and check

displays each morning and throughout the day to ensure the berries are fresh and appealing, and maintain quality.” She also recommends using refrigerated table displays when possible and maintaining the cold chain by moving strawberry shipments quickly from truck to warehouse to refrigeration.

### CELEBRATING FROM MEMORIAL DAY TO LABOR DAY

The many summer holidays, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, present retailers with a plethora of promotional opportunities. “Grapes go well with all of the summer holidays so make sure they are on ad for Memorial Day, Father’s Day, Flag Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day,” says Plummer.

“To sell more summer grapes, retailers need to make sure they are stocking the grapes preferred by shoppers. Research shows that 94 percent of primary grape shoppers prefer grapes from California more than other origins, when grapes are priced the same. Sixty-nine percent prefer grapes from California when the price for California grapes is higher.” These numbers further support the idea that shoppers pay particular attention to geography when making food choices. This is an opportunity retailers can capitalize on in the lead up to these holidays. “Since California produces 99 percent of the fresh grapes in the U.S., California grapes are America’s local grapes,” says Plummer.

“Memorial Day is a great kick-off,” says Rosado at the NWPB. This is followed by the Fourth of July, which falls during National Watermelon Month. “And we can’t forget National Watermelon Day on August 3.”

“Due to their unique blue color, blueberries are often associated with July 4th red, white and blue promotions,” says Villata, adding, “but consumer demand for blueberries is consistent throughout the summer months, and the berries make for vibrant, eye-catching displays any time of year. Blueberries’ versatility makes them an ideal ingredient to promote for a variety of snacks, meals and potluck recipes for summer celebrations and gatherings.”

“Whether George Washington chopped down the cherry tree or not, sweet cherries have become a part of Americana,” says Michael. “Fourth of July and other outdoor picnic-friendly occasions are a great tie-in for cherries, as retail basket surveys show.” Michael suggests cross-promoting in a central location with other picnic items. He also suggests retailers keep in mind that Northwest cherries in secondary displays boost same-store volume by 13.4 percent.

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## SHOWCASE california summer produce



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# State Promotion Efforts Reach Beyond Regional Borders

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BY BOB JOHNSON

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If you're headed to South Carolina and wonder how to find the restaurants featuring homegrown produce, the answer is as close as your smartphone.

The Certified SC web page, which also has a guide to buying watermelon grown in the state, includes a downloadable app that will let you find the restaurants that have signed onto the local produce program.

"We promote local products through our 'Fresh on the Menu' program that features an app to help consumers locate restaurants throughout South Carolina that feature local produce and proteins on their menu," says Martin Eubanks, assistant commissioner of agriculture for South Carolina in Columbia.

States are finding new and varied ways of connecting people with their produce, and South Carolina finds success with an approach that involves a multitude of ways of connecting consumers to the homegrown fruits, vegetables and other farm products.

"Key elements of the program include a comprehensive media campaign including television, radio, outdoor, print, and social media,"

says Eubanks. "Certified South Carolina is our umbrella brand, and we have individual programs that promote fresh products, seafood, meat, deli, dairy, and grocery at the retail level."

Numerous crops benefit from this active campaign to promote Certified South Carolina. "Peaches, watermelon, cantaloupe, leafy greens, and summer vegetables have been helped by the campaign," says Eubanks. "Heavy local promotion combined with a comprehensive media strategy has helped consumers 'connect the dots' on local produce. In-store merchandising and advertising programs have elevated local sales."

Virtually every state with a significant agricultural economy has enjoyed a return on investment over the decades in developing the brand of their local farm products, beginning with the New Jersey pioneers who promoted buying local before buying local was cool.

"Our farmers benefited greatly from the Jersey Fresh program," says Alfred Murray, assistant secretary of agriculture, New Jersey Department of Agriculture in Trenton. "Now beginning its 32<sup>nd</sup> season, Jersey Fresh was one

of the first programs to tout the benefits of 'locally grown' long before the locally grown trend became hugely popular."

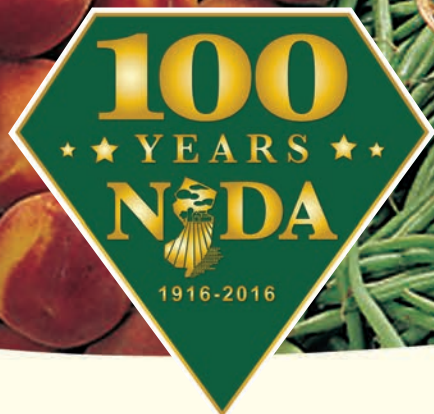
Over the decades New Jersey developed a brand that people throughout the Northeast associate with local, and fresh.

"Residents in our state and the outlying metropolitan areas have come to equate the Jersey Fresh logo with locally grown," says Murray. "Recent polls have shown approximately 90 percent of New Jersey consumers recognize the Jersey Fresh logo, and more than 80 percent surveyed said the Jersey Fresh brand represents superior products."

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has been working with national grocery retailers since 2003. In addition to the state of Florida, Fresh From



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Florida (FFF) marketing programs focus on consumers and grocers in the U.S. Midwest, Northeast, Southeast and the Eastern sections of Canada.

"In 2015, we worked with 64 retail partners representing 12,357 stores in 26 countries worldwide," says Aaron Keller, press secretary for the Tallahassee, FL-based Florida Department of Agriculture. "Our marketing programs generated more than \$335 million in additional cash receipts for our farmers and growers. These additional cash receipts represent 6,299 full/part-time Florida jobs, and more than \$26 million in tax revenue."

## MAKING THE CONNECTION

These promotional branding programs start with a snappy name, and a logo that catches the eye on the carton, in the produce department, on tote bags, and coffee cups, but many states are moving from this foundation toward extensive use of computer-based communication as important parts of marketing their farmers' wares.

"Our website is a real selling tool for farms of all sizes throughout the state," says Tammy Algood, marketing specialist at the Tennessee Department of Agriculture in Nashville. "Of course, it is particularly helpful to those that are just getting started and are small. With the tens of thousands of hits we get each month, it is frequently the only 'advertising' a farm has to do. We also provide value-added items for the producers to use with their customers, such as



**The Virginia Department of Agriculture networks to bring individual grower-shippers, or groups of them, together with potential retailers for in-store event support.**

recipe cards, kitchen equivalent charts, farm measures and dry erase boards for pricing."

These marketing efforts appeal to the desire to buy the freshest produce and support the local farmers.

Campaigns are going beyond that start, however, by developing connections with particular elements of the community, frequently by employing the tools of computer age communication.

"We will continue to partner with major

U.S. grocers to incentivize and encourage them to purchase Florida commodities during our October through June growing season by continuing with circular advertising, product samplings and e-coupons," says Keller. "Direct-to-consumer brand advertising will continue to play an integral part in growing brand awareness and acceptance. FFF commodities have an excellent reputation for high quality and great taste. Our current and past marketing initiatives have portrayed these two qualities to consumers, and these initiatives depict how easy it is to cook and serve nutritious FFF meals."

"The Virginia Grown website seems to be particularly helpful at connecting consumers with fresh, local produce at pick-your-own farms, and farmers markets," says Elaine Lidholm, director of communications for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in Richmond. "C & E, our largest producer of fresh-market green beans, uses a video we produced as a major sales tool with buyers. Consumers learned to look for the Virginia Grown logo on banners, signs, price cards, etc., and farmers at local markets like to give away the Virginia Grown tote bags."

Virginia has a larger than average number of military personnel, and the state has linked its marketing campaign with the bases.

"Our Virginia military commissaries have a Hometown Heroes program that features Virginia Grown produce in all the Virginia commissaries during our harvest season,"

## ■ THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

A few years ago a team demonstrating the many possible uses of New Mexico green chile in a major East Coast city made the sort of connection of which promotional dreams are made.

The evocative aroma as they roasted the chile, an important step in the cooking process, was enough to transport one passer-by to memories of long ago and thousands of miles away.

"It's very aromatic," recalls Katie Goetz, spokeswoman for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, Las Cruces, NM. "A woman showed up in tears. She was from New Mexico, had smelled the chiles, and it reminded her of home. We had a laugh, had a hug, and she bought a lot of chiles."

Green chile is the crop promoted from New Mexico, which is second only to California in chile pepper production.

Only a few states have such a branded

crop, as Georgia has peaches and the sweetest onions in the world, while California has the invention of sunshine in January, but farm states have pretty much all developed promotional campaigns with recognizable brands like Jersey Fresh, Colorado Proud or It's Got to Be NC.

These names are associated with distinctive logos prominently displayed at harvest time in produce departments throughout the state, and usually a little bit beyond the borders, and at the larger trade shows.

But some marketing efforts go further, and culinary demonstrations in store are one way to enjoy the sweet smell of prospective customers.

Paul Jones, media marketing specialist at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services in Raleigh recalls a promotion that involved sweet

potato, blueberry and strawberry growers. "We had in-store displays, and we had chefs come in and show how to cook with these ingredients."

New Mexico, too, includes the cook's touch in promoting its signature agricultural product.

"We educate the store managers, show them how to roast it and how to incorporate it into different dishes," says Goetz. "This is a unique crop that can add color as well as flavor to a lot of foods."

When the harvest comes, this educational campaign goes to thousands of stores in every corner of the country.

"Every August and September we work with a variety of groups to help them promote New Mexico green chile," says Goetz. "We're talking 30 to 35 retail chains, including Wegman's and Whole Foods, and around 2,000 stores. It's far and wide." **pb**



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3. Names and dates of promotion (must have taken place between June 1, 2015 and June 1, 2016).  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Promotion objectives.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Description of promotion.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Promotion results (sales or traffic increases, media attention). What made this program a success?  
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says Lidholm. “Our farmers, many of whom are veterans, are really proud to be feeding the troops.”

Other states with large veteran populations are also linking their buy local campaigns with the farmers among them who are veterans.

“Homegrown by Heroes is a special Arkansas Agriculture Department program — and specific extension of the Arkansas Grown program — that highlights military veterans who are also farmers in Arkansas,” says Adriane Barnes, director of communications at the Arkansas Agriculture Department in Little Rock. “Homegrown by Heroes has its own logo and signage to further set apart members of this special group of Arkansas growers.”

The Homegrown by Heroes program was first started by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, and the Arkansas Agriculture Department later developed its own Homegrown program in partnership with the Farmer Veteran Coalition, according to Barnes.

### IT'S A NEIGHBORLY THING

These marketing efforts generally carry weight with consumers some distance beyond the state lines.

“We promote South Carolina produce heavily through the retail and wholesale community throughout our home state and the Southeast region,” says Eubanks. “We also work with retailers in major markets in the Mid-Atlantic region and Northeast for crop specific promotions.”

Different arms of this program help growers of varying sizes to increase their sales.

“Promotional programs provided sales lift at retail,” says Eubanks. “Many smaller producers are now able to access retail through direct deliveries. Larger producers have realized significant increases in sales throughout the region. In addition, we promote heavily through community-based markets and through roadside markets locally. Certified SC Grown is highly recognized across the state, and local demand continues to grow providing additional market potential to our farm producers.”

One “buy local” program developed a reputation that even reaches across the border into Canada.

“The Jersey Fresh program promotes the New Jersey’s farm products primarily along the Eastern Seaboard with an emphasis on New Jersey’s three largest markets: New Jersey/New York/Philadelphia, New England, and Eastern Canada,” says Murray.

Regional retail partners can play a significant role in making the campaign work beyond



the border of the home state.

“We have done several events with retailers that have stores outside of the state to market North Carolina produce,” says Paul Jones, media marketing specialist at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services in Raleigh. “We’re talking fairly local, like in Virginia and South Carolina. We also do onion and tomato promotions as well.”

Many, maybe most, state agriculture departments team up with the major crop groups to put the marketing campaign together.

“Our efforts rely heavily on partnerships as well,” says Wendy Lee White, marketing specialist at the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Broomfield, CO. “We have great support from our produce growers and industry organizations including the Colorado Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association, Colorado Potato Administrative Committee and the Rocky Ford Growers Association.”

The Colorado Proud program received the 2015 PRODUCE BUSINESS Marketing Excellence Award, three Colorado Chapter Public Relations Society of America awards, and two MarCom awards.

The Virginia Department of Agriculture networks to bring individual grower-shippers, or groups of them, together with potential retailers.

“We do an annual potato promotion with Wal-Mart,” says Lidholm. “We initiate production area tours with buyers, merchandisers and store personnel to discuss new sales opportunities with producers and evaluate crop conditions as well as packing facilities. We work one-on-one with farmers to bring buyers and sellers together with outlets such as national,

regional and local grocery chains; independent stores; big box stores. We use social media to promote produce and related events, such as tomato or berry festivals. Our most active sites are Facebook and Twitter and we also have a Flickr account.”

Some campaigns shift their focus to match the movement of the harvest from one area of the state to another, and from one crop to another.

“As the three stars on the Tennessee flag represent the three very different areas of our state, we are able to assist farmers at their peak need,” says Algood. “Our biggest produce items have certainly been helped such as tomatoes, from Grainger County in particular, green beans from the Plateau region, pumpkins from the southeast, and fruit from the middle and west portions of the state. By targeting each area with a marketing campaign, we are able to help the producers there rather than having a blanket marketing effort that is a one-time shot, which might be perfectly timed for one area, but either too early or late for another.”

### GLOBAL REACH

In the age of the global economy, campaigns promoting “buy local” produce and efforts to market internationally are frequently housed in the same state agency, and sometimes even organized by the same individuals.

The markets division of the Colorado Department of Agriculture promotes Colorado produce statewide, nationwide and worldwide, says White. Colorado Proud is a free marketing program that promotes food and agricultural products that are grown, raised or processed in the state. The division has contracted with

a public relations firm. “We focus heavily on produce promotion in the summer,” she says.

Many of the state marketing efforts focus on international markets that are relatively close to home.

FFF marketing programs have taken the form of commodity advertising incentives for in-store ads, point of purchase ads and materials, periodical print ads, co-branded TV ads, social media initiatives, integrated media campaigns utilizing billboards and TV, grocery cart advertising, e-coupons and in-store product sampling events.

“Canada represents Florida’s leading agricultural trade export destination and is our No. 1 international marketing partner,” says Keller. “Other international areas of interest include Asia, Europe, and Central and South America.”

“We do a lot of promotions in the Mid-Atlantic, including some joint endeavors with other states, with big national or regional outlets,” says Virginia’s Lidholm. “We promote produce in Canada and on a more limited basis, with other countries. Mexico and Cuba are good examples of places where we promote Virginia apples and other produce.”

Virginia, however, is also sending agricultural product representatives around the world for these promotion efforts.

“We have international marketing representatives on contract around the world who promote Virginia products,” says Lidholm. “Virginia growers have made more than \$800 million in sales brokered by Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services since we hired our international reps in 2010. One specific produce example is apples – most, if not all, of the \$1.6 million in apples sold from Virginia to India in 2014 were due to contacts provided to the growers from our Indian reps and the Office of International Marketing. Most of the 2015 sales came as a result of a reverse trade mission of Indian apple buyers we organized and hosted in December 2014.”

Virginia is expanding its international marketing to embrace more fruits and vegetables, and more destination markets thousands of miles away.

“Apples, peaches, green beans, peanuts and potatoes certainly have benefited from our promotions,” says Lidholm. “For example, India, China and Latin America are places where we are helping our apple growers to access sales opportunities beyond our borders. We also worked, and continue to work, on opportunities in Panama and Colombia for our apple exporters.”

“Georgia Grown is used on products delivered both domestically and internation-

ally,” says Matt Kulinski, deputy director of marketing at the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Atlanta, GA.

“The most famous product that proudly utilizes the Georgia Grown logo is the Vidalia onion,” he says. “The boxes and bags of Vidalia onions are shipped across the country with the Georgia Grown mark. Georgia pecans are often delivered to Asian nations with the Georgia Grown logo. Asian consumers relate the Georgia Grown logo with high quality and strong food safety standards.”

These international efforts can be so important that the top agricultural official in the state personally takes the lead.

“Arkansas Agriculture Secretary Wes Ward directly represented and promoted Arkansas agriculture on three international trade missions in 2015 to the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Sub-Saharan Africa,” says Barnes. “During each trade mission ... valuable contacts and relationships were built during these trips for exporters of Arkansas’ agricultural commodities.” **pb**

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# Dressing Up Produce Departments

The refrigerated salad dressing category expands to include on-trend flavors and healthier ingredient profiles — broadening product appeal.

BY LISA WHITE

**A**s more consumers shop supermarkets' perimeters looking for fresh produce that can be prepared with minimal effort, dressings have become more prevalent in today's produce departments. This includes vinaigrettes, yogurt-based, Mediterranean flavors and spicy and traditional favorites, such as Ranch and Blue Cheese.

The refrigerated salad dressing category has grown by \$24.4 million over the last year, while the shelf stable dressing set has declined by \$20 million in the 52 weeks ending Feb. 21, 2016, according to a joint report by research firms Nielsen in New York and IRI in Chicago.

Salad dressings have a long history that dates back to the Babylonians, who used oil and vinegar for dressing greens nearly 2,000 years ago, according to the Atlanta-based Association of Dressings and Sauces. In the twentieth century, Americans began using oil,

vinegar or lemon juice, and spices to create a variety of dressings to complement salads. Many of the major brands of salad dressings available today were on the market as early as the 1920s.

In recent years, the healthier dressings have been driving growth in the refrigerated dressing category.

"Organics are the fastest-growing segment, with sales up 50 percent over last year, and Greek yogurt-based dressing sales are up 40 percent over last year," says Camille M. Balfanz, brand manager at Lighthouse Foods, headquartered in Sandpoint, ID. "Within the remaining segment, Ranch and balsamic are the fastest growing RSD (refrigerated salad dressing) flavors."

Further proof of this trend is New Seasons Market, a 19-store chain of privately owned grocery stores operating in Oregon's Portland Metro area with locations in Vancouver,

WA, and San Jose, CA, which recently began selling a salad dressing and marinade made with a local seaweed called dulse. Developed in partnership with Oregon State University and Dulse Foods, the Tamari with Dulse Seaweed Dressing & Marinade is sold under New Seasons' Partner Label private brand.

Although refrigerated dressings are carried in the stores' produce departments, these products are not managed in the same way as other products. "The refrigerated salad dressing category lives in my department, yet I don't order or watch these products," says Jeff Fairchild, director of produce at New Seasons Market. "The grocery director handles these items on a store-by-store basis."

## TASTE TRENDS

When looking at the RSD category, it's important to note consumers' perception of healthfulness is shifting. Consumers are

more concerned about the ingredients they are finding on labels than they are about traditional health claims, like calorie counts.

According to the International Food Information Council Foundation, 37 percent of consumers are avoiding preservatives, 33 percent are avoiding MSG, 48 percent are avoiding high fructose corn syrup and 21 percent are avoiding food colors, according to the International Food Information Council Foundation, Washington, D.C.

Traditional flavor profiles, like Ranch and Blue Cheese, continue to grow in the RSD set and account for 38 percent of the category, yet neither flavor is usually associated with low-calorie claims, according to IRI Info Scan's report for the 52 weeks ending Feb. 14, 2016.

The reality is consumers have different needs. "Some consumers are focused on low calories, while others are analyzing ingredient decks," says Balfanz. "Some consumers are looking for interesting flavors and others are driven by habit and purchase only brands they know and trust. Differentiating the product assortment for different consumer segments will help increase in-store sales."

For Marzetti, it's the vinaigrette segment that is growing.

"Consumers want ingredients they recognize, like extra virgin olive oil, red wine vinegar and Parmesan cheese without added preservatives, MSG or high fructose corn syrup," says Mary Beth Cowardin, director, brand

## **"In the 12 weeks ending in mid-February, yogurt-based product sales increased by 22 percent over the previous year."**

— Mary Beth Cowardin, Marzetti

marketing – Marzetti brand for T. Marzetti, based in Columbus, OH. "And vinaigrette dressings are generally lower in calories than other creamier dressings."

Manufacturers report yogurt-based products also continue to perform well, due in part to the health halo of yogurt as an ingredient.

"In the 12 weeks ending in mid-February, yogurt-based product sales increased by 22 percent over the previous year," says Cowardin.

In 2014, Bakersfield, CA-based Bolthouse Farms launched its traditional Greek Yogurt dressing line with four flavors — Peppercorn Ranch, Bold Blue Cheese, Creamy Basil and Cucumber Dill.

"Greek yogurt has penetrated the dressing category and is well received by consumers looking for lower calorie and low fat options," says Bill Lange, Bolthouse Farms' vice president of marketing. "Kefir has become popular within the dairy set, but we've yet to see it hit the mainstream refrigerated dressing category."

At the same time, traditional products have a strong place in the market.

"Ranch, Blue Cheese and Caesar still account for almost two thirds of all dressing sales," says Cowardin. "Consumers like the tried and true, and these dressings are versatile and often the gateway to consumers trying new foods."

Packaging formats for these products are changing, as consumers demand more convenient, healthier and sustainable options from manufacturers.

For example, Litehouse uses a glass jar because consumers perceive it to be high quality and environmentally friendly, while keeping its product fresher, healthier and more flavorful, according to a February 2015 qualitative focus group report conducted by Ipsos and commissioned by Litehouse.

Refrigerated salad dressing labels also have shifted toward highlighting brand and flavor more than other package components, say manufacturers.

"Consumers are reading labels more frequently and are making their purchases based on healthier products," says Charles

## **■ HEADLINE NEW USES & BRAND EXTENSIONS**

Recently, there have been a number of new brand extensions and products geared to expand the uses and buying opportunities for refrigerated salad dressings.

Columbus, OH-based T. Marzetti's newest Simply Dressed flavors and Vineyard Dressings lines of vinaigrette dressings are currently rolling out nationally after successful regional introductions last fall.

"These two lines are bringing new people into the category and are on-trend with consumer desires to consume more fresh, locally sourced produce, for clean labels and for overall health and balance," says Mary Beth Cowardin, director of brand marketing for Marzetti.

Greek yogurt is a \$7.4 billion business, according to UK research firm Mintel.

This relates directly to produce, since the Greek yogurt consumer is four times more likely to purchase items from the

produce department than the average consumer, based on a report by Singapore-based SPIRE.

In response to this trend, manufacturers are expanding refrigerated salad dressing lines. In addition to Litehouse Foods' newest flavors, which include Avocado Ranch with Bacon, Organic Rosemary Balsamic, and Organic Ginger with Honey, the company has added to its Opa Greek Yogurt line.

"OPA by Litehouse was launched in 2013, and it has seen tremendous growth since then," says Camille M. Balfanz, brand manager at Litehouse Foods, headquartered in Sandpoint, ID. "Over the last year, OPA has grown more than 40 percent, while non-yogurt dressings have grown 4 percent."

Earlier this year, the line was expanded to include pourables in Strawberry Poppyseed, Tzatziki Ranch, Roasted Garlic,

Avocado Cilantro, and Curry flavors.

In 2014, Bakersfield, CA-based Bolthouse Farms released a Cilantro Avocado Yogurt Dressing, which was met with an "overwhelming, positive response," says Bill Lange, vice president of marketing at Bolthouse Farms. As a result, the company introduced two new yogurt-based dressings in January 2016: Salsa Verde Avocado Yogurt Dressing and Creamy Roasted Garlic Yogurt Dressing.

Usage occasions for these products have expanded in recent years. For example, Makoto Dressing products are used as both dressings and marinades. "Our ginger dressing is popular as a marinade for beef, chicken, seafood, pork, etc.," says Charles "Buzzy" Blyer, sales manager of the Melbourne, FL-based company. "Consumer research is revealing the Millennial generation is looking for zesty and spicy products for their salads." **pb**

“Buzzy” Blyer, sales manager at Melbourne, FL-based Makoto Dressing Inc.

### MARKETING AMONGST PRODUCE

In the RSD category, when it comes to sales, much depends on placement and effective cross-merchandising.

Tom’s Market, a single-store operation in Freeburg, IL, merchandises its refrigerated dressings in the cold case alongside prepackaged salads. Brands include both Marzetti’s

and Litehouse. The store occasionally will hold promotions with its dressings, putting shippers’ display cases up when they’re on deal.

“It has been very effective to have these products next to all of our prepacked salads in the grab-and-go case,” says Ken Carel, produce manager.

Produce departments have become table stakes for grocers, who are seeking RSD products that reflect and meet new consumer demands for freshness and label transparency

and that support a balanced healthy lifestyle.

“Bottomline, retailers need new and distinct products that will resonate with current trends and provide consumers with a variety of choices,” says Cowardin.

Merchandising within the RSD set is all about catching the consumer’s attention during the produce shopping occasion. Placement next to bagged salad is the classic approach, although some retailers are now adding secondary placement of organic dressings next to organic salads when there is a separate placement for organic produce.

“This really drives the message to the consumer to top their salad with the same quality of ingredients as they put in their salad,” says Litehouse Foods’ Balfanz. “This convenient consumer solution also drives a higher ring for the retailer. The fact is that as consumers focus more on fresh, there is a squeeze for refrigerated space around the perimeter.”

Beyond cross-merchandising in produce, Litehouse had recent success cross-merchandising in the deli department with its Dip it, Dunk it, Wing it promotion in January and February 2016. With multiple placements of Litehouse Blue Cheese dressings in the refrigerated salad dressing set and in the deli cross-merchandised with wings, Litehouse Blue Cheese sales increased by 25 percent during these two months, with some chains doubling their sales during this period, according to IRI Infoscan Total US Food in the six weeks ending Feb. 14, 2016.

In addition, cross-merchandising that takes into consideration timely themes and relevant food pairings works well.

“Consumers are often looking for new ways to consume produce so doing that extra work to inspire them through creative meal time recipes or innovative snack ideas can go a long way,” says Bolthouse Farms’ Lange. “Most often, produce items such as pre-packaged salad, coleslaw and shredded veggie mixes are cross-merchandised with salad dressings as well as raw, whole veggies and pre-package veggies.”

The RSD category is uniquely positioned for growth, as it complements the entire produce section, while offering convenient solutions for consumers and driving sales for the retailer.

“The RSD category is perfectly positioned for retailers to leverage fresh solutions,” says Balfanz. “As consumers buy more produce and read more labels, the refrigerated salad dressing set is a natural choice to complement fresh fruits and vegetables.”

**pb**

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# Expand Summer Sales With South African Citrus

Consumer expectations for year-round fruit combined with increasing variety and volume mean surging citrus sales for retailers.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

As retailers begin looking to summer offerings, citrus from South Africa plays a crucial role in building summer sales. “Summer citrus is now well established as a category on retail shelves and in the minds of consumers,” says Marc Solomon, senior vice president at Capespan North America in Gloucester City, NJ.

University Foods, an upscale independent grocer in Detroit, sees booming business with citrus in the summer. “Our customers have come to expect citrus all year long,” reports Sam Marrogy, produce manager. “Summer is a great time to promote, because the weather is good and product is amply available.”

Intersecting benefits in availability, quality and price helps build the category. “South African fruit is great quality,” explains Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner’s Markets in Reading, PA, with 44 stores. “Availability keeps getting better and costs continue to come down.”

Kim Flores, marketing director for Seald Sweet in Vero Beach, FL, expects nothing less from this coming season. “South African citrus has established itself with consistently high quality, great flavor, and volume to promote aggressively. We’re excited to report this season is shaping up to have these same attributes,” she says.

According to the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF), South African offerings represent a significant part of summer citrus category growth and continue to climb. “Volumes from South Africa have increased by 25 percent from 2010 to 2015 with 2015 being the record year in terms of volume,” reports Suhanra Conradie, chief executive of the WCCPF in Citrusdal, South Africa.

Redner’s, like most retailers, counts on South African summer product to contribute to a year-round citrus program. “There isn’t



TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTERN CAPE CITRUS PRODUCERS FORUM  
PHOTO ON LEFT COURTESY OF TOM LANGE

much citrus available from other sources in summer so we need the South African product to maintain citrus sales,” says Stiles.

The timeframe is opportune since it is contra-seasonal to citrus from California, Florida and Texas, says Tom Cowan, sales manager for the South African program at DNE World Fruit LLC in Fort Pierce, FL. “The window starts when California Navels finish in late May or early June and closes when the new California Navel season starts in late October or early November,” explains

Cowan. “Retailers can now merchandise and grow their citrus profits year-round due to the wide variety of imported citrus.”

## MAXIMIZE SPACE WITH VARIETY

Retailers can continue expanding citrus sales in the summer with the ample variety available from South Africa. “You must have a full assortment for the customers,” says Stiles. “We carry Clementines, Cara Caras, Navels, grapefruits, Blood oranges, whatever is available. It just enhances the whole category and

gives customers options.”

According to the WCCPF, South Africa citrus offerings are available from June through September and with limited items in October. Items include Easy Peelers, Navels, Star Ruby grapefruit, and Cara Cara oranges and Midnights in October, says Conradie.

The season essentially starts with Easy Peelers in late May through August, says Bill Weyland, vice president of sales for Seven Seas in Iselin, NJ, which is part of the Tom Lange Family of Companies and represents a global list of growers to supply international retailers and restaurants.

Navels, Cara Caras and Midnights fill the gap from June through September with some potential alteration in any given season. Seven Seas markets Cara Cara oranges from late June to September and W. Murcotts from late August to October.

“Seald Sweet starts Navels and Midnight oranges in early July through the second week of October,” reports Stu Monaghan, sales director for Seald Sweet. “We will also have Minneola Tangelos this year in August.”

Importers suggest availability of additional summer citrus products such as grapefruit also helps build sales. “Star Ruby grapefruit is available from July to September,” says Weyland.

Redner’s reports a resurgence of interest in grapefruit. “This is a good product for us,” describes Stiles. “It’s regaining popularity with Millennials as they continue to look for healthy products.”

## GO BIG!

Marketers claim this year’s crop is expected to be excellent in quality and quantity, allowing

## “We feature a different citrus item every week, switching it up to keep customers interested.”

— Richard Stiles, Redner’s Market

for abundant promotion opportunity. “Climatic conditions have been such that we are expecting very good internal quality along with very clean fruit,” explains Capespan’s Solomon. “The season is expected to start at the normal time with weekly arrivals of vessels on the U.S. East Coast ensuring the fruit always remains fresh.”

Ample volumes permit big promotion and big sales opportunities. Marrogy reports University Foods usually buys big volume in summer. “We’ll bring in a bin of oranges and promote in quantity,” he explains. “Large quantities of quality product draws customer attention and sells.”

Visible displays are crucial to Redner’s strategy. “This is an impulse item so you must have a nice display,” advises Stiles. “We feature a different citrus item every week, switching it up to keep customers interested.”

Summer citrus fights for both shelf and ad space. “It is important to give us shelf space,” emphasizes Weyland. “Most produce sales are still impulse buys. Retailers can help support the category with line ads throughout the summer and increase floor space and ad frequency starting in late August with back-to-school promotions.”

## SELL BULK AND BAGGED

Marketers recommend frequently promoting citrus in large displays with a variety of package options. “Including both bagged and

bulk citrus helps attract consumers and ultimately drives sales,” says Seald Sweet’s Flores. “Bagging programs have grown tremendously over the years. We offer bags in a number of sizes, all based on our customers’ needs.”

Capespan helps retailers maximize sales by offering bulk and bagged in a range of varieties. “Navels, Cara Caras and Midnights are available in both bulk and bags,” explains Solomon. “Clementines are also traditionally sold in bags with attractive eye catching graphics.”

Increasing interest in healthy eating and juicing motivates University Foods customers to purchase large amounts of citrus. “Our customers buy large quantities to juice,” explains Marrogy. “So we promote these items in large quantities. I make sure I have enough good quality, fresh citrus at the right price to drive these sales.”

## PRICE AND PROMOTE TO SELL

University Foods operates on ensuring fresh product and pricing it to sell. “I make sure it’s fresh product first and foremost,” reports Marrogy. “Then, I look at the price. I try to put a competitive price on it to do the best for our customers. Lower prices for summer product always moves. For example, we ran imported Navel oranges at 5 for \$5 and they did really well.”

Stores are urged to make summer citrus promotions a focal point. “The quality is good,

## ■ MAKING THE TRIP

Originating from the other side of the world, South African fruit is no short order yet delivers on quality and taste. BY JODEAN ROBBINS

South Africa is about 8,900 miles from the United States. Exporters of South African fruit have invested decades of research and experience to assure quality fruit arrives to U.S. consumers. “South African citrus travels very well and consistently arrives in beautiful condition,” says Stu Monaghan, sales director for Seald Sweet in Vero Beach, FL. “Our growers and packers take great care to ensure the fruit purchased by American consumers is a very positive eating experience.”

Transportation is crucial to making sure South African citrus arrives in peak condition. “South Africa uses both charter

vessels and container vessels to ship their citrus to the U.S. market,” explains Tom Cowan, sales manager for the South African program for DNE World Fruit LLC in Fort Pierce, FL. “The U.S. Department of Agriculture requires South African citrus to undergo 22 days of continuous cold treatment. The South African vessels all have a very sophisticated temperature monitoring system setup to make sure the fruit is maintained at the proper temperature during the voyage to the U.S.”

Citrus actually does well in the transportation leg, according to Marc Solomon, senior vice president at Capespan North

America in Gloucester City, NJ. “The sea voyage is 22 days,” he says. “Since the fruit is kept refrigerated at all times, the fruit has excellent taste and shelf life when the consumer purchases it.”

The main U.S. ports receiving South African fruit are in the Northeast. “Charter vessel fruit arrives mainly in Gloucester City, NJ, and container vessels go to Newark or New York,” reports DNE’s Cowan.

Importers, such as Capespan, have begun receiving fruit into the port of Houston. “This means better access to the Midwest and Southwest regions of the U.S.,” says Solomon.

pb



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the flavor is good, the volume is good and pricing is good,” explains Stiles. “Summer’s not just all about stone fruit anymore; these items give you good opportunity to increase or add on sales. It is just something else the shopper will pick up. It doesn’t affect the sales of the other summer fruit so promote it often and aggressively.”

The attractiveness and taste of summer citrus provides a perfect platform for reaching consumers directly. “Retailers who promote

citrus during peak taste, advertise weekly, build colorful displays with an assortment of colors, and offer in-store sampling during peak flavor, have successful programs and grow their summer citrus sales,” says Mark Hanks, vice president of sales and marketing for DNE.

The portability of summer citrus is another successful promotional focus. “It allows consumers to enjoy great summer outdoor activities with citrus in their picnic baskets, backpacks, and coolers,” says Hanks. “In late

**“In-store sampling is a great merchandising method to attract the consumer and give them a positive experience.”**

— Bill Weyland, Seven Seas

summer/fall, citrus is very effectively promoted in back-to-school lunch box programs.”

Giving customers a taste also boosts sales. “In-store sampling is a great merchandising method to attract consumers and give them a positive experience,” suggests Weyland of Seven Seas.

Hanks agrees enticing customers to sample before purchasing helps boost sales, especially for thrifty customers. “Many customers are on a tight budget and reluctant to buy something new unless they know they are going to like the product,” he says.

#### LOOK FOR SUPPORT

Stores can partner with suppliers for promotional support. Seald Sweet supports retailers when sampling or display contests coincide with promotions. “Our goal is to help grow our retailers’ sales with promotion support and provide them consistently beautiful product for their consumers to enjoy,” says Monaghan.

DNE encourages retailers to work with suppliers offering good quality fruit, steady supplies and good information regarding supply trends and pricing. “DNE offers a complete program of promotional support for retailers with many options for advertising, in-store sampling and merchandising displays,” says Cowan.

The WCCPF is working on a new brand direction for South Africa’s fruit. “We are developing a program that will be attractive and focus on the consumer,” says Conradie. “We are excited to see the results and hope to launch this new focus near the beginning of the season.”

Retailers can also harness existing consumer-oriented social programs for an added layer of support. For example, some of Seald Sweet’s growers in South Africa are Fair Trade accredited. “These programs enable the farm workers to receive benefits from the programs, through the form of fair wages, community improvements, education and social services so the business is more sustainable,” says Flores. **pb**

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# Southern Vegetables Diversify

Kale and collard greens grow peacefully side by side.

BY BOB JOHNSON



**S**outhern growers still produce bumper crops of sweet potatoes, sweet corn, collard and turnip greens, and, in that special corner of Georgia, farmers are still rightfully proud of the sweet onions that only make you cry when they're gone.

But the South's farmers are also growing more broccoli than ever before, as well as Romaine lettuce, Napa cabbage, kale, and even a trendy new cross between kale and Brussels sprouts.

Cooking shows and food blogs made tastes more national, and institutional produce buyers with a keen eye for logistics — making Southern agriculture look a lot more like Northern California.

"We're expanding the variety of our offerings," says Lee Anne Oxford, marketing director at L&M Farms in Raleigh, NC. "We tried a lot of new things three years ago, and we're bringing more of them to the market. Some of them are usually grown in California.

Broccoli is one of the items we had good success with. We also expanded the varieties of our chili and sweet peppers."

L&M ships a full line of vegetables (including bell and chili peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, tomatoes, squash, broccoli and cabbage) from farms that stretch from Florida to New York, and as far west as Southern California and Mexico.

"We've been moving in the direction of increasing our variety for three or four years," says Oxford. "We keep expanding broccoli acreage, and we're also growing Asian varieties of cabbage, like Napa."

## NEW SOUTHERN AGRICULTURE

The refrain is the same throughout the South. The region is expanding its vegetable portfolio to include increasing volumes of the vegetable mainstays of the Salinas Valley.

Along the East Coast and as far west as the Rockies, these crops can be merchandised as fresher, and presumably more economical,

mainstream vegetables.

"You are starting to see more traditional Western grown items, such as broccoli, cauliflower, Romaine, lettuce and strawberries," says Andrew Scott, vice president of marketing and business development at Nickey Gregory Company in Atlanta.

Nickey Gregory sources more than 400 varieties of fruits and vegetables from throughout the South, as well as other areas of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Spain and Holland, and ships from its hubs in Forest Park, GA, and Miami.

"We've seen increased demand for what we call specialty crops," says Matthew Kulinski, deputy director of marketing at the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) in Atlanta. "One example would be asparagus. People are also growing more lettuce and other greens."

By 2013, Georgia vegetable production approached a billion dollars in farm gate value, according to the University of Georgia Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development,



## “There are less food miles from grower-shippers to Southeast retail and foodservice distribution centers, so produce is fresh.”

— Andrew Scott, Nickey Gregory

with bell peppers, sweet corn, onions, cabbage, cucumbers, greens and tomatoes all topping \$50 million.

That represented a 20 percent increase over seven years earlier, when the state’s vegetable harvest was worth a little more than \$800 million, with onions, sweet corn, tomatoes, bell peppers, greens and snap beans reaching the \$50 million benchmark.

“Broccoli is relatively new for us, but we have been shipping it for three or four years,” says Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA) in LaGrange, GA.

Other states have also noticed increased demand for a wider variety of green vegetables.

“Recently, there are more greens,” says Nick Augustini, assistant director of marketing at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture in Raleigh, NC. “We ship tomatoes, green and yellow squash, cukes, peppers, cabbage, greens, beans and sweet potatoes.”

The healthiest and arguably the trendiest of the crucifers has also taken root in southern soils.

“I personally noticed an increase in kale in this area as it became more popular nationwide,” says Katie Murray, sales manager at Southern Valley in Norman Park, GA. “For us, we market throughout the United States and Canada, with an emphasis on the Eastern Seaboard.”

Southern Valley, a sixth generation family farming operation in Southern Georgia, grows

spaghetti, butternut, acorn, zucchini and yellow squash, eggplant, peppers, cucumbers, green beans, cabbage and, as of recently, kale.

“Kale production increased the past four years,” agrees Sonny Dickinson, assistant director of marketing and retail merchandising at the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, Columbia, SC. “A lot of people are doing kale smoothies. It’s a healthy product, and it’s trendier than collard, mustard, or turnip greens.”

Even kale’s fellow crucifer, Brussels sprouts, has taken root in the fields of the South.

“There’s been more consumption of Brussels sprouts; there’s probably been 10 to 20 percent growth,” says Dickinson.

As a sign of the times, a major South Carolina farming operation is growing a cross between kale and Brussels sprouts, a British invention contending to become the next trendy vegetable. Called Kalettes, this hybrid was developed in the United Kingdom.

“Six companies in the U.S. have the rights to it, and one of them is Walter P. Rawl here in South Carolina,” says Dickinson. “Kalettes is an excellent product; it’s a healthy product.”

Southerners, like everyone else in the country, are eating more vegetables and more varied vegetables.

“People embraced vegetables in the Southeast,” says L&M’s Oxford. But she adds, “There’s an interest in locally grown, and there are freight savings.”

Certain public policies, regarding the food

we serve school children, are also doing their part to boost vegetable consumption.

“We’re also definitely getting increased demand from schools,” says GDA’s Kulinski. “Anecdotally people in Georgia are eating more fresh produce.”

### A REGIONAL HUB

While Southern retailers have opportunities to merchandise a wider array of locally grown vegetables, it is largely the national and regional buyers that are behind this drive to diversify the region’s vegetable production.

“Large institutional buyers are trying to pivot away from California in their supply,” says Kulinski. “Most of Georgia’s fresh produce goes up Interstate-95 to most of the East Coast. The vast majority of our fresh produce, around 80 percent, is sold outside of Georgia.”

Transportation time and mileage from the South to the East Coast, traveling up the 2,000-mile Interstate-95 highway that runs from Miami to the Holton-Woodstock border crossing in Maine, or even to much of the Midwest, is far less than from the fields of California.

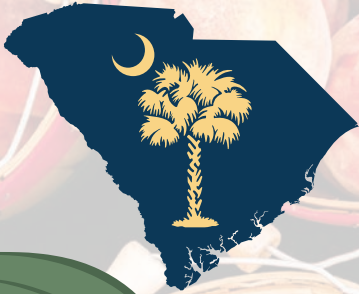
“There are less food miles from grower-shippers to Southeast retail and foodservice distribution centers, so produce is fresh,” says Scott. “Buyers can plan their purchases a day or two in advance and keep inventory close as they purchase locally grown products. I would say more than half of the country purchases fresh produce out of the Southeast, and that is expanding.”

The closer proximity should translate into vegetables that can be merchandised as fresher and, because of reduced transport costs, a little less expensive.

“We have great growing conditions, and the vegetables can be on a Midwest table within 24 to 36 hours of harvest,” says Hall of GFVGA. “We market primarily east of the Mississippi, up in the Midwest and Northeast. About 10 percent of our product goes to Canada. We offer all mixed vegetables — cukes, squash, beans, carrots, eggplant, tomato, bell and specialty peppers, greens, cantaloupes, watermelon, broccoli, and others.”

Some Southern states are able to ship a significant number of different vegetables, each from areas that have their own unique climate.

“Virginia is lucky to have several climatic zones within the state as well as a wide variety of soils and types of topography,” says Elaine Lidholm, director of communications for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in Richmond, VA. “This



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There are shippers, grower associations and state agencies that help retailers merchandise Southern vegetables.

"As a supporter of southern products, Market Fresh offers point-of-sale material to help market items, recipes to use those products in, logos and product photos for advertising, and a market update each week to retailers," says Kaylyn Bender, manager of marketing at Market Fresh Produce in Nixa, MO. "This gives the retailer the necessary tools to assist in the marketing and advertising needs. The Southern agriculture commissions are also extremely active and supportive of buyers and users of their commodities. These commissions have programs to assist in the promotion and advertising of products from the Southern regions."

As the reliance on Southern farms to supply the East and Midwest becomes a more important part of modern, efficient logistics, individual shippers try to offer a more varied line of vegetable crops.

"We offer a full line of Southern fruits and veggies, especially *Georgia Grown*," says Nickey Gregory's Scott. "The most popular products we sell are peaches, blueberries, Vidalia onions, bell peppers, squash, zucchini, green beans, cucumbers, cabbage, eggplant, watermelons and tomatoes. We offer advanced pricing, product forecasting and just-in-time delivery if they run short on ad items. You can call us by noon, and we will deliver the next day to their distribution centers. Buyers can order what they need direct, and then 'lean on the street' for a percentage of their direct buys and eliminate shrink and excess inventory."

Some shippers spent decades developing their regional and national vegetable markets.

"We market our product all over the United States and Canada, from Atlanta to Toronto and Miami to Los Angeles," says Billy Krause, sales manager at V.L. Walker Co. in Florida City, FL. "We have relationships with customers that go back to the early 1950s and '60s. It is vital to us and our growers that we promote vegetables not only locally but nationally. We can never have too many outlets, because the time will come when we

must move product — the more outlets we have the better we can market and keep our product moving."

V.L. Walker grows or ships a variety of vegetables (such as green beans, eggplants, green and yellow squash, cabbage, corn, tomato, bell peppers, cucumbers, pickles, peas, and butter beans) within Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and even upstate New York.

"The mainstays for Southern vegetables are green beans, squash, peppers, cucumbers, corn, cabbage, and eggplant," says Krause. "These are the items our company has been shipping for more than 75 years. We offer the ability to forecast markets and availability with three generations of knowledge."

## THE CONVENIENCE FACTOR

Another sign that Southern vegetables have merged with national trends is the growth of value-added, or packaged vegetable products.

"Retailers seem to be moving toward the bagged items," says Krause. V.L. Walker has been selling its peppers and green beans in bags. "We have seen growth every year and now see many others following suit. We believe these items will only continue to grow as retailers see an increase in sales and a decline in product shrinkage on their side."

Other shippers are also finding increased interest in their convenience packaged vegetable products.

"We started experimenting in value-added from 2008 to 2010," says Ed Sullivan, chief marketing officer at Pero Farms in Delray Beach, FL. "It took us a couple years to position ourselves in the marketplace. We have about 10 really active SKUs, and another 10 that are newer products."

Pero Farms grows or ships a wide variety of conventional and organic vegetables, and ships them in bulk or convenience packaged out of Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, New York and Michigan.

Packaged value-added vegetable products fit with many of the vegetable mega trends — more convenience, greater shelf life, and less danger of contamination.

"Value-added gives convenience; the produce is already cut and washed," says Sullivan. "It also gives you extended shelf life. For the consumer there is less waste, and for the store less shrink. Food safety is also a big issue. If the produce has been decontaminated and put in a bag, that's a tremendous plus."

From his vantage point between West Palm Beach and Boca Raton, Sullivan sees packaged vegetables playing a major role in a greatly expanded produce department of the future.



“The packaged goods trend is so much more manageable and stable, I don’t think the produce industry has much choice but to move in that direction,” says Sullivan. “The produce department in 10 or 20 years is going to be much larger, and it’s going to be full of consumer packaged goods.”

### SOME TRADITIONS LIVE ON

Tastes and vegetable availability may have grown more uniform, but there are still important regional favorites and traditions.

“Everything is available everywhere these days,” says Brian Rayfield, vice president of business development at Loxahatchee, FL-based J&J Produce, which markets produce grown from Florida and four other southern states as well as Arizona, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. “People in the South like vegetables that are traditional, nostalgic, the ones grandmother used to eat. They like crookneck yellow squash, instead of the straight ones. They like pole beans that grow up a trellis even though they are a lot of work. I think okra would be another and peas, black-eyed peas, purple hull peas, and white acre peas.”

Even in the modern world of value-added, packaged vegetables and national supply chains, some of the Southern vegetable traditions are still healthy as ever.

Southern Valley Fruit and Vegetable, Inc, in Norman Park, GA, grows cucumbers, cabbage, squash, zucchini, eggplant, bell, jalapeño and Cubanelle peppers, corn, green beans and hard squash.

The regional favorites continue to rank high, even as vegetable production is geared toward a national market.

“The most important vegetables coming out of Georgia are Vidalia onions, of course, bell peppers, cucumbers, sweet corn, and then your greens, cabbage, collard and turnip greens,” says GDA’s Kulinski.

Even as the South becomes more closely connected with national vegetable trends and markets, some traditional regional favorites grow even more popular.

“Sweet potato sales are increasing,” says Autumn Campbell, sales representative at Matthews Ridgeview Farms in Wynne, AR. “The nutritional value is what sells them. It’s growing. People are using them in more ways, like in French fries or dog treats, because they are so healthy.”

Matthews Ridgeview grows and ships sweet potatoes in 40-pound cases, 3- and 4-pound bags, and individually wrapped microwaveable.

Increased interest in good nutrition is helping this time-honored Southern vegetable.



**“Sweet potato sales are increasing,” says Autumn Campbell, sales representative at Matthews Ridgeview Farms in Wynne, AR. “The nutritional value is what sells them. It’s growing. People are using them in more ways, like in French fries or dog treats, because they are so healthy.”**

“People try them and decide they love the taste,” says Campbell. “Our sales are increasing every year. Continue to educate people on the nutritional value, and on ways to prepare them. They have beta carotene, anti-oxidants, vitamins, minerals and dietary fiber. They’re good for your cardiovascular health.”

Fresh corn is another traditional Southern vegetable that continues to enjoy strong demand.

“The biggest crop that comes out of the South is corn but there are several other vegetables that are in high demand as well,” says Bender of Market Fresh Produce. “Additional items include sweet potatoes, green beans, yellow and zucchini squash, bell peppers, Vidalia onions, eggplant and cucumbers. These vegetables are marketed to the majority of the United States. The South provides a lot of commodities to the U.S. as well as exporting these commodities to various countries.”

Even mainstream favorite, corn, is undergoing change as evidenced by subtle variations in the types of corn in greater demand.

“There has been a shift in corn coming out of the South,” says Bender. “Yellow corn was always a higher demanded item, but now bi-color corn is being sought and demanded more than yellow corn. Another change in vegetables in the South is seed variety. The commodities have remained the same but the varieties have changed over the years.”

Changing and improving plant genetics is helping Southern growers supply a better breed of vegetables.

“With new seed varieties they can enhance the quality, flavor and shelf-life of the products,” says Bender. “Over the years, the biggest change in growing regions is the seed varieties being used each year. The produce industry is ever changing and always trying to improve. To keep up with demand and changes, the quality, flavor profile, and product durability

has to evolve.”

Some vegetables are more in demand because they just taste better when they are sourced closer to the retail outlets.

“Any and all local vegetables are looked forward to,” says J&J Produce’s Rayfield. “Vegetables that might be the most in demand locally are the sweeter ones like tomatoes, sweet corn, watermelons and cantaloupes. By being on the vine longer, they are sweeter. Peppers and cucumbers, however, are not getting sweeter on the plant.”

Consumers have grown fickle about tomatoes, probably more than any other vegetable, and this led to strong demand in the South as elsewhere for sources of fresh, tasty, ripe tomatoes.

“We have about 700 acres in Alabama, and 350 acres in Arkansas, which lets us supply vine ripe tomatoes from around mid-May to the end of October,” says Michael Prather, director of sales and marketing at Flavor Pic in Birmingham, AL. “The retailers want a vine ripe tomato program, and Flavor Pic has always had a strong vine ripe program. We have seen increases in vine ripe tomatoes from our existing customers of three to 5 percent every year.”

Even this vine ripe tomato specialist, however, is looking to diversify into other vegetables.

“We’re diversifying more,” says Prather. “We had some peppers last year, and will do more this year. Our farmers are also growing squash, and more traditional Southern vegetables.”

The increasing popularity of Southern cooking forms a bridge, carrying some of these traditional vegetables to regional and national markets.

“Southern cuisine is a hot trend,” says Augustini from North Carolina’s Department of Agriculture. “We market east of the Mississippi, and up and down the East Coast.” **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA STRAWBERRY COMMISSION

# ORGANIC BERRIES – SUPPLY AND DEMAND GROW SALES

Health benefits keep consumers coming back for more as the category continues to surge.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



**T**here's been a huge buzz over the health benefits of berries. No wonder these sweet nuggets of nutrients collectively rank as the No. 1 category in produce, contributing a whopping 9.4 percent of department sales for the 52-weeks ending February 21, 2016, according to IRI/FreshLook Marketing data as supplied by the Watsonville, CA-based California Strawberry Commission (CSC). Add to this factor the health halo of organics, and it's easy to see why this segment of the category itself represents nearly one-tenth (9.9 percent) of sales, based on 52-week data ending February 27, 2016 by the Nielsen Perishables Group.

"Organic berries continue to demonstrate strong demand among U.S. consumers," says

Frances Dillard, director of marketing for Watsonville, CA-headquartered Driscoll's, which claims to be the category leader for organic berries with more than 50 percent of the market. "Since 2010, household penetration increased by 29 percent (or 4 million) new category buyers. In 2014, more than 14.3 percent of households consumed organic berries of all types. For 2014 sales growth, Nielsen reported a category growth of organics at 14 percent versus 10 percent for conventional."

"We do not currently carry a full variety of organic berries as we are a limited SKU discount format," says Scot Olson, director of produce and floral for the southern division of Grocery Outlet, an Emeryville, CA-based discount retailer with 238 independently owned and operated stores in six states.

“However, it has become very clear that our customers are interested in having us provide an organic berry option at all times if possible. We carried organic strawberries, blueberries and raspberries and have had good sell-through on these items.”

**“It has become very clear that our customers are interested in having us provide an organic berry option at all times if possible.”**

— Scot Olson, Grocery Outlet

## PRODUCTION FORECAST TO GROW

More Millennials coming into the market as household shoppers are driving organic berry growth — generating an upsurge in plantings to keep pace.

“Consumers today expect to be able to get fresh delicious produce anytime, regardless of season, and organic berries are no exception,” says CarrieAnn Arias, senior marketing manager for Dole Fresh Vegetables, headquartered in Monterey, CA. “To meet this demand, there has definitely been an increase in organic berry plantings in most major growing areas during the past few years. We are working on plans to increase production of organic berries throughout the year.”

**STRAWBERRIES.** Organic strawberries

grow in California year-round, but the heaviest production is from April through September.

“California grows more organic strawberries than anywhere else in the world. Organic acreage is about 10 percent of total strawberry acreage this year. Most of the organic acreage is in Santa Maria and the Watsonville/Salinas districts. Proprietary varieties make up more than 50 percent of the organic acreage, followed by Monterey, a University of California variety, and a number of others. New varieties are in continuous development in the industry as breeders work to improve flavor and quality for consumers, and yield and pest resistance for farmers,” says Chris Christian, senior vice president of the Watsonville, CA-based



## ■ PRICING COMES DOWN TO EARTH FOR ORGANIC BERRIES

Price can be a make-or-break factor when it comes to retailers carrying, as well as customers buying, organic berries. That’s because the cost of fruit farmed in this manner — according to federal guidelines addressing factors such as soil quality, pest and weed control and use of additives — is usually higher, sometimes much higher, than its conventionally cultivated counterpart. However, this dynamic is poised to change.

“We can expect organic berries to have higher prices, because of the higher costs associated with growing them,” says Chris Christian, senior vice president of the Watsonville, CA-based California Strawberry Commission (CSC). “Most notable is the fact yields for organic production averages only 50 to 60 percent of conventional yields. According to IRI/Freshlook Marketing data for the year ending February 21, 2016, organic strawberries cost about 40 to 50 percent more per pound in supermarkets compared to conventional.”

Supply is the main factor affecting the price, according to CarrieAnn Arias, senior marketing manager for Dole Fresh Vegetables, headquartered in Monterey, CA. “In other words, due to the limited volume of production, organic berries typically cost

more than conventional berries. Winter is traditionally the most expensive period for organic berries because supply is lowest with early spring and summer being more plentiful and therefore the least expensive time of the year.”

Land is another issue that influences price. “The challenge for us as farmers is sourcing good ground in the right locations to grow organics, or the ability to commit to a three-year transitional period of letting ground go fallow when organic ground is not available,” explains Cindy Jewell, vice president of marketing for California Giant Berry Farms, in Watsonville, CA.

Beyond land, growing organically can be expensive. “Inputs are higher; for example, the cost of the plants themselves, the allowable sprays needed for pest control, and the price of organic fertilizer,” says Gary Wishnatzki, president, chief executive and owner of Wish Farms, based in Plant City, FL.

Consumer research cited by the CSC’s Christian indicates shoppers expect to pay a premium for organic strawberries. The question is often how much extra?

“When a 1-pound clamshell of organic strawberries gets to be more than \$4.99, we typically pull it from our offerings,” says Scot Olson, director of produce and

floral for the southern division of Grocery Outlet, an Emeryville, CA-based discount retailer with 238 independently owned and operated stores in six states. “Other than that, we like the 1-pounder for organic strawberries as it provides customers a shopping experience similar to when they purchase conventional. This helps transition the customer who is on the fence and wants to go for the organic but is uncertain that it is a good enough value to pay more. When consumers get the same amount of product when paying more, that helps bridge the gap between conventional and organic,” he says.

That price gap between organic and conventionally grown berries is poised to narrow in the future. “With the consumer demand for organic berries growing steadily, pricing for organic can be closer to conventional berries as supply increases or surges during the year,” says Dole’s Arias.

Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral at Reading, PA-based Redner’s Markets, says, “There isn’t a lot of price discrepancy anymore between organic and conventional berries, especially in the summer. As a result, we see consumers more willing to try organic this time of year, especially when we have them on promotion.”

pb

California Strawberry Commission (CSC).

Driscoll's announced last summer a broad expansion of organic nursery plant production following seven years of research and a commitment to providing all of its USDA-certified organic growers with organic nursery plants.

"Approximately 10 percent of our organic strawberry production in Watsonville and Salinas today comes from certified organic plants. Driscoll's is the only brand with an organic strawberry nursery certified by the

California Certified Organic Farms (CCOF). The company has an ambitious expansion plan for all of its organic berries," says Dillard.

Florida supplies most of the nation's organic strawberries from December to March.

"About 10 percent of our overall strawberry crop out of Florida is organic," says Gary Wishnatzki, president, chief executive and owner of Wish Farms, based in Plant City, FL. "We continually look for varieties that will grow well in organic systems, such as those with resistance to fungus and stronger

root systems. Of course, flavor and appearance are No. 1."

**BLUEBERRIES, RASPBERRIES & BLACKBERRIES.** "Acreage for growing organic berries is increasing for blueberries, blackberries and raspberries due to meeting the increase in consumer demand," says Dole's Arias.

"We can get organic blueberries, but it seems like never enough to promote," says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral at Redner's Markets, a Reading, PA-based chain with more than 40 Warehouse Markets and 20 Quick Shoppes in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware.

Organic blueberries sold in the U.S. market are grown in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, New Jersey, Michigan, Oregon, Wash-

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**“Biodynamic is a new concept in produce. It’s something we’re letting shoppers know via our labels.”**

— Janice Honigberg, Sun Belle, Inc.

ington, California and the Canadian province of British Columbia from March through September. Imports arrive in the fall and winter from Peru, Argentina, Chile and Mexico.

Peru grows a lot of conventional blueberries, and we might see an expansion in organic acreage,” says Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms, headquartered in Estero, FL. “Peruvian organic blueberries, like those coming out of Argentina, require cold treatment before they can enter the U.S. market.”

Sun Belle, Inc. headquartered in Schiller Park, IL, has a strong organic blueberry program in Chile, says company founder and president, Janice Honigberg. “Almost 10 percent of our blueberries out of Chile and 5 percent of our blueberries overall are biodynamic. This is a holistic farming method that is more stringent than organic. Biodynamic is a new concept in produce. It’s something we’re letting shoppers know via our labels,” says Honigberg.

Mexico is another area growers are looking at to cultivate organic blueberries.

“Expansion in this region adds availability in the winter supplementing the South American market. This new market provides great opportunities to decrease transportation time from growing regions to market. At this time, we are focused on conventional, and once we are stable in this new region we can expand into organics,” says California Giant’s Jewell.

Organic raspberries sold in the U.S. are primarily grown in California and Mexico, while blackberries come from California, Georgia, North Carolina and Mexico.

“We are looking at growing organic raspberries and blackberries in Baja California and Central Mexico. The goal is to provide a year-round supply of all organic berries,” says Sun Belle’s Honigberg.

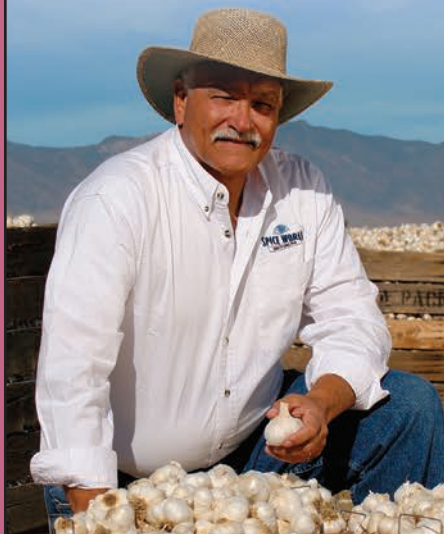
Last year, Naturipe harvested its first crop of organic blackberries in Florida and Georgia during a seven-week window that spanned from early May to July. The company plans to do the same in 2016.



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**“Overall sales tend to be higher when organics are integrated in a display next to conventional. This is because there is a large group of consumers (more than 50 percent) that will buy organics based on economy.”**

— Jim Roberts, Naturipe Farms

#### POSITION TO SELL

“Retail marketing and merchandising is one of the most effective ways we’ve seen demand driven for organic berries. That is, more retailers are carrying organic berries more often and they are merchandising the organics next to the

conventional so consumers know this option is available,” says Wish Farm’s Wishnatzki.

There are two schools of thought as to how organic berries are best displayed at retail.

“Overall sales tend to be higher when organics are integrated in a display next to

conventional. This is because there is a large group of consumers (more than 50 percent) that will buy organics based on economy. When the products are side by side, it’s easier for these customers to compare. Within the set, some retailers like to put all organic berries on one side and conventional on the others. Others like to put the organic and conventional strawberries together and similarly with the blueberries and raspberries for an attractive ribboning effect,” says Naturipe’s Roberts.

Customers shopping for organic will often specifically look for these items in a dedicated “organic” display within the produce section.

“I personally like organic berries in an

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organic section,” says Jim Grabowski, director of marketing for Well-Pict Inc., headquartered in Watsonville, CA. “This is where the true

organic shopper shops.”

Grocery Outlet offers its organic berries in such a dedicated display. “Our stores have

a 4-foot refrigerated section specifically for organics. Here, there are usually 40 to 60 SKUs in organic, including berries,” he says.

Integrated or segregated, grower/shippers agree the best way to sell more organic berries is in refrigerated and eye-appealing displays.

“Berries typically sell well, especially when in season; however, they are not necessarily considered a staple item on produce shopping lists like the old standbys of apples, oranges and bananas,” says Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing for Albert’s Organics, based in Swedesboro, NJ. “Berries must typically rely on impulse, which means where they are located in the retail environment and how well they look play a very large role in how they will sell.” **pb**



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# Short Cherry Season Is Long On Profits



Use these tips to increase sales and store profits during the short season.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

**L**ike little red and yellow beacons, cherries draw consumers to the produce department like few other items. Although they're only available for a few months, no retailer should ignore the opportunity cherries present.

"Cherries are the No. 1 dollar-per-square-foot item in July," says B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers, a marketing organization based in Yakima, WA. "As a result, sweet cherries must be merchandised as an item of importance."

"It's critically important retailers jump on

the opportunity and maximize it while they have the window," says Steven Lutz, vice president of marketing for CMI, the Wenatchee, WA-based marketing entity for four family-owned grower/packer operations. "It closes relatively quickly and then you have to wait another year."

There are several things produce executives can do to increase cherry sales during peak season, including procuring cherries that are high in quality and large in size; increasing the size and number of displays; and selling cherries in various package sizes. But one of the most important things retailers must do is get their staff motivated to move a high volume of cherries during the short time they're available.

"What we're trying to do is make our people realize how important it is to get consumers buying often," says Jeff Fairchild, produce director for New Seasons Market, which is based in Portland, OR with 19 locations.

"It's a real short season so you just try to

move as many as you can," says Tom Brendel, category manager for produce at Schnucks, which is headquartered in St. Louis and has nearly 100 stores in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Iowa.

## BASIC CHERRY INFORMATION

Data from the United States Department of Agriculture shows Washington significantly leads all other states in sweet cherry production. Washington growers produced 252,000 tons of cherries in 2014. Its closest competitor was Oregon at 53,700 tons, followed by California with 40,000 tons. (Michigan dominates the tart cherry market, with 203 million pounds produced in 2014.)

The summer of 2015 was unusually hot and dry in the Northwest, which led to record cherry shipments in June and July. In 2016 the season should be much more normal. "The Northwest has seen an extremely cold winter resulting in a much-needed replenishment



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**“Industry suppliers have invested heavily in optical sizing equipment that can sort cherries by size, color and firmness in a quick and efficient manner.”**

— B.J. Thurlby, Northwest Cherry Growers

of snow and water in the various mountain ranges surrounding the Northwest cherry growing regions,” says Thurlby. “Based on the heavy snow pack and much cooler winter of 2015-16, growers are reporting there has been an abundant amount of chilling hours in the orchards. Likewise, the cooler winter and spring has many growers thinking that the earliest cherries in 2016 will be harvested close to June 1.”

Sweet cherries are typically available in June, July and August. There are two types: yellow and red. The vast majority of yellow cherries are Rainiers. They ripen near the middle of cherry season, although some growers are trying to get a jump on their competitors by offering earlier varieties. Chelan Fresh in Chelan, WA, which handles sales and marketing duties for Gebbers



Farms and Chelan Fruit Cooperative, offers two options: Early Robin and a proprietary variety called Orondo Ruby. “It’s like eating a Rainier cherry and Bing cherry at the same time,” says Mac Riggan, the company’s director of marketing. “It’s a very sweet cherry that also has a very high acid content.”

There are several red cherry varieties that come on at different points throughout the season. Andy Tudor is the director of business development for Rainier Fruit, based in Selah, WA, which works with eight family-owned grower-packers in Oregon and Washington.

“The season starts in the warmest part of the state, the southeast corner, and goes up through the Yakima Valley,” he says. “All the cherries mature at different times, so it extends your season.”

Chelan are the first ones to ripen, followed by varieties that include Tieton, Bing, Lambert, Skeena and Sweetheart. A few early red cherries are coming to the market as well. For example, The Flavor Tree Fruit Company sells the Sequoia cherry, an early variety from the state that sends the first cherries to market.

#### **QUALITY CONTROL, PACKAGING INNOVATIONS**

The quality of cherries making their way to market is higher than they’ve ever been. “Over the past 24 months the Northwest cherry industry has been transformed by major technological advances at the packing and shipping level,” says Thurlby. “Industry suppliers have invested heavily in optical sizing equipment that can sort cherries by size, color and firmness in a quick and efficient manner. This allows retail and import customers to request packs by specific size of cherry and specific color of cherry. Likewise, the new technology does an amazing job of reducing fruit with blemishes from the final pack that reaches the consumer.”

Retailers have probably noticed that cherry packaging has changed in recent years. “It’s gradually shifted away from the old catch weight poly bag to a catch weight pouch bag,” says Lutz with CMI. “You can print better graphics on them.”

These graphics can be beneficial, but Rainier’s Tudor says there’s an advantage to keeping them to a minimum. “We try to put very few

#### **CHILEAN CHERRIES INTRODUCE A SECOND SEASON**

Cherries imported from Chile have created a second season for cherries: the beginning of winter.

“We have a short window between mid-December and late January,” says Karen Brux, managing director, North America, at the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), a marketing and promotional program for Chilean fresh fruit based in San Carlos, CA. December and January are the South American country’s summer, and ripe cherries (primarily Bings) are abundant.

More than 800,000 tons of Chilean fruit is exported to North America each year. 5,610 tons of that is cherries. “Chilean cherries have been exported to the U.S. market for more than 20 years, but the volume to the U.S. has been decreasing over the past several years due to the

emergence of a strong market in China,” says Brux. “During the 2015-16 season, 87 percent of Chilean cherry exports went to China.”

Given the timing of Chilean cherries, there are many opportunities for produce managers to include them in holiday promotions, reports Brux. “Retailers can build a holiday display, incorporate cherries in holiday party ideas and encourage their customers to have a ‘Very Cherry New Year.’ Our POS cards have messages like ‘Sweet Cherries: One Resolution That’s Easy to Keep’ and ‘Warm Up Winter With Summertime Sweetness.’ Cherries are also a popular Chinese New Year item, so depending on when Chinese New Year falls, there are also opportunities to work with retailers in high Asian population areas on special festive packaging.” **pb**

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**“We try to put very few graphics on the lower part of the bag because people want to see the fruit.”**

— Andy Tudor, Rainier Fruit

graphics on the lower part of the bag because people want to see the fruit,” he says. “That way it sells itself.”

“Now that they’ve gone to the pouch bag, you look at the ring per bag and it’s the best ring you can get in produce,” says Edward Osowski, director of produce for Martin’s Supermarkets, a family-owned chain based in South Bend, IN, with stores in northern Indiana and southern Michigan.

For organic cherries, he tends to favor clamshells, another popular choice for packaging cherries. “The price per unit is a little lower because it’s not a great big bag,” he says.



“The catch weight bags are where the volume is, but we try to do some bulk cherries to get people’s attention,” says Fairchild with New Seasons Market.

#### **UNDERSTANDING CHERRY CONSUMERS**

“There are more than 77 million sweet cherry buyers in the U.S.,” says Thurlby. “More than 13 million are late-season (after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday) cherry shoppers. As a result, there is great opportunity to expand cherry sales in July and August.”

Size matters to cherry consumers. “The bigger the size of the cherries, the more we seem to sell,” says Brendel with Schnucks.

Quality is also important to people who buy cherries. “Consumers who buy cherries throughout the summer tend to search the market for the highest quality cherries,” says Thurlby. “Cherry consumers seek fruit that is fresh and healthy and tend to spend more dollars across the store than shoppers seeking only value.”

Osowski of Martin’s agrees. “What we’ve found is the premium cherries are the ones consumers want,” he says. “My theory on cherries is you start out with the best and largest cherries you can buy and you run your entire program based on that.”

Cherry consumers span all household sizes, and it’s important to sell cherries in volumes that appeal to all of them. “We often miss cherry customers because we force them to buy 2 or 2 1/4 pounds and they’re just not going to buy that,” says Riggan with Chelan Fresh. “We’re excited to hit that new customer with a smaller package. That’s a great way to entice a new customer to the category, or sell to a customer who likes cherries but doesn’t want to buy a full bag.”



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**“We’re excited to hit that new customer with a smaller package. That’s a great way to entice a new customer to the category, or sell to a customer who likes cherries but doesn’t want to buy a full bag.”**

— Mac Riggan, Chelan Fresh

“One out of every two cherries sold is purchased on impulse,” says Thurlby. During the short time they’re available, it’s vital to let consumers know they’re in the store by making

them highly visible.

**DISPLAYS: LARGE, UPFRONT**

“Big, bold and out front.” That’s how Fair-

child of New Seasons Market sums up his advice for selling cherries. “They should be standing alone, front and center. Try not to have cherries get lost in mixed displays, and have them standing right up front.”

“Cherries are large enough to command a full table during peak season,” says Lutz with CMI. “The mistakes we see are often related to retailers not allocating sufficient space. Displays should be full and in a premium position to

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**“Cherries drive the produce customer, so we use cherries more as a draw than trying to make a lot of money on them.”**

— Edward Osowski, Martin's Supermarkets

take advantage of impulse buys. Consumers have to know the product is back.”

If you're going to display cherries with anything, Brendel recommends putting them next to other stone fruits such as peaches, nectarines and apricots.

“When cherries are priced fairly high, like above \$2.99 a pound, sales will be lower, so you'll want to display them in a refrigerated section,” says Riggan. If you're turning the cherries over two or three times a day, it's okay to keep them out of the refrigerator case. They'll stay fresh for four to five hours on an uncooled display. (Stores in very hot climates



may want to refrigerate them more quickly.)

Because the cherry season is so short, and cherries are such an impulse product, it's wise

to look for secondary display opportunities. “[Research shows] secondary displays of sweet cherries can increase category sales by 14 percent and dollar volume sales by more than 22 percent,” says Thurlby.

Northwest Cherry Growers and Rainier Fruit are among the companies that offer free-standing cardboard display boxes. Thurlby says he was impressed by one creative retailer that set up secondary banana rack displays near the checkout aisles of their stores.

“Cherries sell better when we carry both kinds,” says Brendel, even though “the reds definitely outsell the Rainiers.”

### CROSS-MERCHANDISING AND OTHER TIPS

Retailers looking to boost cherry sales even more can try several tricks for increasing sales. Karen Brux, managing director, North America, at the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), recommends cross merchandising them with gourmet cheeses, chocolate (“Who doesn't like chocolate-dipped cherries?”) and champagne.

Riggan recommends cross merchandising with cherry pitters, yogurt, whipped topping and pie crust. “We make cherry pies out here with the sweet cherries and they're delicious,” he says. “The old standard is you use pie cherries and put a bunch of sugar in. If you make them with sweet cherries you don't put nearly as much sugar in.”

Organizations such as Northwest Cherry Growers and the Chilean Fresh Fruit Associa-

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tion make recipes and other resources available to retailers. “The Northwest Cherry Growers continues to work with key retailers across the U.S. and Canada to develop unique campaigns that focus on the health benefits and seasonality of Northwest cherries,” says Thurlby.

“Overall, domestic retailers continue to believe sampling promotions are a viable tactic for increasing demand for cherries,” he continues. “Depending on the region and market, some retailers prefer multi-variety fruit fairs, POS support and display contests. We continue to work with the retail trade to design campaigns that match with the various retailers’ specific vision.”

“We work very closely with retail social media staff and retail dietitians, providing nutrition information, holiday-specific usage ideas and photography,” says Brux. “We have POS that we make available to retailers, but we are also very happy to work with retailers on custom materials. We support retailers with in-store demos and sales contests.”

Brendel believes advertising cherries at the beginning of the season can have an impact. “If they’re in the ad that really launches them



According to Mac Riggan of Chelan Fresh, if cherries are priced high, then retailers have the option to place smaller displays outside of refrigeration, as long as the cherries are turned over two to three times a day.

well,” he says.

Lutz with CMI notes many stores try to increase sales by offering price discounts.

However, “Cherries are such a powerful stand-alone item, I don’t know that it’s really necessary,” he says.

Osowski has a slightly different perspective. “Cherries drive the produce customer, so we use cherries more as a draw than trying to make a lot of money on them,” he says. “We can move tremendous volumes of cherries that way. And the consumer keeps coming back, so we get repeat business.”

One new thing Martin’s Osowski is trying this year is placing dried cherries in the same displays as fresh cherries. Tapping into consumers’ growing interest in preserving food can be a good way to increase sales.

“Remind customers cherries can be consumed throughout the year if they are willing to rinse, pack and freeze cherries,” says Thurlby. “Spur late season sales with store-level canning, drying and freezing information.”

In addition, he says, “Full season cherry shoppers respond to the store-level message of ‘Last chance to buy Northwest Cherries this season.’ In July, provide store-level messaging that conveys a sense of urgency — letting shoppers know the countdown on availability.” **pb**



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# Mango Merchandising: 5 Challenges And 5 Solutions



PHOTO COURTESY OF COAST TROPICALS

Mangos see positive 4-year growth of 8 percent with further sales hikes projected for the coming years.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**A**lthough they are among the most popular fruits in the world, mangos don't even rank among the top 10 fruits in U.S. dollar sales or pounds, according to the 2015 *Fresh Produce Review*, a report by Bakersfield, CA-headquartered Gruszka Consulting, using Information Resources Inc. and FreshLook Marketing data for the 52-weeks ending December 27, 2015.

Dollar sales of fresh mangos in U.S. retailers nationwide represented only 0.4 percent of total produce sales during the year ending February 27, 2016, based on data supplied by Nielsen's Perishable Group. This figure fluctuated from a low of 0.3 percent in Q1 and Q4 to a high of 0.7 percent in Q2 of 2015. However, fresh mangos could become top register ringers in U.S. supermarkets.

"Mangos are still gaining familiarity in the U.S.," says Jose Rossignoli, category general manager for Robinson Fresh, based in Eden Prairie, MN. However, from a tropical portfolio perspective, mangos represent 9 percent of total tropical retail sales, and the trend has been very positive with a 4-year CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 8 percent, according to IRI FreshLook data.

Taste, health attributes and culinary versatility are a few of the drivers of consumer demand and retail sales.

"Mangos are a growing category for us, and getting to the level of mainstream with our customers," says Scot Olson, director of produce and floral for the southern division of Grocery Outlet, an Emeryville, CA-based discount retailer with more than 200 independently owned and operated stores in six states. "There are so many ways to use mangos, such as in fruit salsas. I think because they are versatile, mangos pique the interest of customers looking to expand their usage.

"After all, mangos can be used in dishes at all meals: breakfast, lunch or dinner. You see them on cooking shows, and so the understanding of how to utilize them is growing, which increases consumer demand. At the same time, I think we just scratched the surface

with the potential of this fruit," he says.

To grow mango sales, retailers need to match the most common merchandising challenges with successful selling solutions. These hurdles — not knowing how to buy, how to choose ripe fruit, where to find in-store, how to cut or use, and potential sticker shock — are most prevalent among a shopper demographic that isn't familiar with the fruit.

"As second and third generations of immigrants enter the market with more purchasing power than their parents and grandparents, the fruit gains penetration," says Andres Ocampo, director of operations at HLB Specialties, in Pompano Beach, FL. "In parallel, Americans are also being exposed more to the fruit and learning of its attributes and getting used to buying it regularly. Demographic changes are helping the growth of the fruit."

## CHALLENGE 1: A MANGO ISN'T JUST A MANGO

### SOLUTION: OFFER MORE THAN ONE VARIETY

There's no longer just one variety of apple, or tomato, or potato sold at retail. Likewise, there is more than one variety of mango. The six most common varieties sold in the U.S. are the Tommy Atkins, Haden, Kent, Keitt,





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Ataulfo and Francis, according to the National Mango Board (NMB). The majority of these are imported from Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, Guatemala and Haiti to provide year-round supply.

“I am not sure the average consumer is as in tune with asking for specific varieties,” says Grocery Outlet’s Olson.

Varieties, though, are one of the most exciting aspects of mangos. “Each variety not only has its own characteristics, but also has a unique growing window. For example, the Haden variety is early in the season. Tommy Atkins come next with great yields, strong color, and firmness. Late into the season, Kent and Keitt varieties are grown that perhaps have less color but a superb taste and eating profile. Being adaptable to the crop conditions and having a merchandising program that promotes the available fruit at different points of the season will allow a retailer to promote the most adequate size at different stages of the season,” explains Robinson Fresh’s Rossignoli.

Many retailers, according to the NMB, will offer two SKUs when possible: a “round” (Tommy, Kent, Keitt) and a “yellow” (Ataulfo or Francis) mango variety.

“Some shoppers want to know the mangos they’re buying by variety,” says Isabel Freeland, vice president of Coast Tropical, in San Diego. “In that case, we work with the retailer to put varietal names on the stickers. For example, we do this for Publix.”

The number of mango varieties available to retailers is on the rise. For example, Melissa’s/World Variety Produce in Los Angeles is on its seventh season importing Alfonso and Kesar mango varieties from India during the fruit’s mid-April to early-June season. Last November, the company brought in its first full shipment of three Australian mango varieties: orange with red blush Kensington Pride, lemon-colored flesh R2E2, and the apricot-yellow Honey Gold. The fruit was available through February. More than adding volume to the market, these mangos introduced new flavors to the U.S. market, according to Robert Schueller, director of public relations.

#### CHALLENGE 2: SKIN COLOR DOESN'T SIGNAL RIPENESS

##### SOLUTION: OFFER RIPE FRUIT

“We have greater success with the mango varieties that provide more color such as Tommy Atkins and Haden’s than those that are green-skinned,” says Grocery Outlet’s Olson.

Red-skinned mangos represent 80 percent of the market share and continue to see double-digit growth with an 11 percent year-over-



PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRULI BROTHERS

year growth from 2014 to 2015, according to IRI data as supplied by Robinson Fresh.

“Even though skin color isn’t a sign of ripeness in mangos, consumers shop and eat with their eyes. That’s a challenge. There are some great-tasting green-skinned varieties that shoppers are passing by,” says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for Hackensack, NJ-based Vision Import Group.

Only 44.7 percent of mango consumers felt comfortable selecting a mango at retail, according to the 2013-published report, *Tropical Produce: Consumer Insight Panel*, by C.H. Robinson.

There are three ways to solve this problem. First, teach shoppers how to select ripe fruit.

“This year we will be partnering with the National Mango Board to help provide point-of-sale material on how to pick and utilize mangos. We found mangos are like bananas and avocados; having a mix of ripeness stages helps increase purchases as some customers are looking for that immediate usage while others are shopping for the week and won’t need to utilize for several days ahead,” says Grocery Outlet’s Olson.

Teach produce employees too. “Staff needs to know mangos are ripe, when they are soft, and color is not always the best cue, because not all varieties change color,” explains Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers, LLC, in Nogales, AZ. “Staff should also be able to inform customers that mangos must not be placed in the refrigerator, but they should be left at room temperature, lest they risk damaging the fruit and offsetting the flavor.”

Second, retailers can take the guesswork out by offering ripe fruit. “You can’t put stone hard mangos out and expect customers to buy,” says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner’s Markets, a Reading, PA-based chain with more than 40 Warehouse

**In the next three to four years, “retailers will be requesting conditioned mangos — we’re definitely headed in that direction.”**

— Tom Hall, Freska Produce

Markets and 20 Quick Shoppes in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware. “They have to be conditioned.”

Vision Import’s Cohen likens the mango industry today to where avocados were a decade ago in terms of ripening programs. “Growers tend to pick fruit before it’s fully ripe in order to hold up through the hot water treatment required as a phytosanitary measure before mangos can be imported to the U.S. As a result, we have to help the fruit along by giving it a little temperature to bring on the flavors and sugars. All varieties can be conditioned this way. However, certain varieties, those with less fiber such as Keitt, Kent, Ataulfo and Haden condition better than a Tommy Adkins that has more fiber,” says Cohen.

In the next three to four years, “retailers will be requesting conditioned mangos — we’re definitely headed in that direction,” says Tom Hall, sales manager at Freska Produce, in Oxnard, CA.

Third, it’s possible to offer a tree-ripe mango program. This fruit comes from a fruit fly free area in Sonora, Mexico, near the U.S. border. Mangos grown here do not need to undergo hot water treatment and can stay on the tree longer to ripen.

“Tree-ripe is a big trend,” says Melissa’s/World Variety Produce’s Schueller. “This is our



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third season to offer tree-ripe mangos. Varieties include Haden, Kent, Keitt. Availability is May through late August or early September.”

**CHALLENGE 3: MANGOS CAN BE ‘LOST’ IN SMALL BACK-OF-THE-DEPARTMENT DISPLAYS**

**SOLUTION: PLACE MANGOS FRONT-AND-CENTER AND IN UNIQUE LOCATIONS**

Big displays of mangos are the norm at Redner’s Markets. “Mangos are a staple for us,” says Stiles. “Customers come in looking for them, and we want to ensure they can find them easily by building big displays up front.”

Price figures into the display strategy at discount retailer, Grocery Outlet. “When we get into promotable quantity and price points, we go bigger by displaying on slant racks and field bins. We have done mango display contests in the past and plan to go even bigger this year with growing interest and results from promoting this delicious and versatile fruit. However, when mangos are priced high, and aren’t a higher color variety, we tend to display in one tray with other tropical items such as papayas, pineapples, guavas, coconuts and kiwi fruit,” says Olson.

Research by the NMB, which was conducted during a six-week period in July and August 2015 at Schnucks (a St. Louis-based retailer with about 100 stores), reveals it may be profitable to take mangos out of the tropical section. In fact, results of the *Impact of Display Location on the Mango Category* study, published in January 2016, shows there was a 45 percent increase in volume and dollar sales when mangos were displayed next to stone fruit.

“We propose that the positive impact comes from positioning mango as a mainstream fruit,” says Rachel Muñoz, the NMB’s director of marketing. “When the shopper comes to the store with the intention of purchasing fruit, and mangos are displayed alongside the seasonal fruit, the shopper sees mangos as a great option. This is a shift from thinking about mangos as tropical, exotic and special. The retailer response to this study has been really exciting. This summer, I expect to see lots of retail displays with stone fruit and mangos side by side.”

**CHALLENGE 4: CONSUMERS DON’T KNOW HOW TO CUT AND USE MANGOS**

**SOLUTION: TEACH THEM VIA POS**

“One of the biggest detractors is some shoppers don’t know how to enjoy a mango. Cooking shows on TV are helping as are efforts



PHOTO COURTESY OF REDNER’S MARKETS

by the National Mango Board. While I do like a ‘clean store’ look, POS has value when used properly to educate consumers and drive consumption,” says Grocery Outlet’s Olson.

“I like to use it [POS] incorporated into a bin display full of fruit. Bin photos that show usages, like mangos cut up with yogurt and granola, are a great connector too,” he says.

The NMB offers different types of POS materials for retailers to use in educating their customers. This includes cutting and selection, nutrition and recipe information on banners, balloons, buttons, posters, header cards and recipe tear pads, as well as materials for its annual Mango Mania Display Contest.

“Combining demos and big displays with POS material that can be easily accessed by consumers can make inroads to teaching the consumers how to eat the fruit. However, more investment on the actual sticker attached to each fruit can be the most effective way to give the consumer education through something they will take home. Space is limited but certainly can be utilized in creative ways to teach and engage the consumer,” says HLB’s Ocampo.

**CHALLENGE 5: SOME CUSTOMERS THINK MANGOS ARE TOO EXPENSIVE**

**SOLUTION: PLAN YOUR PROMOTIONS ACCORDING TO PRICING AND MORE**

“Mangos are a great item to promote when there’s great quality, volume and pricing. We go crazy with 10/\$10 ads,” says Redner’s Stiles.

The summer period from May through July, when the crop is coming out of Mexico, is one of the best times to promote.

Price promotion is most popular. “Use multiples in retails like 2/\$3 rather than \$1.50 each,” recommends Danny Pollak, vice president of sales at CarbAmericas, in Pompano Beach, FL. “When on ad, be sure to create a secondary display space or place mangos on the endcap for the duration of the ad.”

**“I like to use it [POS] incorporated into a bin display full of fruit. Bin photos that show usages, like mangos cut up with yogurt and granola, are a great connector too.”**

— Scot Olson, Grocery Outlet

In the winter, when shoppers appreciate an upbeat theme, mangos can provide a spark, says HLB’s Ocampo. “Even if prices can’t be at their lowest, it might be the best opportunity for mangos to shine, because there are fewer items in the produce department than in the summer when locally grown fruits are in season.”

Price combined with theme promotions can be exponentially effective. A good example is Coast Tropical’s partnering with its retail customers in store-wide events.

“We have many different methods of maximizing sales for our retail partners,” says John Goodwin, in sales at Coast Tropical. “For example, one is partnering with the other departments and taste sampling a variety of foods that most would not even think of like mango layer cake from the bakery, mango jicama salad with peanut lime dressing from the deli, and mango tamales in the meat department.

“We also have characters in dress which gets the children excited. There are games, impressive displays in size and creativity, and live remote broadcasts by radio stations. All of this comes together to greatly increase sales by exciting and drawing in new customers. A nearly 600 percent increase in mango sales and volume because of events such as this speaks for itself,” says Goodwin.

**pb**

# Micro-Management



Skuna Bay salmon topped with micro parsley at Leonora restaurant in Vail, CO.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SEBASTIAN

Expanding selection of microgreens give chefs fresh flavor and plating tools.

BY JOHN LEHNDORFF

**M**icrogreens and edible flowers are far from a “new” produce item. The baby seedlings and blooms have been consumed in one form or another since humans first farmed. They did not become a “thing” until upscale California restaurants started using them in the 1980s.

To the outside world, the itty bitty herbs and greens that are tweezed onto dinner plates as “vegetable confetti” seemed a little precious. However, chefs understood these brightly colored, subtly flavored, fresh produce items augmented the arsenal of ingredients at their disposal. And that was before anyone looked seriously into microgreens’ nutritional resume.

Now the category is a related array of crops including “petites” (which are bigger microgreens), shoots (or tendrils), micro vegetables and edible flowers. Some are delivered to retail and foodservice ready to use and others arrive ready to be “harvested” as needed.

Microgreens are not sprouts. The latter are germinated in water in low light long enough to grow roots, a stem and pale leaves — a process that has made sprouts susceptible to health safety issues in the past. Microgreens are planted in a sterile-growing, medium soil in sun (or under lights) until they have their first set of leaves.

A culinary trend, microgreens and their relatives are likely to influence diners’ produce shopping habits in the future. In a recent National Restaurant Association (NRA) survey, 51 percent of chefs predicted micro vegetables/microgreens will be a “hot trend” at eateries in 2016. Fully 63 percent of the chefs also indicated that uncommon herbs (such as lovage and chervil) would make an impact.

Since they are ready-to-eat and cooking optional, tiny greens are finding a home in foodservice atop hot, artisan Neapolitan piz-

zas, on grilled fish tacos, and a range of dishes from tomato soup (topped with micro basil) to a roasted walnut tart (with micro chocolate mint).

## SMALL BEGINNINGS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

When David Sasuga opened Fresh Origins 21 years ago, few people knew what “microgreens” were except some chefs. “When we started out we had maybe five varieties, and now we have more than 100,” says Sasuga, owner of the San Marcos, CA-based company, one of the largest suppliers of microgreens and edible flowers in North America.

The tiny crops require a lot of infrastructure in the company’s nearly 1 million-square-foot facility.

“Microgreens are such a fast crop. Most grow in five to seven days. The challenge is to prevent them from becoming ‘leggy’ with long flavorless stems,” says Sasuga. Microgreens must be packaged and shipped quickly with environmental controls from farm to restaurant.

“Much of the growth in the category has come from upscale restaurant chains that are

## foodservice profile ► microgreens

more casual,” he says. Fresh Origins microgreens and flowers are served at The Capital Grille, Roy’s, Nobu, and at Darden restaurants such as Seasons 52.

### THE RIGHT MICROGREEN FOR THE RIGHT JOB

Rosa Provoste, executive chef at Leonora in The Sebastian hotel in Vail, CO, has mixed microgreens emotions. “Microgreens and edible flowers are expensive and easy to ruin. They are very sensitive to changes in temperature, light and humidity, but I love them for the flavor and color they add to a dish,” she says.

“I only like certain ones. Not every micro green goes with everything. I use micro cilantro in ceviches and tacos. I don’t use them in the Spanish dishes, because they are too strong,” she says. Leonora’s Skuna Bay salmon comes with lentil ragout, Spanish Blue Cheese, Cipolini onions and micro parsley.

Leonora’s tapas range from steamed mussels with speck, fennel and tomato-saffron broth to a potato omelet with caramelized onions and saffron aioli. “I take micro radish and toss it with chopped parsley and sprinkle it on all the tapas when they go out,” she says.

Provoste also uses micro thyme on chicken and mushroom dishes and her fall-apart braised short ribs are complemented by chipotle salsa, pickled red onions and micro cilantro.

Irvine, CA-based Urban Produce started shipping certified organic produce in 2015 from its facility built around a patented high-density vertical growing unit inside a warehouse, according to Danielle Horton, director of marketing and food safety.

Grown indoors in a 5,600-square-foot, 25-foot-tall space, plants move from seeding in the “substrate” through a serpentine conveyor belt, various light tunnels, and watering stations until harvesting and shipping.

Each micro green from arugula to sunflower is grown separately and then added to various mixes such as Urban Produce’s organic Hot Mama Blend, Wasabi-Bok Choy Blend (popular with sushi bars), and Kale-fornia Blend used at juice bars, which also order harvested wheatgrass packed in clamshells. “One clamshell equals about 1 ounce of wheatgrass juice,” says Horton.

Urban Produce varieties are distributed to supermarkets in California, Arizona and Nevada, and to foodservice operations. “Most of the restaurants are white tablecloth places, but some blends go to large foodservice caterers,” she says. Horton noted Indian restaurants like using micro sorrel and bars muddling cilantro microgreens in beverages like the “Man

**“I take micro radish and toss it with chopped parsley and sprinkle it on all the tapas.”**

— Rosa Provoste, Leonora

Mosa,” a blend of beer and orange juice with a cilantro garnish.

“We can work with a chef to create a blend grown for them and put their name on the label,” she says.

### LITTLE GREENS, BIG NUTRITIONAL IMPACT

Microgreens’ growing reputation as a nutritional powerhouse have made some varieties a common ingredient in demand at health-focused cafes and juice bars, along with retailers such as Whole Foods Market.

A USDA Agricultural Research Service report published in 2014 noted that among 25 varieties of microgreens tested, “red cabbage, cilantro, garnet amaranth, and green daikon radish had the highest concentrations of vitamin C, carotenoids, vitamin K, and vitamin E, respectively. In general, microgreens contained considerably higher levels of vitamins and carotenoids — about five times greater

than their mature plant counterparts — an indication that microgreens may be worth the trouble of delivering them fresh during their short lives.”

However, as the USDA report noted, the growing, harvesting, shipping and storage of microgreens can have a considerable effect on their nutrient content.

While sprouts are naturally the main event at Rochester, MA-based Jonathan’s Sprouts, shoots are emerging fast. “The No. 1 seller is pea shoots, followed by sunflower shoots,” says Liz Reilley, vice president of sales and marketing.

An advantage to pea shoots is they are one of the most hardy and least perishable microgreen, and they can last two weeks or more with refrigeration. “Shoots are really popular, because you can cook with them and won’t wilt. One chef recently cooked with wilted pea shoots instead of spinach as a bed underneath broiled halibut,” says Reilley.

### ‘NOTHING IS JUST A GARNISH’

At Chicago’s award-winning Blackbird restaurant, microgreens and edible flowers are often used, but never indiscriminately.

“It’s common to see microgreens just kind of thrown on the plate. Here, if it doesn’t have a purpose, then it doesn’t go on the plate. Nothing is just a garnish. When we use microgreens



Ceviche Mixto at Leonora.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SEBASTIAN

we don't mess with them and add a lot of seasonings," says Blackbird chef Ryan Pfeiffer.

The eatery's foie gras dish avoids the almost inevitable sweet fruit or sauce accompaniment. "We use microgreens like anise hyssop, lemon balm and others to suggest sweetness. It's a cleaner, less heavy approach," he says.

Edible flowers also play a strong role on Blackbird's menu. "We use a lot of actually edible flowers like chive blossoms. They add depth to the flavor. We grow a lot of our own, use local farms, and order through distributors," says Pfeiffer.

Camilo Peñalosa, vice president for business development at Miami-based Infinite Herbs, differentiates between types of edible flowers. "Most are not eaten and are primarily used as a garnish. Other ones, like lavender blossoms, are put on tables at weddings because they smell nice," he says.

Most of the microgreens and edible flowers served at the signature The Med restaurant overlooking the Pacific coast at the La Valencia hotel in La Jolla, CA, are sourced from Fresh Origins, says executive chef James Montejano.

"We mix varieties and use some on almost every dish at the restaurant. I serve grilled fish

## MICROGIRL TO THE RESCUE

BY JOHN LEHNDORFF

On the opposite end of the volume scale is MicroGirl Organics in Dubuque, IA, owned and operated by its employee, Laura Klavitter.

"It started with a conversation with a chef in town about farming. I come from a community gardening background. He said that if I could grow microgreens he would buy them," says Klavitter.

A whole lot of research later, she was raising organic microgreens under lights in her basement in downtown Dubuque.

"Microgreens are cool, because it's one week from planting to harvest. It's easy to try new ones. To me there's nothing better than when a chef geeks-out over my microgreens and finds ways to use them," she says.

Klavitter plants about a dozen varieties at a time including kales, pea tendrils, arugula and basil. The plants in their sterile growing medium are delivered to the restaurant and cut as needed.

"The low risk, low cost of entry is very appealing, especially for women who want to start a small business," she says.

The chef who supported MicroGirl's launch was Kevin Scharpf, owner of Brazen Open Kitchen + Bar down the street from Klavitter's "farm" in Dubuque. Scharpf was recently named as one of FSR magazine's "40 Rising Stars under 40."

"This arrangement allows me to support a local business, and I'm not paying for shipping from three states away," says Scharpf. He quickly spread the word to other chefs.

Scharpf uses micro basil on coffee-braised beef short ribs with cauliflower "grit" and roasted carrots, and micro Thai basil with seafood. "Micro radishes have a nice stem that stands up to heat," he says.

"I'm also a big fan of shoots, especially popcorn shoots. They have a pale yellow color. The stem is a little bit sweet and the leaves have just a hint of bitter." **pb**

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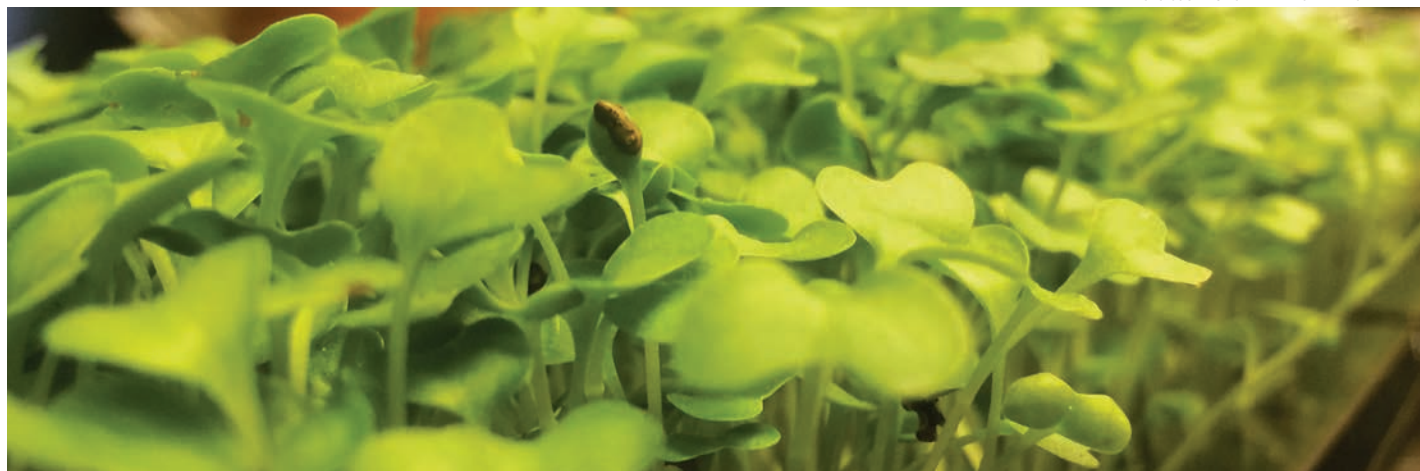


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in dashi broth with micro cilantro and petite fines herbs for omelets,” he says. Among his favorites are micro mustard dijon, micro celery, micro fennel, micro ice plant, micro hearts on fire and micro sorrel.

### DEFINING THE MICRO, THE PETITE AND THE BABY

In the produce and foodservice industries, there is general agreement on what defines microgreens, shoots, tendrils, petites and micro

**To me, there’s nothing better than when a chef geeks-out over my micro greens and finds ways to use them.”**

— Laura Klavitter, MicroGirl Organics

### CHEFS TAKE EDIBLE FLOWERS BEYOND A PRETTY FRILL

BY JOHN LEHNDORFF

Edible flowers have typically been found at white-tablecloth restaurants and were a signal to diners that the dish is a premium item. Recently, new varieties and increased availability are expanding growers’ reach into more mainstream foodservice operations, bars and supermarkets.

Miami-based Infinite Herbs and Specialties puts major emphasis on growing and distributing diverse edible flowers from pansies to calendula, says Camilo Peñalosa, vice president for business development. About 40 percent of the company’s business is retail. “In microgreens and edible flowers, it’s almost entirely foodservice in high-end dining, but that is slowly changing,” he says, noting nasturtiums are becoming a fairly common salad ingredient.

The blooms are also moving from being just a pretty garnish on the plate to actually being consumed, including Infinite Herb’s squash blossoms. “Chefs tend to dust them with flour and fry them or stuff them with crabmeat or caviar,” says Peñalosa.

San Marcos, CA-based Fresh Origins grows dozens of varieties including pansy, calendula, marigold, chrysanthemum, dahlia, nasturtium and viola. Many have concentrated flavors including garlic flowers and tart begonias.

“Our newest addition is the hibiscus flower, which we developed to grow year-round,” says owner David Sasuga. “Restaurants use them in beverages, because they are so beautiful.”

Edible flowers also keep getting smaller, such as Fresh Origins’ distinctive micro orchids. For sheer exhilaration, Sasuga likes the special effects of the company’s Buzz Button. “It’s tart and it leaves your mouth tingling,” he says.

Rosa Provoste, executive chef at Leonora in The Sebastian hotel in Vail, CO, uses a variety of edible flowers including pansies, nasturtiums, pea blooms and marigolds. “I use fava bean blossoms in dishes that use the beans, because they intensify the flavor,” she says.

Flowers have also become much more common in hot and cold beverages. For instance, at Dubuque, IA-based Brazen Open Kitchen + Bar executive chef Kevin Scharpf likes to float brightly hued, edible flowers in summer cocktails.

Edible flowers have a small presence in upscale and natural foods markets, usually in small clamshells in the fresh herb display. A larger marketing effort may woo mainstream shoppers, but growers suggest that truly edible flowers (from chive blossoms to squash blossoms) are much more likely to connect with skilled home cooks.

**pb**

vegetables, but the terms lack any legal definition. “The terms ‘baby greens’ and ‘microgreens’ are marketing terms used to describe their respective categories,” according to a 2014 report by the horticultural sciences department at the University of Florida. Down the line, these definitions may need to become more uniform for the category to grow.

Looking to the future, Peñalosa of Infinite Herbs expects the heavy packaging for herbs and microgreens to become more “green” and effective at keeping them in prime condition longer.

“It would also be good if the microgreens came in small sampler packs of individual microgreens, not pre-mixed,” he says.

At Urban Produce, the goal is not to build a larger facility in Irvine, CA, to supply microgreens. “The goal is to take our technology across the country to help provide access to fresh produce,” says Danielle Horton, director of marketing at Urban Produce. Their system works well in factories, a resource in plentiful supply, she says.

While microgreens won’t replace their full sized siblings, opportunities are abundant. “Even though the market for microgreens has grown it’s still a small, obscure category,” says Sasuga of Fresh Origins, indicating lots of potential.

Microgreens may be obscure now, but consider the kale’s makeover. “Ten years ago, kale was mostly a garnish,” says Horton. “Now it’s a superfood.”

**pb**



# Crunch Time: Healthy Snack Chips Change The Game



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANG FOODS



Simple ingredients and minimal processing give fruit and vegetable chips a healthy halo without sacrificing texture or taste.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

When it comes to snacking, the words “chips” and “healthy” have not always fit so well together. Healthy snacks have always been available in produce aisles in the form of whole fruits and vegetables, but even health conscious consumers crave the salty taste and crispy texture of chips. They also want less oil, preservatives and artificial flavors. Potato and corn-based chips have long dominated the snack segment, but fruit and vegetable chips, baked or toasted to crunchy, healthy perfection, are on the rise. While their presence in produce departments is growing, retailers would do well to incorporate a few marketing strategies and promotional tools to make sure these healthy snacks end up in shopping carts along with whole fruits and vegetables.

## ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

American diets are changing from three main meals to as many as five smaller meals per day, and healthy, convenient snacking is growing to meet demand. Vincent Kitiratragarn, founder and chief executive of Dang Foods, based in Berkeley, CA, understands this. “Dang coconut chips and onion chips are healthy, grab-and-go snacks that utilize minimal ingredients and processing for versatile snacking occasions,” he says.

With this in mind, it’s easy to see why the produce department naturally lends itself to this type of product. As Kitiratragarn explains, “Produce is a great home for us — because of our stand-up pouch, you can put us anywhere.” Kitiratragarn points out that this allows retailers to increase revenue without increasing square footage.

To further assist, Dang Foods sells shippers to produce departments and provides branded wire racks to make the best use of available space. Dang chips are made from coconut meat soaked in brine for eight hours then baked as they dehydrate. Consumers appreciate the process as an alternative to frying. “The result is a golden-brown, slightly caramelized chip that has a fantastic crunchy texture and explodes with flavor,” says Kitiratragarn.

“Consumers head to the produce depart-

ment for real, wholesome fruits and vegetables that help them and their families live a healthier lifestyle,” says Dana Ginsburg, director of marketing at Bare Snacks. The San Francisco-based company offers a line of baked fruit chips made from apples, bananas and coconuts. “Our snacks, which contain nothing artificial and no preservatives, bring a better-for-you option to the produce aisle that’s also convenient, easy and satisfies consumers’ crunchy snack cravings with the goodness of fruit.”

Superfoods come to the rescue for consumers looking for fruits and vegetables with the most vitamin and nutrient bang for their buck. This is something Zach Adelman, founder and chief executive of Navitas Naturals, knows well. Based in Novato, CA, his line of superfood products have put a welcome spin on the traditional chip.

“All of our superfoods are minimally processed and provide consumers an opportunity to discover some of the most nutrient-dense foods on earth,” says Adelman. Navitas Naturals achieves the chewy texture of its coconut chips by drying the thinly cut and seasoned slices at a low temperature.

## EDUCATING CONSUMERS

The average consumer may not think to look to the produce department for chips, and



retailers may view this as a challenge. It's also an opportunity, as Ginsburg points out: "It's important for retailers to catch shoppers' attention and drive awareness of offerings, which is why we offer in-store displays to prominently merchandise Bare Snacks."

Ginsburg recommends retailers merchandise Bare Snacks products next to their fresh fruit counterparts. Shelf talkers or danglers can be used to highlight attributes such as non-GMO and gluten-free. Bare gives retailers and consumers a little extra help delivering a message that's hard-to-miss. "Our new packaging better communicates our dedication to simple, clean ingredients with striking real fruit visuals that put the simplicity of our snacks front and center."

Proudly proclaiming clean ingredients on packaging is great, but retailers can further tout the healthy aspects of fruit and veggie chips. "Merchandise and label them as organic, non-GMO, gluten-free and vegan to help educate consumers," says Janice Greenwald, vice president of marketing at Rhythm Superfood based in Austin, TX.

"They can go one step further to develop promotional materials educating about the nutrient-dense vegetables, the dehydration process, how we maintain the potency of the raw vegetable with our process, and the additional ingredients we use to add even more fiber and protein." Rhythm's Kale Chips, Broccoli Bites, and Beet Chips are dehydrated using air-crisp technology while its Roasted Kale Chips are roasted in an oven.

"The guesswork has been taken out of Navitas Naturals superfoods," says Adelman. "All of our foods are plant-based, organic, non-GMO, gluten-free and free from any artificial ingredients." He recommends retailers feature Navitas Naturals in displays and endcaps cross-merchandised with other items, such as almond milk, bananas, dried berries, nuts and seeds for use in smoothies. On or around salad bars is another prime spot to help consumers make

that health halo shine.

Arthur Pergament, chief executive of Brad's Raw Foods, headquartered in Pipersville, PA, says, "Retailers should promote minimally processed, nutrient-dense foods through educational events such as nutritional classes and cooking classes designed to educate the public and bring awareness to brands like Brad's." Brad's vegetable chips use no artificial flavors, fillers or pastes and are slowly air crisped at low temperatures to preserve nutrients and live enzymes.

### EATING TIPS & RECIPES

Displaying baked and toasted fruit and vegetable chips next to smoothie ingredients and salad bars is a great first step, but creative retailers can deliver the point home by offering consumers eating tips and recipes. Some ideas come from the consumers themselves. "We love the creativity of our Bare fans," says Ginsburg.

Bare consumers use their chips to top salads, yogurt and cereal, as well as to add texture and crunch to baked goods. "Bare chips also add a surprising crunch to sandwiches and pair great with spreads like nut butter. The options are endless," says Ginsburg. The Bare Snacks website provides recipes.

Navitas also features recipes and eating tips on its website for consumers looking for ways to incorporate superfoods into their diets. This can help retailers devise cross-merchandising strategies as well. Some superfoods, like chia seeds, can be easily made into pudding while others such as goji berries can be added to oatmeal, smoothies and tea.

"Our customers have been very creative by taking snacking to a whole new level," says Pergament. "We've seen our products used as seasonings, salad toppings, soup toppings, smoothie bowl toppings, entree enhancers, kids snacks, hiking treats and beach treats."

### MERCHANDISING MANEUVERS

The healthy aspects of baked and toasted chips give retailers options for merchandising in ways that are both straightforward and inventive. Greenwald at Rhythm Superfoods suggests a permanent display of vegetable and fruit snacks paired together to create a real shopping destination. "Consumers are so confused regarding where to find these snacks," says Greenwald. "If we can create a section in the store that's dedicated to this category of snacks that's rapidly growing, it will be a win for consumers and retailers."

Kitiratragarn also endorses this concept. "Creating a healthy-snacking destination in produce is key to increasing basket size. People

**"Creating a healthy-snacking destination in produce is key to increasing basket size. People won't buy healthy snacks like dried fruit and nuts if they cannot find them."**

— Vincent Kitiratragarn, Dang Foods

won't buy healthy snacks like dried fruit and nuts if they cannot find them. The best is a display at the front of the produce area with several packaged snacks that hit on key trends: dried fruit, kale chips, seaweed, coconut chips and onion chips."

Ginsburg recommends in-store displays that prominently merchandise Bare Snacks. "Cross-merchandising Bare Snacks next to their respective fruit is a simple tactic to introduce consumers to a new way of enjoying their favorite fruit. Our snacks can be easily cross-promoted with clip strips or rack placements. We also recommend cross-department opportunities that give consumers ideas for snack pairings, such as Bare Apple Chips near the cheese case or Bare Banana Chips by the nut butters." Ginsburg also recommends in-store demos to allow consumers the opportunity to experience the full flavor and crunch of the chips.

"People are interested in using clean, easy-to-understand ingredients to support their healthy diet and lifestyle," says Adelman. "Superfoods are versatile in culinary applications such as with smoothie making, mixing in cereals or yogurt, topping salads or baking, and they can be cross-merchandised with complementary products. Superfoods can also be viewed as and merchandised for their functional and supplement-like qualities — they contain naturally occurring high levels of vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients."

Brad's offers shipper displays to retailers that can be placed in produce as a center aisle or endcap, says Pergament. "Cross-promotion of the broccoli and kale lines can be done effectively by promoting with salads, soups, and even illustrating the snacks as a lunch replacement — since by comparative weight they are equivalent to a huge salad and much less expensive."

pb



## ‘Skin In The Game’

BY DON HARRIS

Occasionally, during the Monday morning meetings, the subject of supply and availability of product is brought to light. In these discussions, management always talks about the need to commit in advance for many of the grocery-type products to ensure supply and the best cost. In their part of the discussion, produce personnel bring up the potential of doing a similar activity in their area. Management typically replies: “We already contract for our bananas and salad mixes; what other commitments do we need?” This type of reply only goes to show that once again, management “just doesn’t get it!”

While present in most parts of the retail establishment, contracts and advance commitments are not as predominant in produce. The overriding strategy in this area is to take advantage of seasonal, weather, and oversupply situations to make sure they get the best possible cost from downward changes and declines in the market price. Management often thinks tying themselves down in a contract would eliminate these opportunities for “special buys.” This type of “old school” thinking is shortsighted, and it will eventually affect these retailers’ abilities to be competitive in the future.

Times are changing in the produce landscape, and more advance planning and “risk taking” will be needed to maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace. Those who are slow to realize this trend will be left behind the progressive retailers who embrace these concepts and utilize them in their everyday strategy.

The innovative retailer will look beyond simple commitments and traditional contracts with vendors and suppliers to more advanced commitments. These types of commitments include the “sharing of risk” with the vendors and suppliers on the investment in the planting and harvesting of a specific crop.

These types of arrangements essentially have the retailer committing to take the total production generated from the growers’ planting and production in advance of harvest. This is a win-win situation as the grower has a “partner” in production plans and a “guaranteed” market for the crop. For the retailer, it allows effective planning for moving the crop and also encourages growers and shippers to grow crops that enhance variety or are extremely popular with the consumer. For them it “guarantees” a supply of product exclusively. This type of sharing in the risk inherent in the production of product provides that both parties have a vested interest, or if you will, “skin in the game.” They will mutually share the risks of weather, market conditions, and all other factors that affect the production of a crop.

With the emphasis on food waste and better crop utilization growing throughout the world, this type of arrangement between buyer and seller will continue to grow within the industry. This trend could mark the end of large overproduction of various commodities from the old notion that we have the opportunity to make money by growing for potential market conditions favorable to making a profit.

Many times, the industry shows a propensity to overplant an item that enjoyed a profitable year or two, creating these types of oversupply situations and the accompanying low markets and waste. As the pressure increases from consumer groups and the government to decrease the amount of food wasted, the produce industry throughout the world will need to respond as to how reduction in excess production will be accomplished. In a free-market economy where the entire world is involved, this will prove to be very difficult as nations compete with each other for commodity market share.

By utilizing new strategies, like the one I discussed, enlightened, progressive retailers will form the vanguard of leadership in this important area. A cooperative effort of sharing the risk that the grower undertakes each time he plants a crop will create an atmosphere of better crop utilization by planting and producing produce closer to actual demand, while avoiding oversupply, low markets, and food waste.

While this type of strategy goes against many of the time-honored principles of produce procurement, it has proven to be a viable strategy through the efforts of progressive retailers. What is required is essentially a mindset change to allow retailers to take a risk and put “skin in the game” instead of having the growers shoulder all of the risk.

Change of mindset and breaking with traditional ways of operating are not easy or comfortable to the produce industry, but it must happen if we are to reach our goals of sustainability and proper stewardship of our environment. The benefit of such a strategy is the continued success of our retail and growing operations and a more responsible and collaborative approach to bringing more fruits and vegetables to our customers while reducing food waste. **pb**

*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.*

**The innovative retailer will look beyond simple commitments and traditional contracts with vendors and suppliers to more advanced commitments.**



# Spring Tactics

BY ALAN SIGER

Even in the most northern parts of the United States, spring is finally here. It's my favorite time of the year — Mother Nature triggers a rebirth of everything that's been dormant, and grays and browns turn into a bright palate of spring colors. The days are longer and the temperatures are warmer; folks who have been trapped inside all winter are able to get out and enjoy what those in warmer climates often take for granted.

For years, produce wholesalers looked forward to spring for another reason: the five-month period from mid-March through mid-August was traditionally the most crucial period for a successful year. Prior to the advent of the Chilean deal in the 1970s, which provided a "second summer," there was little or no soft fruit or table grapes available to market in the late winter months. Cherries were finished by August, and peaches, plums, and nectarines by October. California's grape growers would store hearty varieties, such as Emperors or Calmerias, into January and February. By March, fresh grapes, too, would disappear from the marketplace until the Coachella Valley Perlette harvest began in mid- to late-May.

Forty years ago, a Terminal Market wholesaler's fruit department looked bare in February. Auctions ruled the roost in citrus, apples, and pears on most markets — leaving the other wholesalers to play second fiddle on these commodities. At risk of sounding like the person who reminisces about his youth with tales of walking to school in a blizzard, uphill both ways, it really was tough back then. For years, our business plan was to not dig too big of a hole in January and February, and to be ready to rock and roll when strawberries started to increase in volume signaling the beginning of fruit season.

Although the first 10 weeks of the calendar year are still a quieter time for today's wholesaler, our global produce economy offers plenty of opportunities for a full product line. Cherries and other soft fruit are available at least parts of eight months of the year, and table grapes are on the market year-round. Customers expect to get what they want no matter what the calendar says. In most cases, when given enough time, a wholesaler can fulfill the customer's request regardless of season.

Global availability enables the wholesaler to offer most products on a year-round basis. Though this helps to drive sales and profits, it doesn't mean it's time to sit back and relax. Expenses continue to rise and competing in today's market place is tougher than ever; it may be time for wholesale distributors to think outside the box

and consider expanding into non-produce commodities. You have a multimillion-dollar facility, and you have a customer base; what can you offer them that can help grow both of your bottomlines?

How about fresh-cut flowers? Floral is a \$36 billion industry in the U.S. that grew by 20 percent between 2010 and 2015. Flowers are somewhat of a sibling commodity to produce, as they travel parallel paths through the supply chain to the consumer. While larger chain stores already have their own floral distribution networks, your other customers might consider adding flowers to their product line if they had a reliable supplier to source from and who could teach them the

business. I'm not just referring to retailers. Think of all of the white tablecloth restaurants that are serviced by foodservice distributors. Restaurants hate to open their back doors more than necessary, and the ability to buy fresh-cut flowers from their produce wholesaler could eliminate a vendor for them.

Distribution of fresh-cut flowers requires a refrigerated warehouse and truck fleet, but that already exists in a wholesale produce operation, so infrastructure costs should be minimal. The largest expense, and the key to a successful venture, would be hiring specialists from the floral industry to launch and manage the program. Experts are necessary to introduce floral to independent retailers or foodservice distributors.

These floral professionals can also train your warehouse staff on proper handling and your sales team on marketing as well as sales strategies. In

the supermarket-chain-store world, floral and produce are generally managed by different teams. Produce and floral may be next to each other on the supermarket floor plan, but the supply chains are different and require separate dedicated personnel. No need for that in your operation. Once up and running, your floral department can operate the same as your fruit, vegetable, or potato and onion departments.

Imagine a world where the busiest holiday for one of your product lines falls in February. Introduce floral to your business, and you'll really have a happy Valentine's Day.

**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.*

**It may be time for wholesale distributors to think outside the box and consider expanding into non-produce commodities.**



# Fresh Food: The Lifeline For Brick-And-Mortar Retailers

BY ED BICKEL, RETAIL ANALYST

**T**he global benchmark for the fresh categories as a share of total grocery in the Top 10 grocery markets of the West is 31.4 percent and growing. Although online grocery is booming, demand for fresh, natural and organic food has reinvigorated brick-and-mortar grocery stores. Across the globe, market leading brick-and-mortar grocers are now ramping up the fresh food ranges, from produce to foodservice. Fresh food might even secure the future of the offline format.

## Getting Shoppers Back In Store

Fresh food, if done right, is a real footfall driver. When it comes to fresh, shoppers still like to see, feel, smell and even taste products. The experience of speaking directly to butchers, fishmongers and cheesemongers in-store is difficult to replicate online.

However, simply stocking shelves with produce is not enough. The presentation of the fresh range and the in-store ambience has become as important as quality and freshness. The display of fresh food requires considerable effort to attract shoppers out of the house.

## Love And Care Required To Create Buzz

As shoppers walk into a grocery store, they must get a sense of the buzz around fresh food. U.S. champions, Whole Foods Market and Wegman's, set the standard in fruit and vegetable display, while Canada's Farm Boy has a 50-foot, self-service hot and cold food bar in every store. Store workers who talk passionately about their products, in-store literature that tells a story of a product's origin (Trader Joe's is good at this), and the smell of freshly baked bread show love and dedication for high quality.

Other features such as open kitchens serving pizzas, stir-fries, pasta and sushi; transparent windows showing butchers and fishmongers at work at the back of stores; and cooking demonstrations add vibrancy to the store experience. Dutch hypermarket Jumbo Foodmarkt creates retail theatre by baking bread and pizzas in brick ovens in store. The retailer also roasts coffee beans in front of customers and has sushi chefs prepare meals in dedicated stalls.

## Creativity Leads To Interesting Concepts

The unbranded nature of fresh food gives retailers the creative and innovative freedom to convey identity. A common theme among North American retailers is creating a farmers-market style environment that promotes local and artisanal products. For example, Phoenix-based Sprouts Farmers Market uses market stalls instead of tall shelving; Whole Foods Market uses wooden crates for fruit and vegetables; and Trader Joe's utilizes blackboard signs written in chalk.

And now retailers are opening specialist fresh food banners focusing on local and organic food and foodservice. 365 by Whole Foods Market and Kroger's Main & Vine demonstrate the innovation drives from major chains.

In the EU, Germany's Veganz sells only vegan products, and Kochhaus groups products by recipes rather than categories. Like Kochhaus, many new concepts are blurring the boundary between grocery stores and foodservice providers. Italy's Eataly combines a grocery store with a department store style foodhall. U.K. grocer Waitrose's new store in London's King's Cross offers food and drink bars, a cooking school, and seating areas.

## Harder To Make Money

Although fresh food provides many exciting opportunities for retailers, it is important not to get carried away. Fresh food is a major cost driver and can depress margin.

A fresh food focus inevitably increases replenishment costs due to the perishable nature of the fresh categories. Labor costs are also higher due to hiring trained specialists spending more time on presentation.

Despite the temptations to pass on the higher costs to customers, retailers must offer value for money. Whole Foods Market has struggled of late as customers perceive its prices as too high. They can get similar quality foods cheaper from rivals Sprouts Farmers Market and Trader Joe's. Furthermore, discounters such as Aldi and Lidl also expanded their fresh ranges. Their lean discount model keeps prices low without compromising on quality.

**Fresh food allows retailers to be expressive by injecting color and personality. This creates a contrast to the corporate dullness of many major supermarket chains.**

## Future Of Fresh Food

Despite brick-and-mortar stores' advantage over online with fresh food, arguably, online has the edge on convenience. The future of grocery could be characterized by a bifurcation in shopping behavior. Shoppers will then buy dry and bulky items through subscriptions online, while buying fresh food from brick-and-mortar stores.

This evolution in buying habits could see the relationship between off and online shift from one of competition to cooperation. Apart from the rise of click-and-collect solutions and drive stations, the recent tie-up of British supermarket Morrisons with Amazon to supply Amazon Prime Now and Pantry suggests this trend is already in motion. **pb**

*Edward Bickel is an analyst for retail consultancy London-based Research-Farm, covering key trends across the retail and FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) space both in the U.K. and globally. Bickel is particularly interested in the impact the Internet and technology has on consumer-facing industries and how shopping behavior is changing amidst the digital revolution.*



# Driving Produce Sales And Consumption With Fresh Herbs

BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER MS, RDN, FAND & CHEF SUVIR SARAN

Every February Suvir and I teach a two-hour workshop called “Spices, Herbs and Aromatics: Exploring Health and Culinary Benefits” to an eager audience of healthcare professionals. While these physicians and dietitians always appreciate updates on research related to spices, herbs, aromatics and health, they are much more eager to hear the ways we use these ingredients to make fruits and vegetables more delicious and craveable.

One of the most common questions we get during the workshop is, “Which is better? Fresh or dried herbs?” Almost without exception, we say, “Fresh is best.” There are no nutrition or health reasons for this. The real power of fresh herbs comes from flavor. Dried counterparts don’t deliver the same burst of aromatic appeal or sensory satisfaction.

In this column we offer tips for boosting produce purchases in both the produce and prepared foods departments by highlighting how well herbs pair with certain produce items.

## Easy Appetizers Featuring Fresh Basil

One of the easiest summer appetizers is using toothpicks to skewer Bocconcini (those small balls of fresh Mozzarella cheese) with grape or cherry tomatoes and fresh basil leaves. Arrange on a platter, drizzle with fresh, high quality extra virgin olive oil, and some freshly cracked pepper. This is an easy in-store demo and sampling idea, perfect for holiday weekend promotions for shoppers who may be doing some entertaining.

## Greek Salads Featuring Fresh Oregano

The Greeks love using fresh as well as dried oregano in many dishes. Minced fresh oregano adds a familiar yet intriguing flavor note to a basic lemon juice plus olive oil salad dressing for a Greek salad with lettuce, cucumbers, crumbled Feta cheese, Kalamata olives, and diced red tomatoes. There’s no need to use salt in the salad dressing; the Feta and olives will suffice.

## Upscale Fruit Salads Featuring Fresh Mint And Cilantro

Suvir created a simple yet complex fruit salad for his *American Masala* cookbook that features grapefruit, pineapple, and mango tossed with vinaigrette that includes fresh mint, fresh cilantro, fresh lime juice, minced jalapeno, and some ground cayenne pepper. We often demonstrate and sample this recipe for our winter workshop, and attendees typically comment about how they can’t wait to take the next bite. The sweet from the fruit beautifully balances with the heat from the jalapenos and cayenne, making the mouth water in

anxious anticipation of the next bite.

## Move More Melons

Melons and fresh herbs are made for each other. Many restaurants offer seasonal beverages that feature watermelon and mint, and many upscale Mexican concepts offer fresh takes on *pico de gallo* with combinations like diced watermelon and cilantro. Last summer Pinterest pages were all abuzz in July and August over watermelon basil salads. We know of a seed company that offers “Crop Pops” at their vegetable seed events. These refreshing homemade popsicles are made with pureed cantaloupe, honeydew, and watermelon sweetened with a bit of sugar, balanced with a little fresh lime juice, and finished with fresh mint.

## Fresh Corn Salads Featuring Cilantro

Sweet corn season is about to start, and while Americans love to boil their ears and then slather on the butter, there are other ways to enjoy this family favorite. Freshly picked sweet corn is so tender it can be cut off the cob — without cooking it — and mixed with minced cilantro, a squeeze of lime, and a dash of salt for a quick, refreshing salad. This no-cooking-required option is awesome for hot summer nights when a pot of boiling water on the stove is the last thing a home cook wants to face. What about the backyard barbecue version where the corn is grilled with the husk on? Pair with cilantro butter for a definite crowd pleaser.

## Herbs Star In Simple Salads

One of the best salads I’ve ever eaten anywhere in my life was at a Mediterranean restaurant in Los Angeles in the late 1990s. The French chef combined cilantro and mint leaves with a lemon vinaigrette. This simple salad was so light, refreshing, and aromatic ... I’m still swooning at the memory. And I’m still waiting for another restaurant to realize that herbs don’t have to be the co-star; they can be the headliner for an excellent salad.

We hope these tips inspire your produce and prepared foods teams. Cheers to finding more ways to highlight the flavor boosting power of herbs. **pb**

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND (@AmyMyrdalMiller, [www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com](http://www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com)) is a farmer’s daughter from North Dakota, award-winning dietitian, culinary nutrition expert, and founder and president of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting. Suvir Saran (@SuvirSaran, [www.suvir.com](http://www.suvir.com)) is an award-winning chef, restaurateur, and cookbook author. Born in Delhi, India, today Suvir lives on a farm in upstate New York.

**Herbs don’t have to be the co-star; they can be the headliner for an excellent salad.**



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# Power Of Produce Research: Key Learnings For Retailers

BY RICK STEIN

**T**he *Power of Produce 2015* research study by FMI and 210 Analytics helped us understand many aspects of consumer thinking — offering objective insights as to where shoppers buy produce and what happens when they are in the store. The research aimed to help food retailers better understand how fresh fruit and vegetable merchandising impacted consumers’ purchasing behaviors.

Specifically, the analysis revealed consumer trends regarding their purchase planning efforts, channel choice, preparation and offered recommendations to grocers to improve customers’ experiences in the produce department.

Of all the ways in which to engage shoppers these days, I found it interesting that the weekly print ad played such an important aspect in consumers’ decisions on where they would shop. Survey respondents stated that they research print ads more than 60 percent of the time — reviewing more than just one circular to compare items.

The research also showed that eight out of 10 consumers made a list of items prior to shopping, and in 90 percent of those lists, the shopper listed one produce item or multiple items. The research merely substantiated how important produce plays in the advertising strategies for food retailers. No wonder most retailers have a produce item on the front page of the store’s print advertisements.

Yet, what really fascinated me was although consumers determined where they shop based on the ad, once they walked through the door, all of the pre-determined shopping list went out the window and everything was based on freshness and quality.

The consumer impulse-buys more than 53 percent of the time while in the store, and the shopper’s decision is always based on the freshness and quality of the product. While you can get them into the store with great ads, the actual produce is what matters. Moreover, if retailers execute produce merchandising strategies effectively, an increase in basket purchase within produce happens more than half the time. Store-level employees can become ambassadors of freshness and quality by preserving proper store conditions.

Another key finding related to how the consumer rated the traditional supermarket versus other outlets. The produce business is estimated to be a \$60-billion industry across multi-outlets according to IRI (including supermarkets, mass, club, etc.).

Consumers consistently cited a preference for shopping the supermarket for produce, listing quality and freshness, whereas they preferred supercenter and club outlets due to prices. The research indicated the high value consumers placed on quality and freshness.

Add the fact that they are inclined to impulse-buy when presented with high quality and freshness gives retailers the knowledge they need to help influence sales by emphasizing attention to store conditions in the produce aisle.

*Power of Produce* also indicated how much the consumer was looking for when it comes to variety. In fact, shoppers cited variety as a Top 5 attribute for store selection, and the only exception to variety pertained to specialty items. Furthermore, among “organic buyers,” the desire for a variety of specialty items was particularly important.

Noting these subtle differences can help retailers determine the extent of selection. The research indicated that the industry’s performance in variety can be improved, especially among supercenter and club shoppers.

While perceptions around freshness, quality and cleanliness and variety will continue to drive competition, the research emphasized the importance in educating talent in the produce aisle. Employees’ knowledge of produce and their ability to help consumers influenced shoppers’ decisions, drove sales, enhanced customer satisfaction, and ultimately cemented loyalty. In particular, the research cited how Millennials need information on health aspects of what they are buying as well as cooking tips.

One shopper told our researchers: “Half the time, when I have a question, the people refilling the fruit are teenagers who do not have the faintest clue about apples or how to make red cabbage. It would be nice to have some experts around, like the butchers in the meat department.”

Having this information is a great tool for conversations along the supply chain. Not only the retailers, but the wholesalers, the distributors and packer/shippers can all get a better understanding from this research on how to help improve what they do to drive more sales for the produce business. Furthermore, I think this data helps retailers drive the point to store associates that shoppers really want to understand the produce aisle, and store associates are critical navigators to the overall shopping experience.

I look forward to *Power of Produce 2016*, which will be presented at this year’s FMI Connect in Chicago on June 20 to 23. I anticipate what new trends and comments emerge in this fast-paced, growing segment of the store.

**pb**

*Rick Stein is vice president of fresh foods for FMI and is responsible for developing a portfolio of services and activities to assist members in formulating and executing their fresh food strategies. These categories include everything from dairy, frozen, meat, poultry, seafood, and produce to service departments — such as deli, bakery and fresh prepared meals and related solutions for take-out or in-store dining.*

**I think this data helps retailers drive the point to store associates that shoppers really want to understand the produce aisle, and store associates are critical navigators to the overall shopping experience.**





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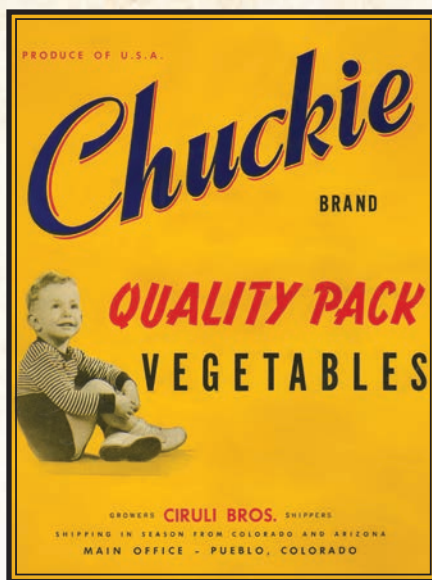
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# NAME THAT CIRULI BROTHER

The “Chuckie” for whom the Chuckie label was named is Charles Ciruli Jr. — the son of original owner Charlie Ciruli and the father of Charles III (“Chuck”) and Chris Ciruli, the company’s present chief executive and chief operating officer, respectively. Charles, who was 4 years old at the time of the photograph (circa 1948), currently serves as chairman of Nogales, AZ-based Ciruli Brothers LLC.

Three generations ago, Ciruli Brothers was the largest grower-shipper in Colorado (from the 1940s to early 1960s) of potatoes, onions, mixed vegetables, and among the largest nationwide through expansion in Arizona, with lettuce, onion, watermelon and cantaloupe. The company marketed produce under several labels using photos of family children from the late 1940s to mid-1950s.

At the time this label was in use, the company farmed its own land and had direct contracts with growers who would farm for them. It operated as many as 12 packing-houses throughout Colorado with headquarters in Pueblo. The Chuckie label was used on the major items the company handled



at the time including corn, peppers, onion, radishes, parsley, parsnips, lettuce, carrots, cabbage, green beans and French beans.

Other labels also included Ciruli children. The company had a “David” and “Mary Jean” label, named for first cousins to Charles Jr. His sister, Pam Ciruli, was featured on the “Pam Kay” label, along with another first cousin Marla Kay Shanklin, (whose father, Ray Shanklin, was general manager of Central Vegetable Farms, a subsidiary of Ciruli Brothers in the San Luis Valley). As the family grew, the children’s labels were phased out and Ciruli Brothers focused on its principal labels, Golden West and Red Pride.

Charlie Ciruli Sr., began farming with his family at just 9 years old. In the 1930s, he became a buyer for Piggly Wiggly Supermarkets, which is now Safeway. By 1940, Charlie started Ciruli Brothers in Colorado

and expanded the grower-shipper operation to Nogales around 1950. The Colorado division closed after his death in the 1960s. Charlie Jr. stepped in around 1967 to head up and grow the Nogales operation; and the rest is history. **pb**

## information showcase

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Commission	27	800-344-4333	www.californiaavocado.com/retail	Lighthouse Foods, Inc.	72	800-669-3169	www.lighthousefoods.com
California Giant Berry Farms	57	831-728-1773	www.calgiant.com	Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	800-884-6266	www.veggiesmadeeasy.com
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Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	43	515-981-5111	www.capitalcityfruit.com	Monte Package Company	34	800-653-2807	www.montepkg.com
Center for Produce Safety	55	530-757-5777	www.cps.ucdavis.edu	National Mango Board	97	877-MANGOS-1	www.mango.org
Christopher Ranch	85	408-847-1100	www.christopherranch.com	NatureSweet Ltd.	37	210-408-8557	www.naturesweet.com
Ciruli Brothers	99	520-281-9696	www.cirilibrothers.com	New Jersey Department of Agriculture	65	609-292-8853	www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov
Columbia Marketing				Pacific Tomato Growers	58	209-450-9810	www.sunripeproduce.com
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Communications	80	972-814-5723	www.palmelitas.com	Produce for Better Health Foundation	113	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
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Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	11	800-333-5454	www.dole.com	South Carolina Department of Agriculture	79	803-734-2225	www.agriculture.sc.gov
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