

# produce business

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

## Independent Stores Thrive With Smart Produce Strategies



**INSIDE:**

THE PUNDIT EXAMINES BEST PRACTICES FOR WHOLESALE MARKETS AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION  
PSK FOODTOWN • WINTER MERCHANDISING • CENTRAL AMERICAN IMPORTS  
MEXICAN AVOCADOS • IMPORTED ONIONS • BANANAS  
CITRUS • PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS • REGIONAL PROFILE: DETROIT  
WHAT'S HOT IN FOODSERVICE • HOLIDAY BAKING



Dole leads the way in nutritional education, helping consumers to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

The DOLE brand is synonymous with high quality and safety standards for fresh fruit and vegetables.





PHOTOS FROM THIS MONTH'S COVER SHOWCASE THE FOLLOWING STORES (LISTED CLOCKWISE): NUGGET MARKET IN EL DORADO HILLS, CA (PHOTO PROVIDED BY STORE); PSK FOODTOWN IN BROOKLYN, NY; AND IGA GRANITE FALLS IN GRANITE FALLS, WA (PHOTO PROVIDED BY UNIFIED GROCERS).



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Eighteen years after we revolutionized the fresh pineapple category, we are ready to do the same in the refrigerated juice category. Introducing Pure Earth™ juice, a unique range of Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet pineapple-based juices with no fillers, no preservatives and no added sugars. Call your Del Monte Fresh rep to taste for yourself.

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**THIS MONTH'S WINNER**



**Chuck Plummer**  
**Manager, Supply Management**  
**Robinson Fresh**  
**Eden Prairie, MN**

Before Chuck Plummer started at Robinson Fresh, he worked for the USDA Economic Research Service for 13 years as an agricultural economist. During his years at the USDA, Plummer's focus was on the produce industry — including aspects such as researching and analyzing various commodity markets.

"It was during my time at USDA that I became very interested in the produce

industry," Plummer says. "I realized that I wanted to explore a career outside of government and more directly planted within the industry itself.

"I thoroughly enjoy daily interactions with individuals on both the production and marketing ends of the spectrum," Plummer says. "It allows me to learn something new every day and provides various perspectives to any given situation which, in turn, inspires creativity, innovation and positive collaboration."

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

**WIN A CAST IRON FIRE PIT**

This pit comes complete with a dome-fire screen coated in a high-heat paint, decorated with a slate stone paver-look on the cast iron rim, and a wood grate. The decorative steel legs support the 30-inch black porcelain enamel fire bowl. A screen-lift tool is also included. The assembled dimensions are: 39.01" L x 39.01" W x 20.88" H x 59.4 pounds.



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**QUESTIONS FOR THE NOVEMBER ISSUE**

- 1) What are the Row numbers in the address for S.Katzman Produce and Katzman Berry Corp?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What's the name of the Produce Director in the ad for Idaho Potatoes? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What is the 800-number for Tanimura & Antle? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What is the brand name of the new Del Monte juices? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What types of fruit are in the two containers shown on the POM Wonderful ad? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) What kind of fruit is wearing sunglasses on the Direct Source Marketing ad? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_

Company \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

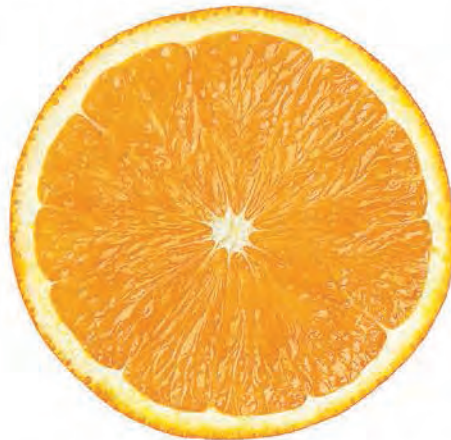
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## TRANSITIONS

### KINGSTON FRESH IDAHO FALLS, ID

Kingston Fresh, LLC, announces industry veteran **Sandy Gatano** will join the Kingston team and fill the newly created position of product manager for specialty vegetables and berries. Gatano's immediate focus will be on establishing these new categories and markets to add to Kingston's expanding product lines.



### FRESH DIRECT PRODUCE LTD. VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Fresh Direct Produce Ltd. announces **Debra Boyle** joins its management team as director of business development. The company sources and imports more than 600 different fruit and vegetable items from 28 countries and distributes produce to grocery retailers and foodservice distributors across Canada.



### THE CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION IRVINE, CA

The California Avocado Commission (CAC) announces that produce veteran **Connie Stukenberg** returns to the Commission staff full-time as retail marketing director. Stukenberg's expanded responsibility with CAC includes managing corporate accounts such as Albertsons, Costco and Safeway. She also has responsibility for retail marketing in Arizona and California.



### ALLEN LUND COMPANY LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE, CA

Allen Lund Company promotes **Beau Thompson** to business development specialist. Thompson attended Western Illinois University, where he graduated with a Bachelors of Business-Marketing. He then began his career at the Allen Lund Company as a transportation broker.

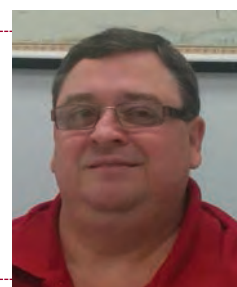


### MONTEREY MUSHROOMS, INC. WATSONVILLE, CA

Monterey Mushrooms, Inc. hires **Andrea Allen** as its southeast region sales manager. In this role, Andrea will manage fresh mushroom sales with both Retail and Foodservice customers in the seven states surrounding the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast Regions. Andrea is based out of Charlotte, NC and is primarily assigned to Monterey's farm in Loudon, TN.

### VEGA PRODUCE DORAL, FL

Vega Produce hires **Joseph Gunter** as a new sales manager. In his new role, Gunter will direct sales and marketing efforts to grow the existing and new business relationships. Gunter will also work in specialties, oriental vegetables and tropicals. Gunter has 31 years' experience in the produce industry.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### HARRIS TEETER AND TITAN FARMS TEAM UP TO FIGHT HUNGER

Titan Farms, Ridge Spring, SC, and Harris Teeter, Matthews, NC, donated more than 58,000 pounds of peaches to the Second Harvest Food Banks in Winston-Salem and Charlotte, NC, to help feed the hungry in the local communities. This donation is part of the retailer's participation in the second-annual "Peaches with A Purpose" program sponsored by peach grower Titan Farms.



### COLUMBINE VINEYARDS ANNOUNCES ECO-FRIENDLY SALES BAGS

A new collection of bags are being rolled out by Columbine Vineyards, Delano, CA, to feature its high-quality table grapes. The new stand-up, innovative design and vibrant color selection were created to catch the consumers' eyes and allow for easier storage. The bags use 6.5 percent less plastic than the previous bags. Columbine will be launching the new Milano bag in 2015.



### STEMILT AWARDS LICENSE TO NEW UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA APPLE CULTIVAR

The University of Minnesota awarded Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA, the license to grow, pack, and market a new, early-to-ripen apple cultivar. The patent name for the cultivar is MN55, and the University of Minnesota plans to trademark a name for the fruit in conjunction with Stemilt in the near future.

### AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO LAUNCHES NEW "HUNGRY FOR FOOTBALL" PROMOTION

Avocados from Mexico (AFM), Dallas, TX, announces it will partner with Ro\*Tel, a ConAgra Foods brand, for its "Hungry for Football" promotion. The promotion is designed to get customers and consumers excited about the season and enthusiastic about incorporating AFM into its celebrations. The "Hungry for Football" campaign runs now through Dec. 15.



### LOVE BEETS UNVEILS NEW BRANDING

Love Beets, Philadelphia, PA, announces a company-wide re-branding campaign. The fresh new look reflects the brand's approach to preparing and eating beets. Its new, state-of-the-art packaging aligns with its commitment to providing consumers with quality products. The new branding continues to roll out nationwide through the end of the year.



# It's POM Time!



It's the most Wonderful time of the year! Especially if you're fully stocked with POM POMS, POM Wonderful 100% Pomegranate Juice and POM Wonderful fresh pomegranates. All three will be supported with a multi-million dollar marketing campaign—in-store POS, promotional support, public relations and the largest FSI program in POM history! Not to mention, the biggest merchandising team in produce. Get ready. It's gonna be POM time all the time.

Order your POM POMS and pomegranate display bins now at [GetBins@POMWonderful.com](mailto:GetBins@POMWonderful.com) or contact your local Wonderful brands sales representative at 877.328.7667.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

**NATURAL DELIGHTS MEDJOOL DATES DEEMED HEART-HEALTHY FOOD**

Natural Delights Medjool Dates, Bard Valley, CA, announces its dates were certified as a heart-healthy food by the American Heart Association's Heart-Check Food Certification Program. Medjool dates are also naturally sweet, gluten-free, nut-free, Kosher, Halal and vegan — making them an ideal sugar substitute in recipes and a heart-healthy snack for people with various dietary needs.



**DOMEX SUPERFRESH GROWERS LAUNCHES NEW SWEEPSTAKES**

Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, WA, launches a new social media promotion called "Your Awesome Apple Recipe Sweepstakes." The company offers a suite of in-store and online partnership opportunities including ready-to-post social content, pre-designed POS materials and co-sponsored #EatApples Twitter parties. Through a random drawing, three winners will be announced this month.



**GARDEN CUT LAUNCHES NEW BRANDING AND LABEL DESIGN**

Garden Cut, Indianapolis, IN, launches a new branding and label design for its pre-cut and ready-to-use products in retail stores. A new "To-Go Snack" line of produce-based products has also been released during the launch. The newly branded Garden Cut products, sold throughout the Midwest, will be available in hundreds of grocery stores.



**SAN MIGUEL PRODUCE EXPANSION**

San Miguel Produce, Inc., Oxnard, CA, announces a two phase, groundbreaking expansion of new and increased growing/processing operations in both the East and West. The first of the company's expansion is the addition of the new Georgia plant to open winter of 2014. The second phase is the addition of 40,000 square feet to its current plant in Oxnard, CA.

**VEG-FRESH FARMS EXPANDS PRODUCT PORTFOLIO**

Veg-Fresh Farms, Corona, CA, announces the expansion of its business and launch of the new consumer label Crystal Cove Berry Farms. Sourcing strawberries throughout Mexico and California's fertile berry growing regions, Crystal Cove Berry Farms will be a valuable and consistent supplier of fresh berries to foodservice and retail starting in the spring of 2015.



**SWEET GOURMET PEARS' NEW PACKAGE ROLLS OUT**

CMI, Wenatchee, WA, announces the national rollout of its new pouch bag for Sweet Gourmet Pears. Introduced on a test basis last year, the bag proved to be a hit with consumers. This season, CMI is launching the Sweet Gourmet Pears 3-pound pouch bag, in Bartlett and D'Anjou varieties, in select stores across the U.S.



**SUNKIST'S NEW FRUIT BAG**

Snack it Forward, LLC, Los Angeles, CA, announces the launch of Sunkist Fruit 2.0, a new line of natural and healthy freeze-dried fruit. Fruit 2.0 is pure fruit healthiness in a whole new way to eat 100 percent real fruit. Fruit 2.0 will be rolling out to grocery, convenience and mass merchandise retailers nationwide beginning in the fourth quarter of 2014.

NEW PRODUCTS



**NASOYA'S NEW TOFUBAKED AIMS TO CONVERT TIMID TOFU SHOPPERS**

Ayer, MA-based Nasoya has been courting retailers since May with its new TofuBaked product. The pre-cooked, marinated tofu, which is available in Sesame Ginger and Teriyaki flavors, takes the guesswork out of tofu — providing home cooks with a ready-to-eat way to prepare and serve tofu. The product launched nationwide and was featured at the Nasoya booth during this year's the PMA convention.

**POM WONDERFUL LAUNCHES NEW ANTIOXIDANT SUPER TEAS**

POM Wonderful, Los Angeles, CA, introduces new Antioxidant Super Teas: Pomegranate Lemonade Tea, Pomegranate Sweet Tea and Pomegranate Honey Green Tea. POM's No.1-selling Pomegranate Peach Passion White Tea will join the new Antioxidant Super Teas with a fresh new look and convenient new size.



CORRECTION

Because of an editing error, Tanimura & Antle's company name was spelled incorrectly in the headline of the company's PMA Aisle By Aisle Booth Review in the September issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS. We regret the error.



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

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# THE RISING STAR RECEPTION



On Friday, October 17, at the PMA Fresh Summit convention in Anaheim, CA, PRODUCE BUSINESS in conjunction with sponsors, MIXTEC Group and Ocean Mist Farms, hosted the 10th Annual Rising Star Reception to celebrate this year's 40-Under-Forty\* class.

In addition to the class of 2014, attendees included members from previous classes as well as many movers and shakers of the produce industry. The students and faculty from U.S. and international colleges, who were participants of the Pack Family/PMA Career Pathways Fund, were also honored guests.

\*40-Under-Forty, an annual feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS, honors the produce leaders of tomorrow, all of whom have been chosen by industry mentors for their industry and community accomplishments. Please see this year's winners by visiting [www.producebusiness.com](http://www.producebusiness.com) and clicking on our June 2014 issue. You can also nominate candidates for next year's class by clicking on the 40-Under-Forty icon.



The 2014 Class of 40 Under Forty Winners



(L-R): Jeannine Martin, Megan Schulz and Rudy Ruiz of The Giumarra Company.



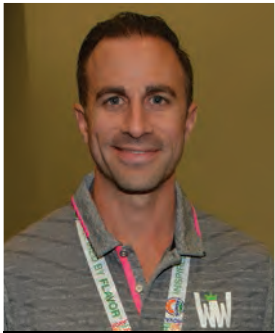
(L-R): Garrett Patricio and Blake Patricio of Westside Produce



(L-R): Katiana Valdes, Emanuel Lazopoulos and Melissa Athanasopoulos of Del Monte Fresh Produce

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES

# THE RISING STAR RECEPTION



**Peppe Bonfiglio of Sunset**



**(L-R): John Dmytriw, Index Fresh; Jorge Inestroza, Tenalu; Julia Inestroza, Gourmet Trading Company**



**(L-R): Shreenivas Shellikeri, Loblaws; Ben Alviano, Mann Packing; Chelsea Mascari, Indianapolis Fruit**



**(L-R): Eric Halverson and Yvette Halverson of Black Gold Farms**



**(L-R): Jamie Bowen, Idaho Potato Commission; Chris Wada, Wada Farms Marketing Group**



**(L-R): Kenny Mills, Justin Fisher, Amanda Newhard, Yuichi Shirakashi of House Foods America Corp.**



**(L-R): Kelly Jacob, Pro\*Act; John Toner, United Fresh; Ryan Easter and Kaci Komstadius of Sage Fruit Co.**



**(L-R): Jamie Sells of Del Monte Fresh Produce and Roger Schroeder of Stater Bros.**



**(L-R): Traci Hiebert and Alejandra Munoz of Idaho Potato Commission**



**(L-R): Chetan Tiwari, United Fresh Produce Association; Lori Taylor, Indianapolis Fruit Company; Angela Tiwari, United Fresh Produce Association**



**(L-R): Kyle LeStrange, To-Jo Mushrooms; Peter Wilder, To-Jo Mushrooms; Meg Miller, Produce Marketing Association; Mike O'Brien, Schnuck Markets; Kevin Delaney and John Cunningham of To-Jo Mushrooms**



**(L-R): Veronika Adam of USA Farm Fresh and Gary Caloroso of The Giumarra Companies**



**(L-R): Albert Wada and Christine Wada of Wada Farms Marketing Group**



**(L-R): Rachel Montoya, Erik Sambrailo, Jennifer Evan, Sara Mailhot, Salvador Hernandez Betancourt of Sambrailo Packaging**

# THE RISING STAR RECEPTION



(L-R): Martin Britz of Sunwest Fruit Company and Josh Logsdon of Giro Pack, Inc.



(L-R): Jesse Sepulveda and Dan Lawton of Vision Produce Co.



(L-R): Laurie Foster and Boyd Foster of Idaho Potato Commission; David Fraser, United States Potato Board; Andrew Fraser, student at Purdue University



(L-R): Mitch Brinks, Russell Comport, Don Armock of Riveridge Produce



Jim Prevora of PRODUCE BUSINESS



(L-R): David Morgan and John Marlow of Mann Packing Co.



(L-R): John Shaw, Kevin Hicks, Kori Tuggle, Brian Scattini, Wyatt Maker, Brian Hawes, Mary Catherine Langford, Ty Schurman of Ocean Mist Farms



(L-R): Monica Cordero, Gold Coast Packing, Inc.; Jeff Lundberg, Chris Cordero of Babé Farms; Brent Scattini, Gold Coast Packing, Inc.; Ande Manos of Babé Farms; Terry Kuhel, Gold Coast Packing



(L-R): Caitlin Tierney and Edgar Ruiz Miranda of Bayer CropScience



(L-R): Ian Bessell and Kelly Green of Birko; Amber Kosinsky of Wish Farms



(L-R): Allen Vangelos, Naturipe Farms; Chris Vangelos, A.R. Arena Products Inc.; Dick Spezzano, Spezzano Consulting Service; Neil Millman and Jim Provost of I Love Produce



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# UNITED FRESH EXAMINES REPROPOSALS FOR FSMA



By Dr. David Gombas, senior VP,  
food safety and technology;  
Julie Manes, director, government relations

The long process of implementing the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) reached a key point recently when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued supplementary proposals for four draft rules. The supplementary proposals, which make changes to certain sections of the previous proposed rules, cover produce safety, preventive controls for human food, preventive controls for animal feed and foreign supplier verification rules. These “reproposals” were published in the *Federal Register* on September 29 and will be open for public comment for 75 days with a deadline of December 15. The public is welcome to review and comment on the reproposals.

United Fresh is continuing to assess the revamped rules for their impact on the fresh produce industry. As everyone in the produce industry knows, food safety can make or break a business, so there is a significant number of issues in the reproposals that we’ll be closely examining. They include, but are not limited to:

- Revision of the testing frequencies for water sources used in-field
- The definition of a farm
- Product testing
- Mandating of supplier approval programs

These are just a few of the aspects of updates to the proposed rules that will require thorough analysis as we prepare to comment on the proposed changes. In order to do that, United is undertaking a comprehensive approach that will foster the kind of close examination needed as we prepare comments on the supplementary proposals.

We formed working groups consisting of industry experts and stakeholders who will be focusing on each of the reproposals separately. The United Fresh working group on the Produce Rule met in early October, and the remaining working groups on the Animal Feed

AS EVERYONE IN THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY KNOWS, FOOD SAFETY CAN MAKE OR BREAK A BUSINESS, SO THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF ISSUES IN THE REPROPOSALS THAT WE’LL BE CLOSELY EXAMINING.



Michael Taylor, the deputy commissioner for Foods and Veterinary Medicine with the FDA speaks about the FSMA reproposals at this year’s United Fresh Washington Conference.

rule, Preventive Controls and the Foreign Supplier program met throughout the month of October. In the course of each of their discussions, the working groups examined each of the reproposals in detail — assessing how the proposed rule would impact the produce industry in negative or helpful ways. The results of those conversations will form the basis of United Fresh’s comments.

Members of the produce industry should also be aware that the FDA is undertaking efforts to provide additional information on their supplementary proposals. On October 6, the FDA joined with United Fresh for a webinar that reviewed the supplementary

proposals. A recording of the webinar can be found at [UnitedFresh.org/FSMA](http://UnitedFresh.org/FSMA). On November 13, the FDA will host a public meeting in College Park, MD. United Fresh will share information on the meeting as it becomes available.

United Fresh briefed congressional staff about the supplementary proposals and will continue to keep key congressional offices up to speed regarding our examination process as well as our final comments. We will also continue to advocate for food safety policy that is science-based and does everything possible to protect consumers and maintain produce providers’ business viability.



# Together, they mean business.



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By James Prevor  
President & Editor-in-Chief



There was a time, not too long ago, when America had no national supermarket chains. Wal-Mart's rollout across America changed that. Beyond Wal-Mart, though, the fragmentation of retailing into specialized types clearly opened the door for national chains of all types — Costco as a national warehouse club chain; Whole

Foods as a national health retailer; Trader Joe's as a national epicurean play; Aldi as a national discounter.

In some cases, these stores don't have the footprint that a true national classification would require, but it seems to be the way the market is going.

These chains have lots of advantages in expertise, capital, procurement, etc., but for every action there is a reaction, and the

homogenization of national chains will create an umbrella in which local retailing can thrive. This can be a farmers market, a CSA, an independent supermarket chain, a single-unit operator and a panoply of ethnic specialists.

Indeed this issue's cover story, which deals with the renaissance of independents, profiles this trend. But we would actually go a step further. Most of the experts quoted in the article urge independents to avoid trying to price against the big chains, pointing out that these giants can buy in bulk, and it will be difficult for independents to beat the chains at this game. That is probably sound advice for groceries, but it is not true at all in fresh produce.

You can't say that Wal-Mart, Costco, Kroger, Safeway/Albertson's/Publix, etc., are all buying below the market — they are the market.

Some independent retailers will become part of a co-op, such as Wakefern, or they will team up with large wholesalers, such as Super-Valu or C&S, and they can buy as cheaply as big retailers. Lots of ethnic retailers buy off local terminal markets, and by being flexible, they can often buy under the FOB plus freight.

These ethnic independents are especially dangerous to competitors in fresh produce. They often have a sharp focus on one ethnicity as a clientele, so the groceries are often brands that wouldn't appeal to a typical shopper, but the produce can appeal to anyone.

Independents of all sorts can be quicker to change procurement strategies, flexible when integrating rapidly changing procurement strategies with merchandising and marketing, and better at acquiring that "local" halo than national chains. Yet while the future of inde-

pendent retailing is bright, the produce industry is doing a rather poor job of supporting this customer segment — which is another way of saying the produce industry is not taking advantage of the independent opportunity.

On the first week in December, many in the industry gather in Manhattan for The New York Produce Show and Conference. One of the shocking things that happens there is that shippers talk to retailers; the shipper finds out that the retailer has been selling their produce for years, and the shipper never knew it!

The shippers couldn't service these accounts directly, and the retailers have good reasons for buying from service wholesalers or terminal markets, but these independents could benefit from promotional support. Indeed, these players will actually use the Point-of-Purchase material that most chains simply throw away.

Yet the same producers and associations that offer large

chains substantial promotional assistance just ignore the independent sector. The reasons are clear:

- It is a difficult sector to gain transparency.
- It is easier to go meet with one chain that can order its stores to do a promotion than to meet with a wholesaler who has to persuade his customers to participate.
- Limited staff resources can seemingly get a bigger bang for the buck by going after the highest volume players.
- Some of the ethnic retailers require non-English fluency to work with productively.

These things are all true, but they don't change the fact that there is an enormous opportunity, and the very difficulty of reaching out to independents creates a larger prize for those who dare to make a difference in this field.

How to coordinate with wholesalers and distributors; how to reach out to retailers with diverse store sizes and customer types . . . none of this will be easy. But as independents grow, and as shippers find their options with national retail chains are more limited, there will be a natural meeting of the minds.

The retailers want to sell more produce, the wholesalers and distributors want to sell more produce, and the grower/shippers want to sell more produce. The opportunities to creatively do new things are constrained at giant national retailers, so those grower/shippers looking for opportunity will gravitate to the independent sector.

It is very hard for a big chain to compete with a great independent, so it is in the interest of the produce trade to keep a diverse customer base by helping independents grow.

pb

**The produce industry is doing a rather poor job of supporting this customer segment — which is another way of saying the produce industry is not taking advantage of the independent opportunity.**



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# Fruit Is In Top 3 UK Kids' Snacks

BY KIRSTY NOLAN, ANALYST WITH CANADEAN

A recent online panel owned by Canadean that is used for customized consumer research — both as a service for businesses and for our own in-house research — surveyed 506 parents with children aged 16 or under. It revealed that 94 percent of the U.K.'s children snack, and more than half do so on a daily basis.

**Fresh and processed fruit snacks are on the rise in the U.K., as concerned parents want healthier products for their kids.**

There are approximately 12 million children in the U.K., which equates to more than 6 million snacking occasions every day. When asked what foods their children snack on, parents revealed fruit is the most common snack among children, with 67 percent of children snacking on fruit, closely followed by crisps [potato chips] at 65 percent. The remaining top spots were filled by biscuits [sweet cookies] (64 percent), chocolate (42 percent) and confectionery (37 percent). Overall, health remains the key priority. When asked what their children were most likely to snack on, fruit is revealed as the overall snack of choice with one in three children most likely to snack on the natural, sweet treats in either packaged or unpackaged forms.

## Parents Worry About Kids Snacking Habits

Parents across the U.K. are increasingly concerned with their children's snacking habits, which is not surprising given the media attention surrounding the issue of rising childhood obesity levels. In the same survey, one in three parents expressed concern regarding their child's weight. Approximately 40 percent expressed concern about snacking and overall dietary habits, and more than half worry whether their children are eating enough fruits and vegetables.

## Snacking Market Rife With Opportunities

The findings of the survey highlight a number of opportunities for snacking companies. There is a definite need for healthy snacks for children. More parents want to incorporate the "5 A Day," which is the generally accepted healthy daily quantity of fruit and vegetable portions, into their children's diets.

In its simplest form, this can be packaged fresh fruit, conveniently prepared and packed in a bag ideal for lunch boxes or on-the-go snacking. The Asda supermarket chain has an extensive private label range of children's fruit products that appeal to parents because the pre-packaged fruit bags provide kids with one of the "5 A Day." Processed options are also growing in popularity. Organix, a British company specializing in baby and toddler foods, has a range of fruit snacking bars under its 'Goodies' brand. The label provides one of the recommended "5 A Day," while also promising to be 100 percent organic and containing no added sugar, artificial flavors or colors. Along with the health benefits, parents also like the extended shelf-life of processed fruit products, as they can be stored more easily than fresh fruit.

## What Does This Mean For Marketers?

To market child snacking products

successfully, it must be remembered that health is key, closely followed by convenience. As much as parents want their children to eat healthfully, a snacking occasion must remain convenient from the perspective of both parent and child. Further, a product must taste good in order for it to be successful in the kid's market. Although an adult may consume a product for health reasons alone, this simply isn't the case among the youngest consumers.

Marketers are faced with the task of communicating a product's health and taste benefits in an already saturated marketplace. The purchasers of these products are mostly busy parents; these consumers do not have time to waste on food shopping, so the message to them needs to be loud and instantaneous. If a processed fruit product can still be classified as one of the recommended "5 A Day," then don't be afraid to highlight this on the packaging and in the marketing campaign, this extends to single portions of fresh fruit. Parents want to be able to quickly tally their child's intake to ensure they are getting the nutrients they require — why shouldn't marketers make this task easier for them?



**Method:** The data in this article is taken from an in-depth survey of the attitudes and consumption habits of 2,000 U.K. consumers. The survey was conducted via Canadean's Rewarded Opinions panel, which has a reach of more than 100,000 respondents. The study was conducted between July 11 and July 14, 2014. Of the 2,000 respondents, 506 identified themselves as parents of children aged 16 and under.

**The Company:** Canadean provides in-depth market research across the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, including food, packaging, ingredients, soft drinks, beer, retail, foodservice, wines & spirits and cosmetics & toiletries. Canadean specializes in conducting online survey panels and producing in-depth market insight country reports through qualitative and quantitative research.

**The Author:** Kirsty Nolan, an analyst with Canadean, assists FMCG companies in identifying emerging market trends and provides insight into the motivations behind consumer behavior. Working as an analyst for almost three years, Nolan has a wealth of experience in report writing and detailed strategic analysis.

# Parental Guidance Suggested

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

**I**t is important to survey consumers because it gives us great insight into their thought process, but it does not necessarily provide insight into behavior. In this case, surveying parents about their children's snacking habits inherently creates a bias in response because most parents want to be perceived as good parents. Since it is widely known that produce is a healthier snack than other options, asking parents what their children snack on is not a neutral question. It is virtually identical to asking the parent if they are good parents or not.

Put another way, one can ask a parent, "When your child eats ice cream, does he prefer vanilla or chocolate?" Researchers would probably get a reasonably accurate response because the answer carries no moral weight. On the other hand, asking about children's snacking habits can be perceived by the research subjects as such: "Are you one of the lazy, negligent parents who allows your children to eat all kinds of junk, or are you one of the parents who love their children enough to enforce healthy standards and ensure fruits and vegetables are the most common snack?"

It would be fascinating to see this type of research tied in with actual purchase data, such as receipts from supermarkets, so we can get an idea of how much parental opinion translates into food purchase data. It would be even more interesting to go a step further and study actual consumption among children; after all, parents often purchase fruits and vegetables and children pass them by.

Despite the positive interest in increasing produce consumption, Kirsty Nolan, analyst for Canadean, also points to important obstacles. She mentions interest in processed foods because they offer extended shelf-life, and she points out that "product must taste good in order for it to be successful." Providing consistent taste can be a problem for the fresh produce industry. Many fruit items are

inconsistent in taste, and many vegetables — especially the bitter green vegetables thought to be most important in promoting health — are often unappealing to children.

With the fresh-cut explosion, the produce industry made great strides at offering more convenient product. However, fresh product inherently is not as convenient to store as, say, frozen product is to have ready to make a smoothie, and many vegetables are really cooking ingredients.

It is interesting that the researchers place great emphasis on marketing items as one of the recommended "5 A Day." When the "5 A Day" program was just getting started in California back in the late 80s and early 90s, Barney McClure, who was the president at the San Francisco, CA-based ad agency, McClure and Tjerandsen — and an important marketer for the produce industry — praised the program for exactly that specificity. He said, up to that time, everyone knew that produce was good for you but never had a specific guide as to behavior.

With "5 A Day," McClure thought there was a chance to really change behavior because the guidance was now so specific. Though the U.K. stuck with the "5 A Day" concept, the U.S., abandoned the concept back in 2007 to adopt a more conceptual slogan, Fruit & Veggies: More Matters. So the specification of a given serving may not carry the same impact here in the states as it does in the UK.

Of course, the big question may be to what degree marketing matters in selling produce for kids. Certainly a good slogan, or perhaps a Sesame Street character as promoted in the new Eat Brighter! program, can gain some initial attention and even trial. But if the fundamentals of the produce don't appeal to the children, and they don't eat it, what are the odds of getting repeat purchases?

It makes one think that to really have a big impact on public health, we actually

need to have efforts to condition taste buds so that little children get used to eating kale or spinach. In other words, maybe the whole notion that we are supposed to get children to love everything has to be challenged. Maybe the adults have to tell children what is good for them, and then insist they eat it.

**Maybe the whole notion that we are supposed to get children to love everything has to be challenged. Maybe the adults have to tell children what is good for them, and then insist they eat it.**

It is not marketing, it is parenting; and maybe the public-policy approach should be to persuade parents that they need to step up and take responsibility for their children's diet. Serious parents, insisting children eat healthfully, might boost consumption more than any marketing campaign. **pb**

**NOVEMBER 2 - 5, 2014  
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Conference Venue: Bellagio Hotel, Las Vegas, NV  
 Conference Management: Western Growers Association, Newport Beach, CA  
 Phone: (949) 863-1000 • Fax: (949) 863-9028  
 Email: [jtimmering@wga.com](mailto:jtimmering@wga.com)  
 Website: [wganannualmeeting.com](http://wganannualmeeting.com)

**NOVEMBER 5 - 6, 2014  
INTERNATIONAL PINEAPPLE ORGANIZATION'S GLOBAL CONFERENCE**

Conference Venue: DoubleTree by Hilton, Hotel Carairi, San Jose, Costa Rica  
 Conference Management: International Pineapple Organization, Winter Park, FL  
 Phone: (760) 643-1153  
 Email: [wcafan@gmail.com](mailto:wcafan@gmail.com) • Website: [ipineapple.org](http://ipineapple.org)

**DECEMBER 2 - 4, 2014  
THE NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE**

Conference Venue: Jacob K. Javits Center  
 Conference Management: PRODUCE BUSINESS and Eastern Produce Council  
 Phone: (212) 426-2218  
 Email: [info@nyproduceshow.com](mailto:info@nyproduceshow.com)  
 Website: [nyproduceshow.com](http://nyproduceshow.com)

**DECEMBER 4 - 5, 2014  
CONSUMER FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION CONFERENCE**

Conference Venue: Crystal Gateway Marriott, Arlington, VA  
 Conference Management: Partnership for Food Safety Education, Arlington, VA  
 Phone: (202) 220-0651  
 Email: [info@fightbac.org](mailto:info@fightbac.org)  
 Website: [teamfoodsafety.org/2014](http://teamfoodsafety.org/2014)

**JANUARY 7 - 9, 2015  
POTATO EXPO 2015**

Conference Venue: Rosen Shingle Creek, Orlando, FL  
 Conference Management: National Potato Council, Washington, D.C.  
 Phone: (202) 682-9456 • Fax: (202) 682-0333  
 Email: [hollie@nationalpotatocouncil.org](mailto:hollie@nationalpotatocouncil.org)  
 Website: [potato-expo.com](http://potato-expo.com)

**JANUARY 8 - 11, 2015  
SE REGIONAL FRUIT & VEGETABLE CONFERENCE**

Conference Venue: Savannah Int'l Trade and Convention Center, Savannah, GA  
 Conference Management: Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association, LaGrange, GA  
 Phone: (877) 994-3842 • Fax: (706) 883-8215  
 Email: [skilgore@asginfo.net](mailto:skilgore@asginfo.net)  
 Website: [gfva.org](http://gfva.org)

**JANUARY 15 - 16, 2015  
UPPER MIDWEST REGIONAL FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWERS CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW**

Conference Venue: St. Cloud River's Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud, MN  
 Conference Management: Minnesota Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association, Ham Lake, MN  
 Phone: (763) 434-0400  
 Email: [mfvga@msn.com](mailto:mfvga@msn.com) • Website: [mfvga.org](http://mfvga.org)

**JANUARY 21 - 23, 2015  
PMA FIT LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM**

Conference Venue: Omni Dallas Hotel at Park West, Dallas, TX  
 Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE  
 Phone: (302) 738-7100 • Fax: (302) 731-2409  
 Email: [lfisher@pma.com](mailto:lfisher@pma.com) • Website: [pma.com](http://pma.com)

**JANUARY 21 - 23, 2015  
CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA - WORLDS OF HEALTHY FLAVORS LEADERSHIP RETREAT**

Conference Venue: Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, St. Helena, CA  
 Conference Management: Culinary Institute of America, St. Helena, CA  
 Phone: (707) 967-1100  
 Email: [s\\_orem@culinary.edu](mailto:s_orem@culinary.edu) • Website: [ciachef.edu](http://ciachef.edu)

**JANUARY 21 - 23, 2015  
TPIE - TROPICAL PLANT INDUSTRY EXPOSITION**

Conference Venue: Broward Convention Center, Fort Lauderdale, FL  
 Conference Management: Florida Nursery Growers & Landscape Association, Orlando, FL  
 Phone: (407) 295-7994  
 Email: [shaines@fn gla.org](mailto:shaines@fn gla.org) • Website: [fn gla.org](http://fn gla.org)

**JANUARY 25 - 27, 2015  
SWEET POTATO CONVENTION**

Conference Venue: Gaylord Opryland Resort, Nashville, TN  
 Conference Management: Sweet Potato Council, Columbia, SC  
 Phone: (803) 788-7101 • Fax: (803) 788-7101  
 Email: [USSPCouncil@gmail.com](mailto:USSPCouncil@gmail.com)  
 Website: [sweetpotatousa.org](http://sweetpotatousa.org)

**FEBRUARY 4 - 6, 2015  
FRUIT LOGISTICA 2015**

Conference Venue: Berlin Exhibition Fairgrounds, Berlin, Germany  
 Conference Management: Messe Berlin GmbH  
 Phone: +49 (0) 30-3038-0  
 Website: [fruitlogistica.com](http://fruitlogistica.com)

**FEBRUARY 8 - 11, 2015  
NATIONAL GROCERS ASSOCIATION'S SHOW**

Conference Venue: The Mirage, Las Vegas, NV  
 Conference Management: National Grocers Association, Arlington, VA  
 Phone: (703) 516-0700 • Fax: (703) 516-0115  
 Email: [ccunnick@nationalgrocers.org](mailto:ccunnick@nationalgrocers.org)  
 Website: [nationalgrocers.org](http://nationalgrocers.org)

**FEBRUARY 11 - 14, 2015  
BIOFACH 2015**

Conference Venue: Exhibition Centre Nuremberg, Nurnberg, Germany  
 Conference Management: NurnbergMesse GmbH, Nurnberg  
 Phone: +49 (0) 9 11.86 06-89 96  
 Website: [biofach.com](http://biofach.com)

**FEBRUARY 16 - 19, 2015  
NATIONAL WATERMELON CONVENTION 2015**

Conference Venue: La Quinta Resort & Spa, LaQuinta, CA  
 Conference Management: National Watermelon Association, Inc., Lakeland, FL  
 Phone: (863) 619-7575 • Fax: (863) 619-7577  
 Email: [bobm@nwwatermelon.com](mailto:bobm@nwwatermelon.com)  
 Website: [nationalwatermelonassociation.com](http://nationalwatermelonassociation.com)

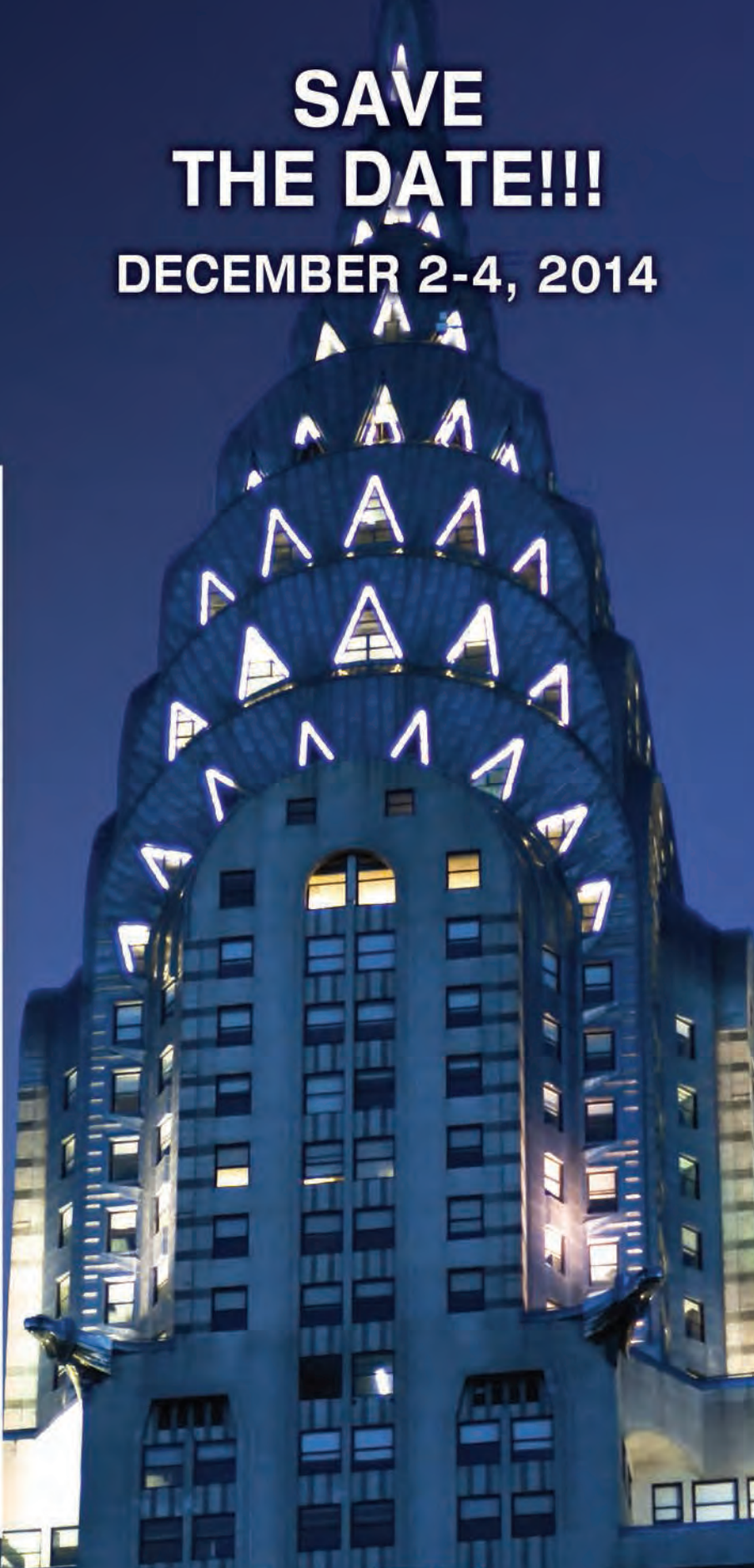


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# World Union Of Wholesale Markets And The Food And Agriculture Organization Unite To Identify Best Practices For Markets And Food Distribution

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 10.16.2014

**M**aria Cavit, secretary general, World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM), based at The Hague in the Netherlands, recently sent the Pundit a note:

*The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM) have agreed to collaborate to identify and disseminate interesting good practices and lessons learnt in any country on improvements in food distribution infrastructure (assembly, wholesale, retail including storage) of any size in urban and peri-urban areas.*

*WUWM and FAO are interested in learning about a wide range of good practices and lessons learnt related to improvements in wholesale and retail markets as well as food storage facilities: new infrastructure, relocations, as well as approaches to solve operational and logistic constraints, integration of small farmers, facilitated access by consumers, improved compliance with rules and regulations, provision of better services, adoption of new technology, etc.*

It sounded like a most interesting project, so we asked Pundit investigator and special projects editor Mira Slott to find out more, and Maria suggested we speak with Manuel Estrada-Nora, chairman of World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM).

**Q: Issues you're addressing sound challenging, complex and far-reaching. Was there a particular trigger that pushed the project forward?**

A: The initial idea was borne in the FAO, conscious of the importance of having efficient fresh food markets that confront the challenge to bring safe, sanitary, healthy and widely accessible food to both local, national and international markets in an efficient and sustainable manner.

For a project like this, FAO approached WUWM with which it has had a long-lasting relationship. WUWM has a market membership spanning five continents, but

we are also a nonprofit association that can take part in this project without the influence of economic interest. One of the main aims of WUWM is to ensure an exchange of information and experience exists in order to improve the management of food wholesale and retail markets everywhere.

**Q: How will the collaboration work exactly? Is this effort unique in breadth and scope as well as in the context of other projects undertaken thus far?**

A: This is a unique collaborative opportunity, and we hope to carry out more of this type of joint initiative in the future, especially with some of the aims of the FAO and the WUWM being so very similar. WUWM is open to collaboration with all multilateral and international institutions sharing this common interest. Indeed, this project also involves the Sustainable Society Network (Imperial College London).

The *modus operandi* is very simple: the project partners will help to identify the best practices and lessons learnt by market management the world over. Those submissions of best practice will be reviewed by an editorial board, and then each will contribute towards the presentation and eventual dissemination of the results, aimed to be a publication of good value to markets the world over.

**Q: What and where are the biggest areas of concern you are bent on tackling? WUWM raised a broad range of complex issues in wholesale and retail markets as well as food storage facilities: new infrastructure, relocations, approaches to solve operational and logistic constraints, integration of small farmers, facilitated access by consumers, improved compliance with rules and regulations, provision of better services, adoption of new technology, etc.**

A: You mention a number of aspects that are very important to turn traditional wholesale markets into real logistical food centers. The companies that operate in one way or another on such food centers (wholesalers, retailers, export-import companies, catering, restaurants suppliers, etc.) have all the serv-

ices and facilities they need to be more efficient and competitive. This has already been achieved by many wholesale markets in, for example, Europe and North America — what we would call the “third-generation wholesale markets”. In other parts of the world, especially Latin America and Asia, food markets are taking very significant steps forward.

It is important that the management of wholesale markets, as with those of any company (either private or state-owned), know exactly where they want to be, having identified their goals for the mid- and long-term. Market management that keeps clear its aims needs to formulate a strategic plan in a systematic, organized and prioritized way, and many of these good practices and learnt lessons will support those efforts.

**Q: Can you provide examples of pressing issues that you believe need to be urgently addressed? Do you have any notable stories to illustrate the value of pursuing this project?**

A: There is a series of key points that should be the priority of every market manager: food safety and hygiene; the transparency of the market in the sense of generating competition among the wholesale operators themselves — and also between the traditional retail sector and the big chains of retail distribution (referring always to fresh product).

Another aspect is to guarantee internal safety inside the market. But this aspect, while being important, is not on its own sufficient. The market must be organized in an efficient way, so that there can be a reduction in operational costs as well as a minimization in food loss and waste. This latter part is one of the great worries of the present time (an FAO report published in 2011 estimated global food loss and waste as being one-third of the food produced for human consumption in mass, or one-quarter as measured in calories). Food wholesale and retail markets can effectively contribute to reducing this amount.

On the other hand, wholesale market management must be conscious that a large





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number of small and medium enterprises are born (and grow-up) in their premises and facilities. Studies show how market development can be a good tool for generating employment of youth as well as ethnic minorities. Food markets are "incubators" of companies and, because of that, all these good practices and learnt lessons may also be seen to contribute to facilitating the operative and ongoing development of these companies.

**Q: Are you targeting particular countries/areas or designating more efforts in certain locations due to need?**

A: I believe that networking and benchmarking will generate interesting ideas for food markets whatever their socio-economic environment or level of development. We could certainly say that those food markets in the worst of conditions, and with major problems, would be the ones to profit most from an initiative like this. Nevertheless, for more than 20 years, I have visited many food markets worldwide, and I can say that in every visit to a wholesale or retail market, I have learned something valuable or new.

**Q: Could you share some insights?**

A: It is clear that the problems facing food markets may vary according to the level of development of the country, their physical location, as well as the amount and nature of the food products they handle daily. For example, in some wholesale markets in Central America, child labor can be a real problem, while in some European markets the problem could be the quality and cost of the telecommunications network. As WUWM has many members from varying socio-economic environments, I consider our participation in this project to be both vital and beneficial for the project, providing access to information from an interesting, diverse and varied membership.

**Q: With so many variables involved, such as economic and political obstacles, how complicated will it be to instigate these changes?**

A: The exchange of information, ongoing communication, and ensuring an eagerness exists to take advantage of good ideas and experiences of third parties is a natural way of introducing good practice and learnt lessons. In WUWM, we do not have the power to impose, but we do have an opportunity to make recommendations. We

would like that both the market authorities and its management (as well as local planners) have the opportunity to benefit from the experiences, solutions and ideas undertaken in other markets of the world.

There is a need to strengthen links between market infrastructure and territorial planning at urban, provincial and metropolitan levels.

**Q: How challenging is it to get managers of wholesale or retail markets to provide meaningful information in the WUWM-FAO Questionnaire?**

A: Of course, the challenge is to obtain as many answers as possible, and with most illustrative and explanatory content possible. We all know that statistically a questionnaire is never answered by 100 percent of addressees. Because of that, we want to transmit to food market managers the importance of this initiative, which we promoted at our conference recently held in London. We mailed to both members as well as to non-member markets. The FAO has also disseminated the questionnaire to market contacts in its network. An editorial board comprising the project partners will ultimately determine those best practices worthy of further attention.

**Q: Will you be incorporating the WUWM concept of "Think Global & Act Local" with regional working groups to disseminate the information and help execute solutions?**

A: It is true that the food industry is globalized and that the international trade of fresh fruits and vegetables is very important. But it is also true that traditional wholesale and retail markets are very linked to the local or national food production, to the growers markets, and to the culture and local customs.

Due to the diversity of social and economic contexts, the WUWM has several regional working groups (Europe, Latin America, Asia-Pacific) so that the markets in these zones of the world may work more intensively on issues of common concern or interest. This allows for the implementation of appropriate ideas or solutions and, yes, "to act locally."

**Q: How will this information be compiled and disseminated to maximize its usefulness through varied supply chains?**

A: A comprehensive publication will be the final product of this project. We are at

present treating these questions of procedure together with the FAO. The network contacts of WUWM are very wide and not only consist of our market membership, but also other markets, institutions, experts, journalists, professors and professionals with whom we keep contact.

**Q: How can U.S. produce industry executives be most helpful in bringing your mission to fruition? In addition to participating in the Questionnaire, what other ways can produce industry executives get involved?**

A: Traders and food industry executives are the real clients of food logistic and commercial complexes. Because of that, it is vital that the owners and management of these food centers understand well their clients — their needs, objectives and achievements. In this way, market managers are "client-oriented," to the mutual benefit of both the management of the market, as well as the food industry/trade.

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Our sense is that rising urban land values are putting markets around the world under pressure. This is because the cost of building a market or of not selling a market is obvious and quantifiable, whereas the benefits are difficult to quantify.

On the one hand, wholesale markets are the distribution centers for independent retailers and restaurants in major cities. These are the institutions that fill cities with life and interest and serve as portals for countless immigrants to begin a journey upward in society.

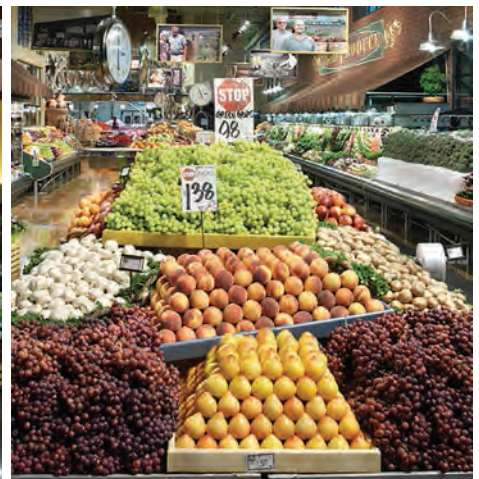
On the other hand, these markets are what make fruit and vegetable production possible. Supermarkets or multiples are a much-prized market, but they only buy what they want — certain sizes, certain grades, certain varieties. The wholesale market merchant is distinct as he sees himself as the agent for the producer and thus undertakes to help the producer sell what he needs to sell, the unusual variety, the off size, the imperfect grade. All over the world, the ability and willingness of market traders to help growers in this way provide the crucial margin that keeps growers profitable.

This project has the potential to help markets thrive, and anything that does that is good not just for market traders but for cities needing life and rural areas needing customers. We wish the WUWM and the FAO the very greatest of success in their collaboration.

# Independent Stores Thrive With Smart Produce Strategies

Service, quality and flexibility allow sole proprietors to take on a unique role in retail.

BY BOB JOHNSON



PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIFIED GROCERS

**E**ven in the age of consolidation and differentiation in the market with a plethora of alternative retail outlets, independent stores and small chains continue to thrive. “Last year the National Grocers Association conducted the first economic impact study of the independent sector, and we found that independent grocers account for 25 percent of supermarket industry sales,” says Peter Larkin, president of the Arlington, VA-based National Grocers Association (NGA).

There is reason to believe that, even as the big get bigger, the independents — defined by the NGA as privately-owned or controlled food retail companies — recovered from the recession,

are healthy as ever and are actually growing.

“Recent PricewaterhouseCoopers analysis of the industry shows the independent channel is growing — especially where they have a unique service model,” says Larkin.

The proposed merger of Safeway and Albertson’s, along with Wal-Mart, Kroger and Publix, would create a produce retailers’ “big four,” which represents more than 40 percent of sales nationwide, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture research.

The Top 4 only accounted for 16 percent of produce sales before a previous wave of mergers and acquisitions in the late 1990s. Then Albertson’s (No. 4) merged with American Stores (No. 2) to create a

nationwide chain; former No. 1 Kroger acquired No. 6 Fred Meyer; and Wal-Mart seized the top spot with meteoric growth of its super stores.

The latest merger season included, before the proposed Safeway-Albertsons merger, Kroger's 2013 purchase of South-

eastern retailer Harris Teeter for \$2.4 billion, Cerberus Capital Management's purchase of five chains including Albertson's, and Spartan Stores purchase of commissary outlet Nash Finch.

But FMS Inc. of Pasadena, MD, which turns accounting information into decision

support tools for retail grocers, found in the survey they conducted for the National Grocers Association that 2012 was a bounce-back year for most independent stores.

Many independent grocers improved their performance compared with the prior year.

## FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE'S VICE PRESIDENT OF FRESH FOODS, RICK STEIN, DISCUSSES PLANS FOR NEWLY CREATED POSITION

Interview conducted by Bob Johnson

**T**his June, the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) chose its first vice president for fresh foods, Rick Stein, previously vice president of retail merchandising and marketing execution for Safeway, where he led marketing activities for the company's Eastern Division — spanning 180 locations and 20,000 employees. Stein began his career at the retail store level, and in his 30-plus-year tenure at Safeway, he rose through the ranks serving in both divisional and corporate roles.

**PB: FMI has generally been known as an association representing supermarket chief executives and their overall concerns of retail operations. Though Perishables is an important component of a supermarket's success, many believe Food Marketing Institute has concentrated mainly on other parts of the store and has encouraged its members seeking Fresh solutions to engage with specific associations in the perishables arenas, such as the Produce Marketing Association, United Fresh and International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association. Why is FMI now emphasizing Fresh?**

Stein: FMI probably had a larger concentration on the center of the store, but we're going to be looking aisle by aisle, because the revenue in the supermarket comes from the entire store. The total store initiative is an important early project, and private brands and fresh foods will be a huge point of differentiation among supermarkets.

**PB: How will FMI avoid duplication with other Perishables associations?**

Stein: I think we can work with the other associations. If one of our members



Rick Stein

is the senior vice president of perishables, quite often that senior vice president doesn't attend all the other industry events. Often when the representative gets back, he or she tries to monetize the trip in terms of how it will increase sales in their area. I will be attending all those events and hope to round out the description.

**PB: Please tell our readers a little about yourself and what you will be doing at FMI. What insights did you learn about Produce when you were at Safeway?**

Stein: When I was at Safeway, produce was a primary point of differentiation. Consumer surveys showed that, after store location, produce is up there in the Top 2 or 3 reasons for choosing a store. Safeway had a big emphasis on Fresh, especially on produce quality and presentation. I've had tremendous research resources at Safeway. Not all of our members have those resources, and I hope to bring insights I learned from them.

**PB: What is your plan for building the Fresh Foods Executive Council at FMI, and how can produce industry leaders get involved?**

Stein: We had success recruiting some top executives on this council. We hope to help them with emerging issues.

**PB: So far, there is an impressive list of FMI members who are on the Fresh Foods Executive Council, including an executive from Giant Eagle as chairman, and top executives from Affiliated Foods, Publix, AWG, Harris Teeter, Longo Brothers Fruit Markets, Wakefern Food Corporation, Heinen's, Hy-Vee, Lowes Foods, Bozzuto's and Wegmans. Have you already identified any key issues that are on the front burner of discussion when you meet and conference with each other?**

Stein: We'll focus on trends in Fresh, especially as it pertains to the Food Safety Modernization Act. We're going to provide information on the menu labeling that is going to be required for prepared fresh foods. I have been involved with the Produce Traceability Initiative, and that is an ongoing important issue. I think sustainability is another very big issue.

**PB: How will your work be conveyed upward to chief executives?**

Stein: Many of the executives on our board will be meeting four times a year. We also have a micro website for fresh foods, and we'll have white papers.

**PB: Will there be any working documents or tools produced from your work that will guide FMI's board in doing more things to help the overall Perishables arena?**

Stein: I'm working on an agreement to do a study on fresh prepared foods. One of the highest priorities is food safety. The Food Safety Modernization Act rules on fresh prepared foods are open for comment now, and we will keep members informed so they can begin to prepare themselves for those final rules when they go into affect next year.

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First, as a group, independents managed to grow sales in the complex marketplace, and second, significantly fewer posted sales losses, according to their 2013 Independent Grocers Financial Survey. The Survey also reports the 2012 fiscal year was a turning point for many independents with net profits bottoming out in 2011 following their multi-year negative slide. The 2012 net profit before taxes among independent grocers improved.

The independent grocery sector is accountable for close to 1 percent of the nation's overall economy and is responsible for generating \$129.5 billion in sales, 944,000 jobs, \$30 billion in wages, and \$27 billion in taxes, according to FMS statistics.

Independents are holding their own — not by trying to compete with Wal-Mart on price, but by offering service, quality and a unique ability to respond to changing needs in their communities.

“The independent operators don't have to follow a script dictated by a home office hundreds, maybe thousands, of miles away,” says Rick Stein, vice president for fresh foods at the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), Arlington, VA. “They can find inspiration in the community in which they serve. They can visit competition and farmers markets to discuss what they are seeing with their very own customers. Then they can implement what they determine is worthwhile on the spot.”

### Service Breeds Loyalty

In the small Washington coastal town of Ocean Park, there is only one produce market serving the local community.

“We don't have anybody big within 35 miles of us,” says Dwayne Smallwood, produce manager at Okie's Thriftway Market, Ocean Park, WA. “There's a Fred Meyer, a Safeway, and a Costco about that far away. Most of our business is summer-oriented tourist trade, and we seem to have good customer loyalty within the community. There is only one other local store with a little produce and a lot of other things.”

There are around 3,500 permanent residents within 20 miles of the store, although a far larger number visits this seaside community during the summer, and its produce store offers a level of service reminiscent of Mayberry, NC, the fictional bucolic town in *The Andy Griffith Show*.

“If a customer wants something, we special order and do everything we can to get it. When it comes in, I call them. I don't think you would get that service from Wal-Mart or



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIFIED GROCERS

**Member-owned Unified Grocers supplies independent stores with marketing help, business services (including insurance), and grocery items (including its Western Family, Springfield, IGA and Natural Directions Organic brands).**

Safeway,” says Smallwood. “We compete on customer service, and on being on top of our cases to make sure everything looks good.”

With this service-oriented approach, Okie's continued to enjoy growth even during the recession.

“We had one year, three years ago, when we were level, but our numbers have been getting stronger every year for 10 years,” says Smallwood.

Okie's Thriftway may be uniquely positioned for intimate customer relations, but many independent stores enjoy strong ties with the communities they serve.

“Independent operators have familiar, strong relationships with their customers,” says FMI's Stein. “That relationship can create loyalty and help reduce the lost sales from fragmentation. The key for the independent operator is to maintain quality above all else and capitalize on their service-oriented relationship with the consumer. Notably, a strong dialogue with the customer equates to loyalty.”

This dialogue begins on the produce department's floor with conversations between customers and knowledgeable staffers, who aim to please.

“Customers are always looking for something different, but they need help to learn how to prepare it as well, which leads to another important piece — an educated, courteous staff,” says Dave Swartz, director of produce at Unified Grocers, Portland,

OR. “All of these items together now make the retailer's operation a destination rather than just another supermarket. Customers who feel appreciated and taken care of often endear themselves to those stores and will go a little further out of their way to shop them.”

Member-owned Unified Grocers supplies independent stores with marketing help, business services (including insurance), and grocery items (including its Western Family, Springfield, IGA and Natural Directions Organic brands).

“At Unified, we have a saying that ‘Our job [as a supplier partner] is not complete until the product goes into the bag at the register.’ Independent retailers need to take the same stance in regard to their customer,” says Swartz. “They should do what they can to educate the retail customer as much as possible on how to use the items they purchase. Chuck's Produce [an independent and local family-owned company based in Vancouver, WA] holds cooking demonstration classes to help educate customers on how to use and prepare items found in their produce departments. New Seasons Market [a grocer out of Portland, OR] has tastings every weekend set up to greet shoppers upon entry to let them sample new and seasonal items.”

Swartz believes competitiveness begins by offering more than just a place to buy food. “The key is for independents to make

Produce an experience within your store, not just a department,” says Swartz.

This strategy kept some relatively high-end independent stores humming during the darkest days of the recession. “Our customers were still shopping during the recession,” says Rosemarie Pacheco, marketing coordinator at Grace’s Marketplace, New York, NY. “During the recession, not a lot of people were throwing thousand-dollar parties, but we weren’t hurt on the staple items.”

Over the past 30 years, Grace’s Marketplace built a loyal clientele looking for quality produce at its two markets in Manhattan and Long Island, its restaurant, and a vibrant catering business.

Vic Savanello, director of produce and floral for Iselin, NJ-based Allegiance Retail Services — a retailer-owned co-op that provides marketing assets, resources, and services to independent retailers — says the most important thing about an independent retailer and the power of the independent supermarket owner is “being able to service customers like a mom and pop corner store.” That description translates into an owner who literally knows what the customers want and is not an absentee-owner.

“People will shop at an independent store because it provides customers with a diverse array of products the community needs,” says Savanello. “When you go into an Allegiance supported-store (Foodtown, D’Agostino, etc.) you know exactly what type of customers the store caters to by the marketing, merchandising and product mixes.” [See related article on PSK Foodtown on page 36.]

### Quality Counts

The experience most likely to keep consumers coming back is finding quality that is a cut above the economy-oriented giants.

“Our customers know when they come here that we stand behind our produce,” says Pacheco. “They know they’re not going to take produce home and have it go bad.”

Some of the consolidated suppliers who aim to bring the advantages of volume buying to independent operation also emphasize quality first.

“We focus on getting quality. We’ll match our quality with anyone,” says Jay Campbell, chief executive of Associated Grocers, Baton Rouge, LA. “We buy from coast to coast and get good quality for the best price.”

Associated supplies produce, groceries

and business services to more than 200 independent stores in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

“The success of independents varies from area to area,” says Campbell. “In our area, we have strong independents. They are well known for having quality produce, meats and deli. The consumer is more aware than many people think. Better quality is usually better looking.”

Independent markets are also generally better positioned than the national chains

to offer local produce by developing relations with a network of area farmers, and it is with the fresh items, in particular, that there are inherent opportunities to impress with quality.

“Thirty-eight percent of consumers identify ‘the quality of fresh foods’ as a reason they will bypass one food retailer and shop at one further away, according to the U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2014,” says FMI’s Stein.

Among the fresh departments, produce



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plays a particularly strong role in creating an identity and generating sales.

“Produce sales account for more than 30 percent of the supermarket dollar coming from all fresh departments, according to the Nielson Perishables Group Fresh Facts, 2013,” says Stein. “In our Power of Produce survey that we presented at FMI Connect in June, it’s clear that produce is a planned purchase for the majority of shoppers. In the survey, we found that ‘pre-tailing,’ or influencing the planners early on, will lead to better sales.”

Quality and variety in the produce department attracts and keeps customers for independent markets. “In attracting new customers with produce, stores have to present the best possible quality they can. That is where it all starts,” says Unified Grocers’ Swartz. “If the quality on the shelf is not good, people will shop elsewhere. Having a wide array of produce items to choose from is the attraction.”

Some independent stores carve out unique identities by offering special varieties of mainstream fruits and vegetables. “Independents can have more specialties in their stores than some of the big chains,” says Damon Francis, senior category manager of produce at Elk Grove Village, IL-based Topco Associates — a member-owned company that supplies a full range of produce, grocery and meat products to independent stores. “Instead of just having a red, green and black seedless grape, they can also carry a Scarlet Royal, or Sweet Celebrity, or a Magenta. They’re all Red seedless, but you can show the consumer the possibilities. There’s also Cotton Candy or Pristine Green Seedless.

“Independents can be creative in their displays,” adds Francis. “It depends on the demographics where they are. We know some of them are creative in their displays, like with little bin displays using high graphic walls. However, you can spruce up the department to attract consumers. Sampling is also an excellent way to create some excitement.”

There are two areas, in particular, in which consumers are looking for markets to take a step up with their produce. “Two big factors that we continue to see rise in the past year are expansion of both local produce and organic produce,” says Swartz. “Product mix of conventional versus organic is drawing closer together, and in stores like Oregon-based Market of Choice, Zupans, and New Seasons Market, we see the mix being among the highest in the region.”

The independents have a built-in advantage over national chains when it comes to developing a supply of produce from local farmers.

“Charlie’s Produce does an excellent job of promoting local produce and the new, larger Portland facility gives them much more room to grow both their organic and local produce programs,” says Swartz. “Nor Cal Produce in West Sacramento is another partner of Unified that is seeing excellent growth in both organic and locally sourced produce. In a recent tour of their facility, I was surprised by the number of items they had on hand both in organic and local produce.”

### Economics

One place where independent stores are at a distinct disadvantage is in the area of economics. Large, consolidated retailers are able to negotiate deals with behemoth suppliers for razor-thin margins that also yield logistical efficiencies.

“There are certain items where our prices are in line, but we don’t buy pallets of apples, strawberries or bananas, so we can’t get down to the same price as the chains,” says Pacheco from Grace’s Marketplace. “We try to sell the best produce we can, but we never gouge our customers.”

Because the largest chains have unmatched economies of scale, low price is not the best strategy for the independents.

“It’s hard,” confesses Reed from Harry’s Supermarket. “I try to maintain fair prices, but I cannot give items away like the chains can. They might order thousands of an item, and I’m ordering 10.”

Independents do best to concentrate on offering better service or better produce, rather than the lowest prices. “It’s a mistake to try to compete on price, but quality will always sell, and sometimes the big guys try to go down the middle and miss on quality,” says Topco’s Francis.

But there are important ways the independents, without trying to compete on price, hold the line on the differential. Most independent stores operate on small margins — the FMS survey found the average profit margin in 2012 to be just 1.65 percent.

The suppliers to the independents, many of them cooperatives, are also able to minimize the cost advantage of the giant chains. “The independents can compete very effectively,” says Campbell of Associated Grocers. “In the case of our customers, many of them independent or family-owned, they compete through cooperative buying. We are buying



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One pricing strategy is to give customers a choice between the best and a more affordable line. “Some independents will have a dual offering,” says Campbell. “They’ll have a premium and a middle quality, so if people are short on money they can make a choice.”

Another strategy for independents is to leave the scramble to be the low-price leader to the big guys. “I don’t think we pay as much attention to price as we do to quality,” says Pacheco. “We carry the best there is that’s available.”

### Smaller Offers Flexibility

The economic advantages major chains have in centralized administration and purchasing can translate into a disadvantage in the ability to respond quickly to changing needs and trends at the local level.

“The ability an independent operator has to parlay their relationship with their consumer, and their ability to be nimble in their merchandising and selection, allows them to capitalize more than ever on the increasing trend of health and wellness in the produce aisle,” says FMI’s Stein.

Because of their relationships, the independent operator is well positioned to tailor a produce program suited to the community.

“With all the emphasis from consumers on health and wellness, the independent operator has the best opportunity to provide solutions for their customer base in the produce section,” says Stein. “The independent operator arguably knows their customer base better than most store operators — often on a first name basis. Independent operators are in touch with local vendors and suppliers that can bring product quickly from field to shelf.”

This advantage in flexibility is demonstrated in virtually every area of the market’s operation.

“I don’t think there is just one area where independents are competing — we’ve seen many compete in a combined number of areas, including price, along with quality, customer service, and through the enhancement of the customer’s shopping experience,” says Larkin.

“The real competitive advantage for independents is understanding the communities they serve and having the ability to be nimble to meet evolving consumer expectations.”

This flexibility is the key to being able to establish a unique identity for the independent store.

“Independents have to differentiate themselves from the competition, which is great because independents are more often the group that can react fastest to change,” says Swarz. “A great example in the Northwest is Chuck’s Produce, a two-store operation in Vancouver, WA. They have made no secret about their commitment to promote produce at their locations. In these smaller footprint stores, the produce department is the first thing you see as you enter and it occupies a large part of the store’s space. Their item selection is second to none, and they have one of the best educated staffs in the region.”

Savanello of Allegiance Retail Services advises independent retailers to find a supplier or co-op that allows the store to run independently and yet have access to resources of a bigger operation. He believes that type of system offers lots of opportunities for success and diversity.

Independent stores also have the opportunity to show a little flair and creativity in how they display the produce.

“The way they merchandise produce is very appealing, and when you are in the stores it just makes you want to buy produce,” says Swarz. “Once you have been in the stores, it is easy to see why they have customers that come from all across the Portland and Southwest Washington region to shop their stores.”

The independent operator can use the ability to move quickly long before the customer reaches the produce display.

“It’s anyone’s game in the food world, but fortunately independent operators are known for being both nimble and competitive,” says FMI’s Stein. “The majority of independent operators I visited influence shoppers early in the planning phase and reach their customers across channels. For instance, we also know from our trends research that the Millennial generation is not necessarily planning their meals and is instead eating by meal occasion.”

This advantage in flexibility extends to being able to more quickly reverse mistakes. “Independent operators can reverse decisions very quickly, if necessary, based on the performance within the store,” says Stein. “If they make a bad decision, they can learn from it immediately and change direction. This ability to be nimble is a great asset.”

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF PSK FOODTOWN

# PSK Foodtown

This retailer fuses independent-style customer service and product variety with large-scale force. **BY MINDY HERMANN**

**F**ruits and vegetables are the king and queen at PSK Foodtown of Bay Ridge, in Brooklyn, NY. A large and colorful produce department greets shoppers with the look and feel of a farmers market. Signage throughout the store highlights the local farms and farmers whose products fill creative displays. The store's weekly circular features 12 produce specials on the front cover, plus additional items in "Be Healthy" (organics) and "Locally Grown" boxes on the same page. Indeed, produce drives sales at this independent store that is part of a 12-store metropolitan and upstate New York chain owned by PSK Supermarkets, Mount Vernon, NY.

## A Competitive Edge

PSK produce departments take sales so seriously that they compete against each other in a chain-wide competition, "In the Game." The contest originated with staff during a PSK University meeting — a quarterly gathering to discuss the upcoming season, success stories, and issues in the stores.

"Each week, I call out four or five items that each produce team has to display and market in a unique way," explains John DiPietro, director of produce. "The competition encourages the produce departments and staff to be creative. They place the featured items in special displays, talk them up to customers, post photos of displays on their store's Facebook page for shoppers to vote on, and vie for top sales." Featured items are priced aggressively to offer the value that PSK Food-

town stores are known for.

## A Unique Structure

PSK enjoys the best of both worlds — the independence of a family-





**John DiPietro, director of produce, works closely with C & S Wholesale Grocers to tailor produce orders for specific Foodtown locations.**



owned chain currently run by third-generation co-presidents Noah and Daniel Katz and the economies of scale and product selection afforded by being part of a large cooperative, Allegiance Retail Services LLC, Iselin, NJ. According to DiPietro, PSK's close working relationship with the executive team at Allegiance — Michael Stolarz, president; Dean Holmquist, vice president, perishables; and Vic Savanello, director, produce and floral — is invaluable.

"We strategize together on marketing programs and talk weekly about promotions for each of our stores," notes DiPietro.

"The power of joining our co-op is that we can tailor requests to any particular group," says Savanello of Allegiance. "For example, I currently have about eight different versions of a produce ad. So for some stores, marketing requires more of a tropical presence and a slightly different retail zone — where retails are lower and gross profits are tighter. In some areas, the store is competing against a ShopRite or a Wal-Mart, so we have to be more

competitive with different items. We can tailor a marketing philosophy (including circulars, in-store POS, product mix and merchandising concepts, etc.) to a member based on their specific needs."

The company also enjoys a long-time relationship with Hatfield, MA-based C & S Wholesale Grocers, which is one of the produce suppliers for Allegiance. PSK tailors its purchases for each Foodtown location. A store in the Bronx, for example, might stock more plantains and avocados while one in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, has more long-stem artichokes and stalks of Brussels sprouts.

"The team at C & S works closely with us to source products that meet the needs of each of our stores," says DiPietro. "With field staff all over the country, C & S gets great deals for us and our customers. The buying team also is happy to source any special items that our shoppers or stores request."

As an independent chain, PSK can supplement its C & S products with local fruits and vegetables. "Our produce managers know best

what is fresh and in season," says DiPietro. "They are encouraged to develop relationships with local farmers, particularly in our upstate New York stores with farms nearby."

The manager at the Cold Spring, NY-based Foodtown, for example, buys heirloom tomatoes for her store from a nearby farm. She decides how much to purchase based on the quality of the items and whether she can offer them at a good price. Stores flag local items with a "Locally Grown" icon in the circular and department, and display posters of the local farmers and farms throughout the store.

PSK Foodtown also differentiates itself by being first to market with new and seasonal items. "At our annual meeting, we identify the best items that we're going to bring in for the coming year," DiPietro explains. "Then we decide when to roll them out, usually a month before other markets do. For example, if other markets begin displaying tote apples in September, we try to put them on the shelves in August. We also were the first to sell mums this fall, at a great price to the shopper."

### Personalizing Service For Customers

Seasonal fruits and vegetables enjoy prominent placement in the store. DiPietro says the store runs a popular Grapemania campaign in August and September with Delano, CA-based Jacov P. Dulcich & Sons Farms, "a grower with whom we have cultivated a close relationship," says DiPietro. "They provide us with premium seedless and globe grapes we feature on the front page of our ad, display in the stores, and, most importantly, price competitively. Over the

past four years, sales of their Pretty Lady grapes rose by 50 percent. The fall season brings apple, squash, pumpkin and mum promotions. PSK's 'Summer in Winter' campaign centers around grapes and stone fruit from South America."

"We strive to provide the world-class personal service, high quality, and value our shoppers expect," notes DiPietro.

PSK encourages all employees to follow an "8-foot rule" that calls for making eye contact and saying hello to any shopper within 8 feet.

The stores go the extra mile for customers, many of whom are on a first-name basis with produce department staff. "If a shopper needs something special, we write it down, call our supplier, and then call the shopper back within 24 hours to say whether or not we can get what they requested," says DiPietro.

PSK Foodtown always gives back to its communities. Its local produce program supports small farmers. The Foodtown in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, participates in Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration, a project that combines community action with private support, by educating children on healthy snacking and providing afterschool program-

ming and snacks. Stores in other locations donated items such as cases of strawberries and cauliflower to area festivals, and crates of pumpkins to classrooms. Not wanting to leave a community without a market, PSK also rebuilt stores in areas that were damaged or destroyed by flooding during Hurricanes Sandy and Irene.

### Moving Heritage Forward

The future points to continued growth and success. Grandfather Paul Katz, the P and K in PSK, entered the grocery business in 1956 with a store on 204th Street in the Bronx. He was later joined by son Sidney, who helped create and expand PSK Supermarkets into the ownership of 12 Foodtown markets in metropolitan and upstate New York. Sidney's sons Noah and Daniel entered the family business more than 20 years ago.

"Noah and Daniel are passionate about the business," explains DiPietro, a 32-year veteran in the produce business who has been with PSK for seven years. "They believe in delivering what matters most to our customers and communities — variety and value — but also have the vision to take PSK Foodtown stores to

the next level."

The Katz brothers are both remodeling existing stores and planning to open new ones in 2015 and 2016. The recently remodeled Foodtown of Bay Ridge, now 18,000 square feet, includes a second floor for organic grocery items, a bigger produce department, larger and improved produce display cases, and wider aisles. The company also moved some of its seasonal featured items outside of the store and onto the front sidewalk in special displays. Health is promoted throughout the store on bulletin boards and in signage.

"Today's food trends are good for PSK and its produce departments," says DiPietro. "People are eating healthier, and that includes having more fruits and vegetables." **pb**

Editor's Note: We thank the Food Marketing Institute for its recommendation of independent members who are recognized for their outstanding produce operation in this series of PRODUCE BUSINESS articles.



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Marketers say they work with chefs to create holiday recipes using carrots and winter vegetables such as cabbage.

# Turning Up The Heat On Winter Produce Sales

Holiday season should generate lots of profits and good cheer to boot. **BY CAROL BAREUTHER**

**T**urn up the heat on produce sales during the cold winter months. It's a ripe time to stimulate sales. After all, the first and fourth quarters represent the lowest produce dollar sales of the year, or more specifically, 2 to 8 percent lower dollars than the second and third quarter sales, according to data supplied by the West Dundee, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group.

"The holiday season is fun and exciting in produce," says Scot Olson, director of produce and floral for Grocery Outlet Inc., a 200-plus-unit chain headquartered in Emeryville, CA. "In January, the theme is healthy eating and New Year's resolutions, and fruits and vegetables remain in the forefront."

At this time of year retailers nationwide can up the ante on register rings by incorporating the season's most iconic fruits and vegetables into holiday-themed promotions.

## CABBAGE

"Green is the real volume mover for us from December to the middle of May, followed by red and savoy," says Jeff Williams, president of William P Hearne Produce, in Wimauma, FL. "We do see a boost in cabbage

sales for Christmas, and some retailers will offer bin sales at this time. We don't suggest cabbage as a loss leader since it's already one of the most affordable vegetables in the produce department."

Christmas is one of the biggest cooking holidays of the year and is a time when customers are interested in recipes. "Americans

eat 8.3 pounds of cabbage annually, so we work with chefs and food editors on recipe development in an effort to show cabbage's versatility," explains Shannon Kyle, part of the sales and marketing team at Torrey Farms, in Elba, NY. "Retailers can offer recipes on cards in-store, in point-of-sale materials, in their ad circulars, on their websites and in email fliers."



Root vegetables play integral roles in this season's winter merchandising.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BABÉ FARMS





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**“We suggest displaying cabbage with other soup ingredients like potatoes and onions. Some retailers will even cut cabbage, carrots, potatoes and onions in-store and wrap them to sell as a fresh soup or stew starter.”**

— Shannon Kyle, Torrey Farms



(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOVE BEETS

Cabbage stars in a New Year’s promotion at Redner’s Markets, a Reading, PA-based chain, which operates 42 warehouse markets and 16 convenience stores in three states. “Cabbage and pork roast is the traditional good luck meal here in Pennsylvania,” says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral. “We use bin displays of cabbage and cross-merchandise in the meat department.”

A post-holiday desire to eat healthfully combined with extreme cold weather in much of the nation makes soup and stew popular in January and February. “Some people like to use cabbage in their beef soup rather than noodles. We suggest displaying cabbage with other soup ingredients like potatoes and onions. Some retailers will even cut cabbage, carrots, potatoes and onions in-store and wrap them to sell as a fresh soup or stew starter,” says Kyle.

Cross-merchandise coleslaw dressing next to cabbage in the week leading up to Super Bowl on February 1. Coleslaw is a popular topper for party-fare such as pulled pork sandwiches.

### CARROTS

“The primary selling season for baby carrots occurs in Q4 and Q1, driven by holiday cooking, social gatherings, and general healthy eating,” explains Carolyn Tao, senior director of marketing for Bolthouse Farms, based in Bakersfield, CA. “Consumption peaks during the following holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s, Super Bowl, and Easter.”

Two-pound bags of baby carrots sell well in December at Grocery Outlet. “Party trays

are big at this time, and those customers who like to make their own enjoy the convenience of a larger bag,” says Olson.

For something different, merchandise multi-color Rainbow Crunch carrots in 1-pound bags of mini-carrots and 2-pound whole carrots with other party tray ingredients.

“This is a sure way to give your customers more options for brightening up their selection of snacks and appetizers,” says Doug McFarland, marketing director at Colorful Harvest, LLC, in Salinas, CA.

Another great cross-merchandising tip is to cross-promote carrots with other items to drive convenient solutions for consumers. “An example might be ‘meal solutions’ or tying carrots in with turkey, potatoes and other meal-building items for the holidays. Or a ‘healthy snacking’ theme consisting of carrots with pre-cut fruit, nuts and other healthy snacks for New Year’s resolutions,” explains Bolthouse’s Tao.

Baby carrots and celery are promoted as dippers in the pre-Super Bowl ad circular at Redner’s Markets, along with fresh fixings for dips, such as guacamole and salsa.

“For Super Bowl party platters, cross-merchandise 2-pound bags of baby carrots, cherry tomatoes and hummus, or merchandise 2-pound bags of baby carrots with celery and ranch dip,” suggests Bolthouse’s Tao.

Super Bowl is one of the largest shipping times of the year for all carrots, according to Bob Borda, vice president of marketing for Grimmway Farms, in Bakersfield, CA.

“We see increased movement on our



**Marketers are providing more merchandising options for retailers with vibrant packaging and display instructions.**

carrot chips and carrot sticks in addition to 2-pound baby carrots,” says Borda.

### CHILEAN FRUITS

“Over the past year, we’ve been working hard to develop new concepts and recipes that can fit different holidays and occasions that take place during the main season for Chilean fruits,” says Karen Brux, North America’s managing director for the Santiago, Chile-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA). Fruits include cherries, grapes, stone fruit and blueberries and the season runs January through April. “We use these (concepts and recipes) primarily for social media, and found this to be a successful tactic for generating exposure for Chilean fruit on retail websites, Facebook pages and blogs.”



**“Displays should highlight the nutritional value of citrus and also include information on taste profiles, as this would be a perfect time to get consumers to try something new like a Moro orange, a Cara Cara Navel, a Pummelo or a Minneola Tangelo.”**

— Julie DeWolf, Sunkist Growers

A good example is the recipe for Chilean cherry, wild rice and quinoa salad that the produce staff at Bristol Farms, a 13-store chain based in Carson, CA, posted on the retailer’s blog site on December 31, 2013.

“For this coming Chilean cherry season, we anticipate harvest will begin around the middle of November and continue through the end of January with favorable volumes and opportunities for good promotions,” says Craig Uchizono, vice president Southern Hemisphere for the Los Angeles, CA-based Giumarra Companies.

Another good retail recipe example is Kin’s Farm Market, a 29-store specialty produce retailer headquartered in Richmond, British Columbia, which posted CFFA’s recipe for Blueberry Chocolate Clusters on its website in February for Valentine’s Day.

#### CITRUS

“We have a big focus on citrus starting just before Christmas with ad prices and in-store specials,” says Randy Bohaty, produce director at B&R Stores, an 18-store chain based in Lincoln, NE, which operates under the Russ’s Markets, Super Saver, Apple Market and Save Best Foods banners.

“To support the long-standing tradition of adding citrus to holiday stockings, we have a number of holiday-themed Navel cartons that are stackable and create fantastic, eye-

catching displays,” explains Julie DeWolf, director of retail marketing for Sunkist Growers, Inc., headquartered in Valencia, CA.

Promote grapefruit in the New Year. “Grapefruit is a wonderful piece of fruit to promote in January when the focus is on healthy eating,” suggests Kim Flores, marketing manager for Seald Sweet International, based in Vero Beach, FL. “The Ruby Red variety from Florida is available into April. Give grapefruit extra real estate by creating a larger or high-visibility endcap

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In order to garner attention for the holiday season, Sunkist's "Share the Holidays" packaging features Navel oranges with blue, red and green gift-wrap bows as well as gift tags and a QR code for consumers to scan and learn more about the product.

display to encourage impulse sales by health-minded customers. Price promote in ad circulars at the same time."

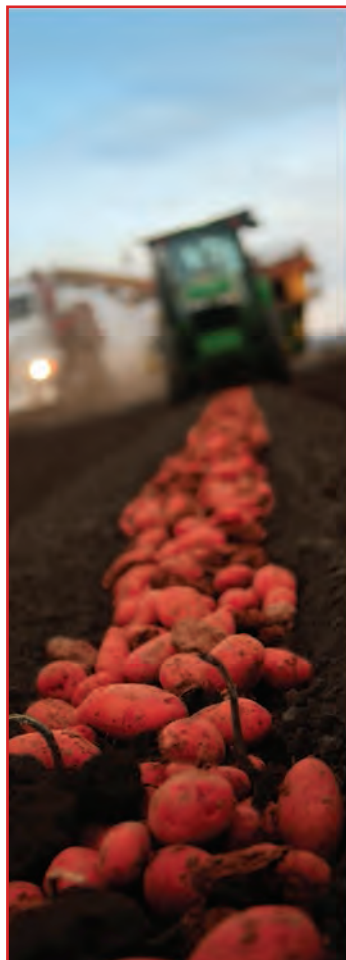
Communicate the vitamin C-rich content of citrus. "Merchandise citrus in the pharmacy section of the store during key months of cold and flu season, rotating varieties through the months of January through April. Displays should highlight the nutritional value of citrus and also include information on taste profiles, as this would be a perfect time to get consumers to try something new like a Moro orange, a Cara Cara Navel, a Pummelo or a Minneola Tangelo,"

says DeWolf.


Tout pink- and red-fleshed citrus for Valentine's Day. "Cut Cara Cara Navels and Blood Oranges in half and cover with plastic wrap so customers can see their interior. Merchandise with strawberries and/or passion fruit for a Valentine's Day theme. Valentine's Day is on a Saturday in 2015, and celebrations tend to be much larger when a holiday falls on the weekend," says Robert

Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles, CA.

Chinese New Year's, set for February 19, 2015, isn't a big produce holiday at B&R




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**“Price promotion isn’t necessary during the holidays, because customers are looking more for quality than price. Also, this time of year tends to be the entry point for many to the category.”**

— Chick Goodman, Coosemans Worldwide

Stores. However, “we do see increased sales of Mandarins at that time among some of our customers, especially stem on fruit,” says Bohaty.

Likewise, “Pumello sales pick up for us for Chinese New Year’s,” says Grocery Outlet’s Olson.

Sunkist Growers offer two Chinese New Year’s themed high graphic 10-pound cartons of Pumellos and Navels. One style is a symbolic, celebratory design that contains Chinese coins and red envelopes, and the other is specific to the animal being celebrated each year. In 2015, the celebrated animal is the sheep.

“Both cartons are easily merchandised as floor stacks, so there is no need to rearrange the shelf planogram, which is convenient and also helps create a large and impressive citrus presence,” says Sunkist’s DeWolf.

#### FRESH HERBS

“Fresh herbs are big sellers because they make holiday meals more special,” says Chick Goodman, the San Francisco, CA-based vice president of sales and marketing for Coosemans Worldwide. “Eighty percent of sage sales for roast turkey occur between November 15 and December 31.”

“Display herbs next to cooking vegetables such as green beans, mushrooms, red peppers and shallots,” recommends Jim Fox, sales



PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTH SHORE GREENHOUSES

director for North Shore Greenhouses, Inc., in Thermal, CA.

The company offers a 24-ct shipper of its Living Herbs-brand Poultry Delights, a clamshell consisting of rosemary, thyme and sage that is perfect for seasoning turkey. North Shore Greenhouses can also provide retailers a 60-ct shipper that holds 24 clamshells of Poultry Delights, as well as 12 each of individually pre-packed clamshells of rosemary, thyme and sage. These shippers can be cross-merchandised in the meat department.

“Price promotion isn’t necessary during the holidays, because customers are looking more for quality than price. Also, this time of year tends to be the entry point for many to the category. However, do offer line-pricing discounts such as \$2.49 or 2/\$5 rather than \$2.99 in January when consumers want full-flavored dishes with less salt and fat. Some 90 percent of U.S. households don’t buy fresh herbs on a regular basis. This is a good way to keep them coming back to the category,” says Coosemans’ Goodman.

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Marketers say that kale chips are a great promotional item for Super Bowl. Walter P. Rawl and Sons introduced its Kale Chip Kit with Chili & Lime Seasoning this spring, followed by two flavored line extensions — Cajun Spice and BBQ — in October. The 12-ounce kits include fresh-cut kale and seasoning packets.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WALTER P. RAWL

In the run up to Super Bowl, “cross-merchandise cilantro with tomatoes for making salsa and chives for twice-baked potato or potato skins,” suggests North Shore’s Fox.

Coosemans offers a Mojito Kit, which scores at many Super Bowl parties. The kit contains fresh mint, sugar cane, lime and a recipe.

#### LEAFY GREENS

“Traditionally, collards have been the ‘good luck’ green for New Year’s, but as kale gathers more notoriety it too has become popular. This is leading growers to offer new kale products.

“We begin the expansion of our Nature’s Greens line in mid-October with a chard and kale blend, followed by our new Burgundy Kale. Heading into November, we will launch our Nature’s Greens Kalettes,” explains Ashley Rawl, vice president of sales, marketing and product development for Walter P. Rawl and Sons, Inc., in Pelion, SC.

In the New Year, and in addition to leafy greens for salads, says Redner’s Markets’ Stiles, “we see other items picking up like Red and Green Swiss Chard, therefore we added more variety to our greens section and will promote for healthful eating.”

“The New Year provides opportunities to merchandise kale, chards, spinach and beet greens in the forefront, as they are easier to introduce to someone new to dark, leafy greens,” explains Brian Cook, director of sales for San Miguel Produce, Inc., in Oxnard, CA.

Kale chips are a great promotional item for Super Bowl. Walter P. Rawl and Sons introduced its Kale Chip Kit with Chili & Lime Seasoning this spring, followed by two flavored line extensions — Cajun Spice and BBQ — in October. The 12-ounce kits include fresh-cut



February 19, 2015 is the Chinese New Year. San Miguel suggests promoting unique Asian green recipes, such as this Baby Bok Choy with lemon-ginger oil, during this holiday.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN MIGUEL

kale and seasoning packets.

Out-of-the-box suggestions for Valentine’s promotions include merchandising bouquets of Rainbow Chard or Rainbow Kale as a romantic dinner fixing, or providing an in-store or in-circular recipe for kale brownies.

“Food is a large part of the Chinese New Year celebration, so increase sales by expanding your Asian Greens set during this time with items such as Gai Lan, Yu Choy, Dau Mue in addition to the regular Shanghai Bok Choy and Junior Bok Choy. Bok Choy is also available in a baby or mini variety,” says San Miguel’s Cook.

#### ONIONS

“Cross-merchandise green peas and pearl onions for traditional holiday dinners,” suggests Melissa’s Schueller.

“Build large displays of yellow, red and white storage onions as these are prime ingredients used on menus throughout the holidays,” says Sherise Jones, marketing director for the Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Committee, based in Parma, ID. “Come

**“People are going to buy potatoes for the holidays, so a deep discount will only erode margins. Start promoting at least two weeks out from the holiday in order to maximize sales.”**

— Seth Pemsler, Idaho Potato Commission

January and February when it's cold, encourage customers to cook with onions. We developed 10 new recipes that put an onion twist on all-American comfort foods like Southern shrimp and grits, sweet and savory caramelized onion waffles, and a lobster salad roll. The recipes are available in printed recipes booklets, or downloadable to print in a form a retailer would like, or by scanning a QR code at point of sale.”

Four-pound bags of sweet onions are the major movers in the winter for Market Fresh Produce, LLC, based in Nixa, MO. “Cross-merchandise onions with tomatoes and avocados in Super Bowl promotions,” suggests Chris Jones, director of procurement.



**MountainKing Potatoes offers this shipper with its restaurant-style marketing to inspire customers looking to recreate their favorite potato side dish.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNTAINKING POTATOES

## POTATOES

“Push varieties like Butter Red, Butter Gold and Butter Russets for the holidays,” says John Pope, vice president of sales and marketing for MountainKing Potatoes, in Houston, TX. “Customers want to impress friends and family and are willing to spend a little extra. To encourage this, place Butter Golds in the weekly ad circular with words like ‘butter flavor and creamy texture — great for mashing,’ then perhaps add a recipe for garlic butter gold mashed potatoes. In addi-

tion, display bins and boxes of varietal potatoes prominently in order to call attention as well as cross-merchandise in the meat department next to holiday hams or turkeys.”

Promote potatoes to remind customers to buy rather than positioning as a loss leader. “People are going to buy potatoes for the holidays, so a deep discount will only erode margins,” explains Seth Pemsler, vice president of retail for the Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), in Eagle, ID. “Start promoting at least two weeks out from the



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Some marketers suggest retailers try new twists on familiar favorites for in-store marketing, such as turkey stuffing with parsley root or celery root. Featuring root vegetables in retail cooking school classes is also suggested.

holiday in order to maximize sales.”

Snacking becomes a primary reason for potato consumption for the Super Bowl. “Retailers can promote our Steakhouse Bakers for potato skins and Steakhouse Roasters for dipping in ranch dressing,” suggests MountainKing’s Pope.

The IPC will expand its annual Potato

Lover’s Month (PLM) display contest from its traditional scheduled time of February to two months, January 15 to March 15 in 2015. More than 5,000 stores nationwide participated last year.

“These dates now encompass the Super Bowl holiday. This is a great occasion to promote Idaho potatoes along with our PLM

(produce lifecycle management) tie-in partner Hormel Real Bacon Bits,” says IPC’s Pemsler.

#### ROOT VEGETABLES

“We sell so much horseradish root for Hanukkah and Christmas — more than 50 percent of our annual sales — so we give it its own display,” says Redner’s Market’s Stiles

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**“During the holidays, we like to run special in-store demos featuring seasonal recipes that allow consumers to try our beets, as well as provide them with creative recipes they can incorporate into their holiday meals.”**

— *Natasha Shapiro, Love Beets Global*

“The days of only mashed potatoes with butter and sweet potatoes with sugar has gone by the wayside,” says Karen Caplan, president of Frieda’s Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. “Today, parsnips, turnips and celery root are picking up in interest. If I were a retailer with a registered dietitian in store, I’d suggest creating a roasted vegetable center display, highlighting each one, and telling customers how to roast.”

There are so many types of root vegetables that can be featured. “For example, we have celery root, parsley root with and without tops, nine types of radishes and three types of beets,” explains Ande Manos, in marketing and new business development at Babé Farms, in Santa Maria, CA. “To familiarize customers, offer taste-testing stations, in-store video loops demonstrating preparation techniques and recipes, suggestions of how to branch out and try new twists on familiar favorites, such as turkey stuffing with parsley root or celery root, and feature root vegetables in retail cooking school classes.”

There is little preparation required for marinated baby beets and pre-cooked beets marketed under the Love Beets-brand by Love Beets Global, based in Vineland, NJ. “During the holidays, we like to run special in-store demos featuring seasonal recipes that allow consumers to try our beets, as well as provide them with creative recipes they can incorporate into their holiday meals,” says marketing manager, Natasha Shapiro.

The company’s website offers a number of festive red-hued recipes that can be featured for Christmas parties or romantic at-home Valentine’s Day dinners. These include Beets and Melted Brie on Toast; Beet, Asparagus

and Smoked Salmon Salad; and even a Spiced Beet Pie.

#### SWEET POTATOES

“Sweet Potato latkes are a sweet and colorful twist on a Hanukkah classic,” says Jason Stemm, spokesman for the Benson, NC-based North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission (NCSPC). “Sweet potatoes (baked and mashed) can also be used in holiday baking as a substitute for pumpkin or bananas.”

“Bring marshmallows and brown sugar from the grocery department into produce to cross-promote with sweet potatoes. During the holidays, we will offer our customers promo-

tional pricing on 40-pound box U.S. No. 1 sweet potatoes to help drive additional retail sales,” says Market Fresh Produce’s Cook.

Keep sweet potatoes on weekly grocery lists in the New Year by offering customers new usage ideas. “Sweet potato fries can be paired with interesting dipping sauces and sweet potato skins loaded with favorite toppings like bacon, cheese and sour cream to elevate the big-game fare. Another fun twist is Sweet Potato Spring Rolls for Chinese New Year’s celebrations. Sweet potato consumption is on the rise, and getting shoppers to consider them a staple in meal planning has been driven by offering different and healthier options for preparation,” says Stemm. **pb**



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North America is opening avenues for Central America to supply a more diversified and larger volume of tropical, Oriental, greenhouse and conventional vegetables.

# Great Vegetable Opportunities Abound In Central America

Production developments in Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama present fresh sourcing potential. **BY GILL MCSHANE**

**G**rowing consumption of an ever-wider range of vegetables in North America is opening up avenues for Central America to supply a more diversified and larger volume of tropical, Oriental, greenhouse and conventional vegetables.

Tropical roots, in particular, are gaining traction as Asian and Latino communities seek nostalgic comfort food from their homelands — a trend, which is catching on among the North American population at large.

“Tropical roots are gaining prominence on the table,” says Peter Liefermann, sales director for Brooks Tropicals in Homestead, FL. “Their often exotic tastes build great foundations for the side dishes paired with turkey, ham and duck.”

According to Mary Ostlund, Brooks Tropicals’ marketing director, product-wise, calabaza (a large squash) is fast-becoming a favorite among North Americans thanks to its nutritional value, while boniato (a white sweet potato) can easily replace regular potatoes. “Discovering the nutty taste of boniatos in a dish is a delight,” says Ostlund.

The pear-shaped chayote (similar to zucchini) represents another low-calorie and nutritious vegetable that can be cooked almost in as many different ways as boniato.

Ginger has also emerged as a must-have ingredient for adventurous palates.

Brooks Tropicals sees tropical roots from Central America as a growing market. The



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firm already imports plantains, malanga, yams, eddos, calabaza, chayote and yuca from Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

“Cold weather and holidays bring cravings for soups, stews, casseroles, sides of down-to-earth vegetables and you can’t get more down

to earth than root vegetables,” says Ostlund.

“For many consumers, their comfort foods are malanga, yuca, true yams, eddos and boniatos. Asian and Latino consumers can easily describe the taste of dishes made with these vegetables. Very few North Ameri-

cans can do the same for Russet potatoes — that’s how important these vegetables are to these consumers,” she says.

Luis Utrera, production manager of Guatemalan mango supplier El Tintero, agrees North America’s ethnic diversity is a key driver of trade from regions like Central America, which have the right climate to grow traditional and exotic produce, not to mention the high quality and food safety standards demanded by the market.

“North American supermarkets promote Central American fruits and vegetables to satisfy a captive market, which is comprised of many ethnic groups that demand and are prepared to buy nostalgic products which they identify with their ancestral roots,” says Utrera.

But aside from population diversification, Ostlund says rising interest among the overall public means tropical roots are starting to enter the mainstream market. “Many tropical roots are in the ‘early adopter’ stage, and we’ve seen from mangos, avocados and papayas how it can take off from there,” she notes.

To satisfy the growing demand, country suppliers like Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama are all positioning themselves to export greater volumes of tropical roots to North America, with some even shifting away from traditional pineapple and melon production.

“In Costa Rica the medium to small pineapple growers have realized they can’t compete in the fresh market, so they’ve gone back to root vegetable production like yuca,” says Mauro Suazo, president and chief executive of Suazo Agro in Pompano Beach, FL.

Suazo says by switching to pineapples in the first place the growers have actually created demand for root vegetables, particularly items like chayote. “There is demand in the United States; Costa Rica can comply with the phytosanitary regulations, so there are no constraints on trade.”

With that in mind, and as consumers become more aware of yuca, calabaza, malanga and other tropical roots, Suazo believes the industry will grow in Costa Rica and continue to expand in Nicaragua, where suppliers previously exported via neighboring Costa Rica.

“The Nicaraguans have created their own demand for Nicaraguan roots, so they’re entering the market with their own brand,” says Suazo. “Quality is also coming up to par with other country suppliers.”

In addition, Suazo says a tropical roots sector is emerging in Panama, where squash, yuca and plantain are substituting lost melon

## TIME TO SHAKE UP THE MELON OFFER

**M**elon and watermelon imports from Central America may have been strained volume-wise, but opportunities still remain for North American retailers to procure new varieties that will continue to inspire consumers to make repeat purchases for years to come.

“Melon volume and consumption have hit a plateau,” explains Jim Graves of import specialist Fresh Quest in Plantation, FL. “What’s happening is North America is looking for new varieties. The trade is changing and wants something different.”

Graves says North American retailers now want different flavors, colors and textures for their melon range. To that end, Fresh Quest is looking to diversify its offer by testing all varieties at its Guatemalan production base.

“We are continuing to test a number of different varieties,” he explains. “Cantaloupes and honeydews have been the mainstay of the market, so it’s about education and getting people to try different varieties. But if retailers don’t bring them in, then consumers won’t see them.”

Fresh Quest has already reaped new varietal success by sourcing Caribbean Gold — a new-generation cantaloupe melon bred by a Netherlands seed developer, Rijk Zwaan. “Fresh Quest was one of the first companies to develop the variety for the U.S. market, but everyone is bringing it in right now,” says Graves. “Eventually, there will be another melon like Caribbean Gold that takes hold of the market. Rijk Zwaan is continuing to offer new varieties,” says Graves.

Fresh Quest also supplies Honeymoon Galias to North America as it seeks to find varieties with the most potential for the market. “We’ve increased our Honeymoon Galia volume from 10 loads per week to 25 loads,” says Graves. “We’re trying to push yellow honeydews, too. Canada seems to be more favorable to yellow



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRESH QUEST

melons than the U.S. at the moment.”

Melons and watermelons continue to top the list of imported produce items from Central America. With the decline in production in Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua and Honduras, Guatemala has emerged as the leading supplier.

“Guatemalan melons and watermelons continue to be the best in the market,” says Mauro Suazo of Pompano Beach, FL-based Suazo Agro. “They compete very well in the United States, and they also go to Canada and Europe. The industry continues to thrive and will grow bigger this year. Some 95 percent of the melons and watermelons grown in Guatemala end up in the United States.”

Graves agrees Guatemala is a well-respected melon supplier, adding the country has the right growing season, climate and logistics. “Honduras is definitely an equal competitor but it overlaps later in the season, and Costa Rica is less now than it ever was,” he says.

“We used to have a farm in Honduras for a number of years, but we shut it down two years ago. We are now 100 percent out of Guatemala because of the food safety, logistics and government support offered.”

pb



## GUATEMALA TARGETS MANGO SHORTAGES

Guatemala's flourishing mango sector is looking to fill windows of low availability in North America by extending its season with early and late varieties.

The Central American nation currently supplies from March to May and competes with Mexico — North America's biggest mango source. During the last few years, however, Guatemala has focused on diversifying its varieties to help boost demand and prices globally.

"The trend has been toward producing early varieties like Ataulfo and also late varieties such as Kent and Keitt to prolong the season and take advantage of windows of short supply," explains Luis Utrera, production manager of El Tintero, a mango grower/exporter in Guatemala.

Utrera says Tommy Atkins currently accounts for 90 percent of Guatemala's mango exports. Ataulfo is now the second most important variety, thanks to an acceleration in production during the last few years through new orchards and

the replanting of existing sites.

In the meantime, Guatemala has made significant steps toward offering the market value-added mangos. "Parallel to the growth in production in the last decade there has been an emphasis on the processing industry to obtain pulps and frozen pieces, as well as ready-to-eat fresh-cut fruit from surplus production."

With fresh exports in the region of 18,000 tons per season, Guatemala is currently the fifth-largest mango exporter to North America, after Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru. Nicaragua also occupies a small niche.

"Guatemala and Nicaragua are both thriving in mangos — they have great quality and continue to grow," says Mauro Suazo, chief executive and president of Suazo Agro in Pompano Beach, FL. "Nicaragua can supply the United States during February and through May, before Mexico enters the market, so they have a little niche." **pb**

Plantation, FL-based Fresh Quest, which sources melons and vegetables from Guatemala. "Okra has worked well and it's a vegetable that's in demand."

Suazo claims Honduras is currently the okra giant of Central America. "Honduras is the king of the fresh okra market," he says. "The country is producing a lot because independent producers of melons and watermelons have shifted to okra."

In general, central Honduras has made major increases in the production of Oriental vegetables, as well as roots like calabaza, squash and even cucumbers, according to Suazo. Going forward, he believes the sector has the potential to expand so long as cooling improvements are made.

"There's a thriving industry of greenhouses and shade houses in Honduras, and an emerging trade with retailers and wholesalers," says Suazo. "Eighty to 90 percent of the okra produced in the country is consumed fresh in the United States, and some volume is beginning to reach Europe by air.

"But if Honduran exporters paid a little bit more attention to their cooling and post-harvest techniques, they could probably take

away the Oriental vegetable market from the Dominican Republic. They have good varieties and good harvesting practices — they just need to improve cooling."

### Diversification For Conventional Veg

In terms of conventional vegetables like snow peas, sweet peas and fresh beans, Guatemala continues to be the strongest supplier in Central America by far. "They are mostly coming to the U.S. as fresh but some are frozen and volume is heading to the United Kingdom and Europe too," says Suazo.

Graves agrees Guatemala is the key produce supplier in Central America in view of its long season. "Central America is very important for the North American market," he points out. "Guatemala can do almost the full Central American season from November to May, when there is no local production in North America; it's winter here and summer there."

As such, there are definitely opportunities to source more produce from Guatemala, according to Graves, which is why Fresh Quest is keen to explore further opportunities for vegetables in the country.

Currently, the company handles mainly

bulk volumes of watermelons, yellow honeydew melons, Honeymoon Galias and cantaloupes. At times, it imports vegetables such as asparagus from Peru, plus leeks, okra, French beans and sugar snaps from Guatemala.

"We'd love to diversify," says Graves. "We're looking into vegetables, but on a more contractual basis. We are looking to do more French beans from Guatemala because they're in demand, so we're doing more trials at the moment."

Because of Guatemala's highlands, Suazo claims the nation could produce a wide selection of vegetables, including artichokes, celery and lettuce. However, so far, he says there has been no major production push, although one local company, Cuatro Pinos, is growing some items.

"Fresh Quest is keen to look into the potential for leeks in Guatemala and is already seriously considering asparagus. Central American Produce brings in Guatemalan leeks on a consistent basis," says Graves.

"There's big potential for asparagus because unlike Peru, it doesn't have to be fumigated on arrival in the United States. If you could perfect production you wouldn't have to worry about shelf life. But asparagus is more difficult to grow in Guatemala, so we're trying to find the best places."

### Greenhouse Veggies Boom In Guatemala

Greenhouse vegetable production, meanwhile, is taking off in Guatemala and presenting more opportunities for North America to source quality salad items from a country supplier that has invested great efforts in its quality and food safety management systems.

"The greenhouse industry for colored bell peppers and tomatoes is booming in Guatemala and is now able to compete with other Central American greenhouse companies, as well as Mexico," says Suazo.

"The market is very happy with the quality and variety. The proximity to the market means Guatemala can supply all major U.S. eastern areas, including Florida, Philadelphia, and New York, among others. Mexico supplies the West Coast from Sinaloa."

Graves says Fresh Quest is definitely keen to look into the potential of sourcing offshore cucumbers from suppliers like Guatemala. Further ahead, Suazo suggests Panama could be another source for greenhouse vegetables since the first hydroponic greenhouses are starting to emerge. **pb**



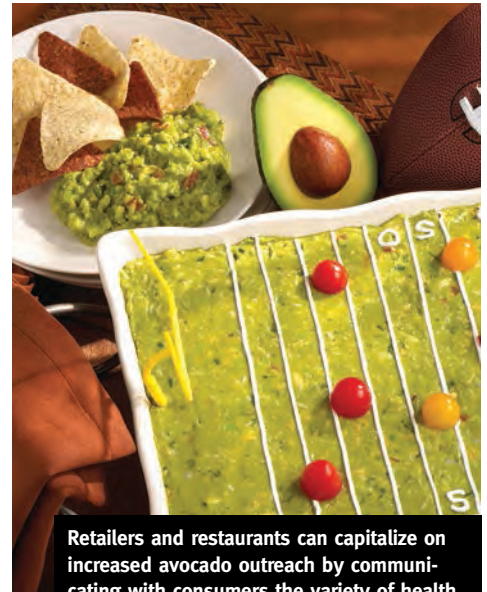
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(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBINSON FRESH AND HASS AVOCADO BOARD



Retailers and restaurants can capitalize on increased avocado outreach by communicating with consumers the variety of health benefits avocados offer and demonstrating how they can be utilized in a variety of ways.

# Mexican Avocados Rise As Produce Champions

Nowadays these luscious fruits are scoring points year-round. **BY LINDA BROCKMAN**

**W**ith football season upon us, it may be easy for retail produce managers to sell bags of avocados, along with chips and salsa. But the main ingredient in traditional game-day guacamole has become a popular fruit year-round among consumers who see it as a tasty and healthful addition to a salad, sandwich, or simply cut and scooped out with a spoon.

Avocados from Mexico (AFM), with more than 1.3 billion pounds of imports and almost 70 percent marketshare, is leading the way. The Dallas-based Avocados from Mexico product is both the bestselling brand of avocados in the United States and the name of the promotion board focused on increasing consumption of fresh Hass avocados from Mexico.

“As the market leader, we want to ensure we drive category growth for years to come,” says Maggie Bezar Hall, AFM’s vice president of trade and promotion. “One way we are encouraging growth is through consumer avocado education and product versatility in core uses.”

Growers and marketing associations have

an abundance of information for retailers on their websites. The Avocados from Mexico website provides ripening and nutritional information for consumers, storage, promotion and display tips for retail stores, as well as recipes and support materials (table tents, promotional posters, etc.) for restaurants.

Rob Wedin, vice president of fresh sales and marketing for Santa Paula, CA-based Calavo Growers Inc., says the future for avocados looks bright. “Significantly increasing demand for avocados continues in earnest. Consumers are zeroing in on fun foods that are healthy. Avocados lead that list. Also, consumers are expanding their menus. They are realizing how diverse avocados are.”

Avocados from Mexico are Calavo’s largest item, selling “in the range of 60 percent or more of the avocados in the U.S. and Canada,” says Wedin.

“In the fresh business segment, Calavo profitably managed sales and marketing of avocados sourced from Mexico to register substantial year-over-year revenue and gross margin improvement,” says Lee E. Cole, chairman, president and chief executive of

Calavo, the leading seller of Avocados from Mexico. “Our strong, profitable supply of fresh avocados from Mexico during the third quarter enabled the company to offset this year’s small California harvest without missing a beat.”

Even with recently rising prices, AFM does not appear to be feeling a negative effect. “FOB carton prices over the last nine months have run 20 percent higher than the same period in 2013. The same FOB prices have been only five percent higher than 2012.”

Still, Wedin says, “avocado popularity continues to grow at a steady rate. Volumes available in the market have grown every other year in the recent past. Volume was not higher in 2014, so prices were higher.”

Calavo processes, packages and distributes avocados and other fruits to retailers and restaurants worldwide. “This year, there was a 20 percent increase in avocado sales volume compared to last year,” says Wedin, who predicts Calavo’s sales of Mexican avocados will increase by 25 to 30 percent in the coming year.

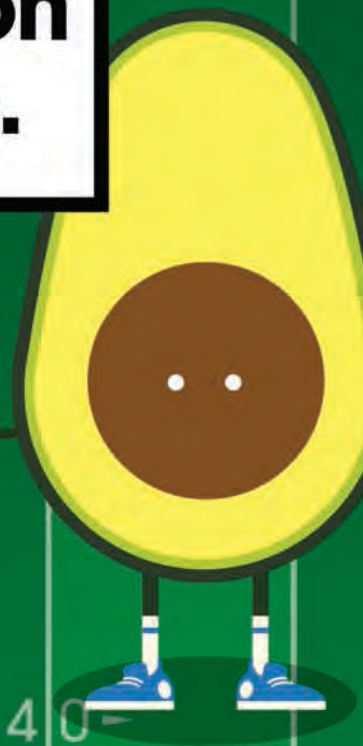
The advantage comes from a year-round availability. “Mexico is the only country of



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origin with four blooms that allow us to supply quality fresh Hass avocados year round,” says Hall. The season for Avocados from Mexico began on July 1 this year and will go year-round to June 30, 2015.

Hass avocado production in Mexico is concentrated in the state of Michoacán, southwest of Mexico City. “The area’s rich volcanic soil spread over a range of different elevations allows for continuous avocado production,” says Hall.

Retailers and restaurants can capitalize on increased avocado outreach by communicating with consumers the variety of health benefits avocados offer and demonstrating how they can be utilized in a variety of ways, say growers.

### More Than Guac

Most operators say avocados are used on a wide variety of items, from garnish in soup, as a main ingredient in salads, mixed into omelets, or as toppings for burgers and pizza. Chefs are creative with uses for the avocado.

According to a study done by Chicago, IL-based Technomic, a food industry research company, avocados are posting large gains in

usage among casual chains and upscale restaurants — with guacamole being the most popular. The study reported: “Flavor, authenticity and versatility drive casual dining operators usage of avocados as an ingredient in many dishes . . . The ability of avocados to be paired with many different flavors has really impacted menus, causing a proliferation of new applications.”

Avocados sourced from Mexico are primarily where Mission Produce gets its Hass variety. “We feel the greatest areas of potential growth may be foodservice, organics and bagged fruit,” says Dave Austin, director of marketing for Oxnard, CA-based Mission Produce.

In the produce section, AFM’s Hall believes the right display can drive customers to buy. “In the shopping decision hierarchy, avocados are primarily bought based on display activity with eye-catching displays and promotions.”

“The best bet for retailers trying to increase avocado sales is to offer consumers choices,” says Wedin. “Avocados sold in bags convert a purchase of one to two bulk avocados into a purchase of four to six.”

The sizing percentages vary from large/medium to medium/small two to three times per year. “When retailers display two sizes, they are in position to promote the more plentiful size range,” says Calavo’s Wedin.

In order to encourage bagged sales among consumers, avocado packer, Riverside, CA-based Index Fresh features three “AvoBuddies” on in-store merchandising and ads to help sell its avocado brand, AvoTerro. Chef Charlotte shows consumers how to add avocados to meals; Muscle Marv informs consumers about the avocado’s health benefits; and Connie Convenience teaches them how to select and prepare ripe avocados.

Robinson Fresh and its Green Giant Fresh brand offer consumers avocados in 3-, 4- and 5-count mesh bags as well as 3-count stand-up pouches, which include a variety of recipes and usage tips, explains Jose Rossignoli, category general manager at Eden Prairie, MN-based Robinson Fresh.

“A ripe, ready-to-eat avocado motivates consumer purchases more than any other vehicle,” says Wedin. “This takes advantage of avocado demand and also reduces damage caused by shoppers squeezing as they hunt for a ripe avocados.”

Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, seafood and floral for Parsippany, NJ-based Kings Food Markets, remembers when “customers would buy them green and then complain they didn’t ripen up. Our ripe program helps customers pick out fruit better. Our avocados are shipped green and then we have someone ripen them, so they are perfectly ripe in-store.”

“The most important thing a retailer can do, in terms of merchandising, is to display avocados immediately adjacent to tomatoes,” says Mission Produce’s Austin. “Granted, the larger the display the better, but placing avocados next to tomatoes creates a beautiful and noticeable color-break. Plus, tomatoes and avocados are often used in the same recipes, and since they are ethylene-producers, they help ripen fruit.

### Getting Sauced

Avocado advocates say guacamole is a nutrient-dense alternative to the empty calories found in other snack foods. The Aztecs were the first to take the huacatl — avocado in their dialect — and make what they called huacamolli (avocado sauce).

That tradition continues in living rooms and sports bars, especially during football season and holidays such as Cinco de Mayo, New Year’s, Memorial Day, Fourth of July and



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Labor Day.

Rossignoli advises retailers to place a display in the chip aisle or near the beer cooler, and cross-merchandise avocados with guacamole tie-ins like tomatoes, onions, and chili peppers.

At Kings, Kneeland places bags of avocados near fresh tomatoes. Avocados are also used by Kings' deli in salads and sandwiches.

Robinson Fresh reports consistent sales throughout the year, but the two weeks when sales increase significantly is the week before the Super Bowl and Cinco de Mayo. "We saw sales volume boosts of 59 percent and 49 percent, respectively, and these trends are likely to continue in the years to come," says Rossignoli.

Through December, Avocados from Mexico's "Hungry for Football" promotion will run TV ads during college football games. AFM will also utilize social media, contests and deals to entice customers. For example, a customer buying three avocados will get a free can of Ro\*Tel diced tomatoes.

Green Giant Fresh is part of the Box Tops for Education loyalty program, encouraging consumers to buy participating products and

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DO YOU HAVE AN ORIGINAL AVOCADO RECIPE THAT FUELS YOUR HEALTHY LIFESTYLE?

(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF HASS AVOCADO BOARD

**"A fresh avocado contains naturally good fat and is cholesterol-free. 'Love One Today' is a non-branded nutrition message that appeals to consumers and gives them a call to action."**

—Emiliano Escobedo, Hass Avocado Board

collect logos to help raise funds for schools. According to Box Tops for Education 2014 research, 40 million households clip box tops, reports Rossignoli.

Tapping into the emotional connection between the consumer and the pleasure of food indulgence, the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board (HAB), which represents Hass varieties from all over the world, is promoting avocados with its Love One Today campaign, says Emiliano Escobedo, HAB's executive director.

"A fresh avocado contains naturally good fat and is cholesterol-free. 'Love One Today' is a non-branded nutrition message that appeals to consumers and gives them a call to action. People love the creamy texture and its nutritional benefits give them permission to love avocados," says Escobedo. To raise awareness, retailers can feature the Love One Today logo in point of sale materials.

#### Advocating Avocados

The avocado is getting more attention for its health benefits. "It supplies nutrients that contribute to healthy skin, teeth, bones, and it helps with muscle development and cardio-

vascular function," says Eduardo Serena, marketing director for APEAM, the Michoacán, Mexico-based association of Mexican avocado growers and packers. Eating avocados is said to also help lower cholesterol and regulate blood sugar.

"Retailers know avocados are good for you, but they often don't know why," says Hall. Registered dietician Barbara Ruhs helps AFM create user-friendly information retailers can pass to consumers through signage, newsletters and websites.

Stats about good fats from the USDA back up these claims. So do nutritionists and fitness experts. Keri Gans, M.S., R.D., author of *The Small Change Diet*, loves the avocado for its vitamin B to relieve stress, and its healthful, monounsaturated fats and fiber. On HAB's Love One Today website, the avocado also gets passing grades from celebrity trainer and nutrition expert Harley Pasternak. In his book, *The 4-Day Diet*, Dr. Ian K. Smith lists one-half small avocado as a healthful, low-calorie snack and puts it in his weight-loss recipes.

Wedin has been working with avocados for 41 years and the romance is still going strong. "I eat about three avocado halves a day. One half in the morning, another at lunch, and sometimes I'll make guacamole. The good fats in the avocado helps keep you feeling full and satisfied. I'm a calorie counter so that helps me from snacking on things I shouldn't be snacking on."

"Our current focus is to capitalize on the recent popularity of bagged fruit, using Instant Redeemable Coupons (i.e. IRC's)," says Mission Produce's Austin. "We are starting this effort by crossing avocados with Frontera's guacamole mix, which we distribute as well, but have plans to cross with many other items — both produce and non-produce — in the future." **pb**

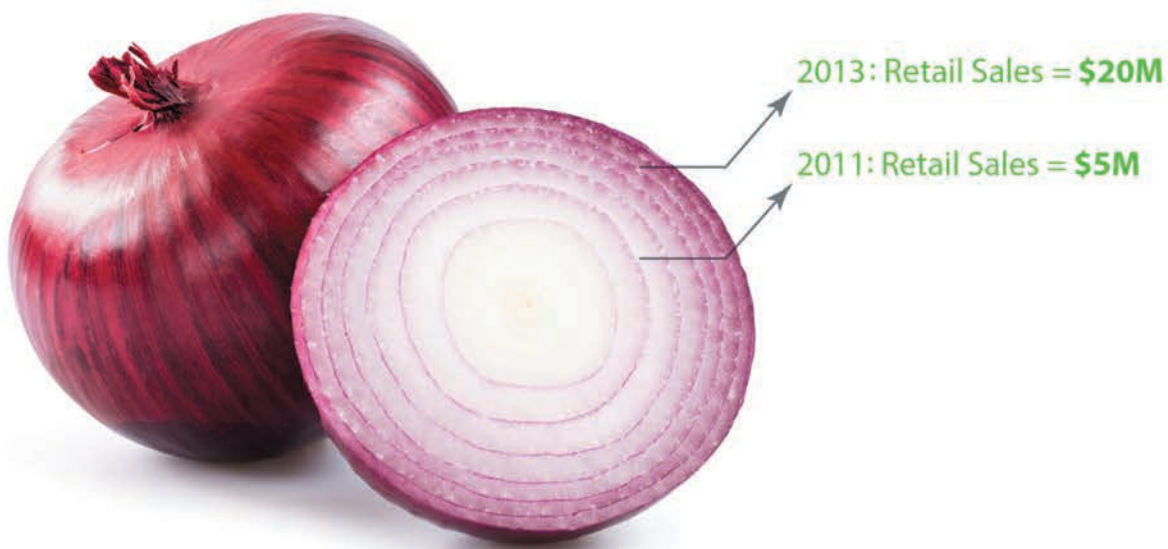
Side Note

## AGUACATES DE MÉXICO

Another segment of the population Avocados from Mexico (AFM) is looking to target is "the ever-evolving Hispanic consumers," says Maggie Bezart Hall, AFM's vice president of trade and promotion. "We are planning authentic, robust Hispanic promotions to reach the 'nueva Latina' as an influencer that is important to the category."

AFM's newly revamped websites in English and Spanish will launch prior to the end of 2014.

Beyond Central America, the U.S. and Canada, AFM is looking to expand its reach to Hong Kong and mainland China, as an extension of its Asia program already established in Japan, says Eduardo Serena, marketing director for APEAM, the Michoacán, Mexico-based association of Mexican avocado growers and packers. "We hope to diversify our international presence to take this amazing product beyond the initial markets." **pb**



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Sweet onions account for nearly a third of total onion category sales and are a staple in consumers' kitchens, so year-round availability is crucial.

# Staying Sweet All Year Long

Imports from south of the border bring continuous sales for sweet onions throughout the winter. **BY ANTHONY STOECKERT**

**W**inter cooking is all about holiday celebrations and hearty dishes such as soups, stews and roasts. Those dishes wouldn't be complete without sweet onions, and this is the time of year for imported onions from south of the border.

While the sweet onions sold during the spring and summer are grown in the U.S., the climate south of the border allows for sweet onions to be sold in the fall and winter — when domestic varieties, such as the Vidalia and Walla Walla, aren't available. It's important for produce departments to carry sweet varieties because shoppers want them year-round.

"Sweet onions account for nearly a third of total onion category sales, and are a staple in consumers' kitchens," says Adam Brady, director of marketing for Shuman Produce based in Reidsville, GA. "They're valued for their mild, sweet flavor and inherent versatility, making them a great choice in so many recipes. Consumers continue to support the trend of cooking at home, and sweet onions

are a popular ingredient in some of the most creative dishes."

### This Year's Forecast

Industry experts agree Peruvian sweet onions are the most prominent of imports from south of the border.

"Peru is the largest exporter of sweet onions during the fall and winter months," says Brady. "The flatter shape and yellow skin color of Peruvian sweet onions make them instantly recognizable as sweet."

While experts say this year's crop of Peruvian onions got off to a slow start, the crop is promising, leading to high expectations.

"This year's crop looks great, and we'll have promotable volumes available to our retail partners through early February," says Brady. "The crop is the best quality we've seen in several years out of Peru. Both the overall size and profile are average."

Marty Kamer, vice president of Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc., headquartered in Greencastle, PA, agrees the current crop is promising. "The early sweet onion crop in

Peru is coming in nicely," says Kamer. He adds the volume and size are adequate, and the crop will be able to meet the demand for high-quality sweet onions expected for the fall and winter selling season.

Brian Kastick, president of OSO Sweet Onions, based in Savannah, GA, says the crop has characteristics that make its onions appealing to shoppers. "What's nice is the crop is fully mature, so the onions come in with better curing and a better overall quality in appearance," says Kastick. "So from a quality and quantity standpoint, the Peruvian onion season is off to a great start."

He attributes the slow start to colder weather early in the growing season in Peru. "Just like with our springtime, sometimes it's cold for a week or two longer, that was the case this year," he says. "There was a little bit cooler weather going into the spring, but now the weather turned to full springtime weather, and it's a lot of sunshine in Peru, a lot of good weather for curing onions. The temperature is between 82 and 88 degrees with lots of sunshine. It's perfect harvesting weather."

# “We think the sweet onion will continue to grow in popularity and replace some of the onion uses that have traditionally been filled by yellow onions.”

— Brian Kastick, OSO Sweet Onions

According to Brady, acreage stayed consistent from last season, allowing suppliers to provide retailers with consistent supplies throughout fall and winter.

## A Growing Trend

Kastick says the current market trend for sweet onions is they are growing in popularity and are even replacing more traditional onions in some uses. “I think consumers are seeing this renewed interest in cooking healthy at home. People are using more sweet onions because there are so many applications for them at home for cooking,” he says. “We think the sweet onion will continue to grow in popularity and replace some of the onion uses that have traditionally been filled by yellow onions.” Those meal options include using fresh sweet onions in salads and for topping burgers.

What makes them marketable yearlong is they’re also used for comfort meals during the winter. “That’s why the Peruvian and the Chilean onion have such a home in the wintertime here in the United States,” he says. “They’re nice, they’re sweet, and they add big flavor to all those wintertime recipes such as: crock-pot dishes, pot roasts, stews, and soups. All the things people like to eat at wintertime and the holidays. Sweet onions are perfect because all that water content in the sweet onion just infuses itself in the recipe.”

## A Big Part Of The Fresh Movement

According to Keystone Fruit’s Kamer, celebrity chefs, cooking shows and media reports about food trends raised awareness of the benefits of eating fresh fruits and vegetables. Those efforts helped sales of sweet onions. “Onions are a big part of this awareness as a staple ingredient, which naturally resonates through to increased consumption and higher sales numbers at the store,” he says.

Another factor in the appeal of sweet onions is their versatility. “Onions are most often used to enhance flavors in a wide range of recipes, including salads, soups, stews, and casseroles,” says Kamer. “Onions are used as a garnish in sandwiches, wraps and in classic

Mexican or Italian cuisine. Approximately 15 to 18 percent of onions are processed for use in prepared food items such as salsa, soups, and appetizers. Onions are also processed for fresh consumption — peeled, sliced, diced and chunked onions — which also go directly to the foodservice industry.”

All of those uses, along with increased consumer awareness, lead to steady increases in demand for sweet onions. “For a period of time, the available supply of authentic sweet onions was lagging behind the demand,” says Kamer. “Today, a reliable, steady supply of year-round authentic sweet onions is available to meet increasing demand.”

Kamer adds sweet onions offer an opportunity for incremental produce sales. “The health and flavor benefits are an easy sell for consumers looking to cook tasteful food without salt and cholesterol,” he says. “Sweet onions also provide opportunity for promotion and cross-merchandising with a variety of products in and out of the department.”

## Marketing Sweet Onions

Brady says Shuman has a year-round onion program that allows retailers to stock onions for customers 12 months a year. Autumn and winter offer lots of marketing opportunities. “Sweet onions are perfect for comfort foods during the winter months as well,” says Brady. “Dishes like French onion soup and a variety of stews are enhanced by the flavor of sweet onions. Maintaining a year-round supply of an instantly recognizable sweet onion in the produce department is a proven winner in increasing overall ring at the register.”

Kamer notes onions have been marketed in the U.S. for more than 100 years, and are one of the most consumed produce items in the world. He adds the average annual onion per capita consumption in the U.S. is 21 pounds. “That’s a tremendous opportunity for consistent sales,” he says.

OSO Sweet Onions’ Kastick says the biggest marketing opportunity comes via the fall and winter holiday season: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year’s and other winter occasions. “It’s a chance to put sweet



onions on promotions for people to use in their homes for big family gatherings and social gatherings,” he says.

Another option he makes note of is setting up mass displays. “People buy with their eyes,” he says. “When they come into the store and see a big display with flat, bright-colored sweet onions in the most prominent area of the produce department, it’s a big mover. Those onions go with winter dishes, so people see that big display and it encourages them to buy.”

He also encourages retailers to display onions in bulk displays and five-pound bags. “Five-pounds are perfect for the holidays, and a lot of people who normally wouldn’t buy a 5-pound bag will do so for Thanksgiving and Christmas to take care of those cooking needs during that time frame,” he says.

## Beyond The Peruvian

According to industry insiders, Chile and Mexico also are players in the sweet onion equation. Kastick says Peru is the leader during autumn, and Peruvian onions are exported to the U.S. through January. “Chile will start in January and go through February,” he says. “Mexico will start, usually at the end of January and the beginning of February.” He adds that the type of sweet onions consumers look for — flat in shape with lots of water similar to the Vidalia — come from Peru in the fall and Chile in the dead of winter. “Those are the onions people associate with sweet onions,” he says, adding Mexican onions don’t quite have the sweetness of the Peruvian and Chilean varieties.

Kamer adds that imports from Peru run

# Keystone

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through the middle of February, then Mexican onions start in February through early May. Additionally, onions from other locations could be on their way. “We have ongoing R-and-D projects in a variety of other countries throughout South and Central America, even Europe and others,” says Kamer. “Future availability of authentic sweet onions from these emerging markets is yet to be determined.”

### Promotional Opportunities

Kamer says fall and winter are an ideal time to encourage impulse purchases of imported sweet onions by building large displays. “Sweet onion usage is very diverse, and cross-merchandising opportunities are limitless,” he says. “Many retailers strive to take advantage of cross-merchandising by strategically placing onions and products that can be utilized with sweet onions. Due to increased demand of sweet onions, many retailers found it advantageous to carry bulk or loose jumbo sweet onions as well as a consumer bag of medium sweet onions. Endcaps, standalones, value-added product offerings, multi-size strategies and consumer bagged displays offer consumers multiple

buying options and ensure sales lift.”

The holidays play a key role in promoting imported sweet onions. Brady notes the season is the perfect time to take some steps to increase sweet onion sales because they are available throughout the holiday season and are perfect for fall and winter meals. “Sweet onions are incredibly versatile and can be cross-merchandised in so many great ways to improve sales of all of the products involved, and the winter months are fantastic for bringing together a variety of products throughout the store for holiday gatherings,” he says. “A display including lettuce, tomatoes and sweet onions is a great start for a salad promotion for the dinner table; or place sweet onions alongside avocados and jalapenos to encourage building the perfect guacamole for the big game.”

Kamer says Keystone will be making the most out of this busy onion season. “We have many dynamic, customer-specific promos planned for this fall and winter,” he says. “Those include promotions for tailgating at football games, holiday cooking, and easy crock-pot meals.” Keystone’s promotions include displays with tips on how to include onions in recipes and in-store demos. **pb**

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# Bananas – A Volume Leader Taken For Granted

Give this popular fruit space, and sales will grow. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



PHOTO COURTESY OF TURBANA

According to sources, syndicated data shows that banana sales typically make up approximately 6 percent of total produce dollar sales and are much higher in terms of pounds.

**B**ananas are among the produce leaders in volume and dollar sales, but this mature fruit can increase its performance if displayed more proudly.

“Syndicated data shows that banana sales typically make up approximately 6 percent of total produce dollar sales and are much higher in terms of pounds. However, bananas are rarely given space analogous to their share of sales,” says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce, Coral Gables, FL. “Experience shows attractive, large and full displays drive impulse sales.”

The successful formula is simple—develop eye catching, well-attended displays of bananas in two states of ripeness, and also include easy-to-find organic fruit, and add specialty varieties if the demographic warrants.

But whatever mix of banana products suits the store, to perform well the section has to look good.

“The first and most important thing for retailers to remember is to keep the banana display fully stocked,” says Bil Goldfield, director of corporate communications at Dole Fresh Fruit Company, Monterey, CA. “Your display cannot look like it’s been picked through; maintenance is key.”

## Two Colors

Consumers quickly, easily and accurately judge the ripeness of bananas by looking at the color of the fruit.

There is a color scale for bananas, ranging from one, which is all green, to seven, which is yellow flecked with brown spots.

“Somewhere in the four-color range is a good color at retail. The fruit is beginning to show a more pronounced break and is more yellow than green,” says Marion Tabard, director of marketing at Turbana Corporation, Coral Gables, CA.

“Consumers get attracted by bananas that have what they consider the right color, the size or width and lack of sugar spots or bruises,” says Rob Adams, director of marketing for Charlotte, NC-based Chiquita Brands.

“The recommended color to sell a banana depends on how soon the bananas are to be consumed,” says Mark Levin, chief executive of M. Levin and Company, Inc., Philadelphia, PA. “If the bananas are going to be consumed right away, they should be a full yellow. If the bananas are going to be eaten over the course of a few days, the consumer probably wants to purchase bananas that are yellow with green tips, to prolong their shelf life. In reality, stores should carry both varieties to satisfy all preferences.”

“We ship out two levels of ripeness, what we call a green and a break,” says Jeff Cady, produce and floral manager for Tops Markets, Williamsville, NY.

Because consumers have different ideas for when they will use the fruit, it is advisable to have at least two displays with clear differences in the color of the bananas. Many retailers are following this practice.

After displays of two or more colors of bananas are set up, they must be scrupulously culled and filled.

“One study has shown most stores typically have less than one day’s supply of bananas on the shelves. To ensure their fair share of banana sales, stores need to either increase space or make sure to refill displays on a timely basis,” says Del Monte Fresh Produce’s Christou.

With bananas beautifully displayed, merchandising comes down first to how much space you are willing to give your best-selling fruit.

“You can never devote too much space for bananas,” says M. Levin and Company’s Levin. “They are the No. 1 selling fruit in the United States.”

## Variety Can Be The Spice Of Bananas

The category is generally straightforward,

## How 'Green' Are The Bananas?

The one new wrinkle in merchandising this mature category is the importance of organic bananas, and the nascent demand for fair-trade bananas that guarantee the wages and working conditions of the workers.

"As consumers are becoming more aware of the chemicals used in agriculture, organic bananas — as well as the whole organic category — are becoming more important," says Marion Tabard, director of marketing at Turbana Corporation, Coral Gables, CA.

However, there are still many consumers unwilling to pay more for organic bananas.

"The most common type of banana sold is conventional," says Mark Levin, chief executive of M. Levin and Company, Inc., Philadelphia, PA. "Certain customers who choose to eat all organic products will choose to eat organic bananas. The organic bananas are a bit more expensive, therefore only certain buyers will be interested in them."

There is also a small but growing consumer base willing to pay a few cents more for fair-trade bananas.

"Fair-trade produce goods are up 15 percent," says Michela Calabrese, campaign director at Interrupcion Fair Trade, New York, NY.

"Ever since I went to a conventional banana farm, I decided to dedicate my professional life to growing the supply and demand of fair-trade bananas," says Calabrese. "The workers on one farm said they used to get paid \$15 a week, but on a fair-trade farm they get \$25 to \$30, which is the difference between putting food on the table or not; and they don't have chemical burns and rashes on their bodies anymore from pesticides. If Americans knew the truth about the real costs on the people and the communities, they would stop buying conventional product,

I'm convinced."

The price differential is low enough that most major supermarkets carry organic bananas as a regular item.

"The demand for organic bananas is growing. The price difference is pretty small, around 15 percent, and it's been growing so much the last three years," says Mayra Velasquez, chief executive of Organics Unlimited in San Diego, CA. "It's huge. The large retailers have decided they want organic bananas as a staple."

Even a 15 percent premium only amounts to a few pennies per pound because bananas are so inexpensive.

"Retailers still use bananas as a loss leader to draw traffic into their stores," says Turbana's Tabard. "Bananas offer a great value to consumers. Typically, we see banana retail prices vary between 49 and 69 cents per pound for conventional fruit, depending on the region in which the retailer is located."

According to Velasquez, organic demand remained level during the recession, and exploded the past few years as the largest retailers decided they need to always have organic bananas.

"In the United States, stores usually carry a conventional banana, a secondary conventional banana and an organic banana," says Velasquez. "It's good to display the organic bananas with the conventional until people know you have organic bananas."

Interest in organic bananas has reached the point that the largest producers are looking for enough land and water to supply the demand.

"Sales of organic bananas have been increasing steadily during the past year. If this trend continues, we expect to reach a tipping point where current supply sources will be unable to meet the demand," says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce,

Coral Gables, FL.

The demographics of the store, however, still make a great deal of difference in demand for organic bananas.

"We carry organic all the time," says Jeff Cady, produce and floral manager for Tops Markets, Williamsville, NY. "They are popular in the affluent stores. We carry them in other stores, but they are most popular in the affluent neighborhoods."

Even as they penetrate every area of the country, however, organic bananas still do not reach some independent stores serving customers of relatively modest means. "We don't have the clientele for organic," says Jim Reed, produce manager at Harry's Supermarket, Pittsfield, MA.

While organic became a staple category with some people, fair-trade bananas are appealing to consumers ready to spend a little more for improved working conditions.

"Fair trade means the work is documented, and the workers are paid a wage equal to or above the local minimum wage," says Calabrese. "It's common for work to not be documented, and for the workers to be paid less than the local minimum. Another of the standards of fair trade is a minimum wage and safe and dignified working conditions. Safe working conditions include having protective clothing and protective gloves. In Ecuador I saw a lot of aerial spraying on workers with no protective clothing, or rinsing chemicals off without gloves."

The battle for the hearts, minds and banana dollars of consumers could come down to whether the tremendous economy of this fruit or the desire to support social justice carries more weight.

"People are accustomed to a relatively steady banana price, which is one of the reasons why bananas remain one of the most widely bought fruits in the world," says Levin. **pb**

and retailers can get by with two colors of conventional bananas, plus a prominent display of organic bananas; but some of the unusual-looking specialty bananas appeal to certain demographics.

"There has been a growing interest in the specialty varieties as people have become a

little more willing to experiment," says Dole's Goldfield. "The baby bananas are extremely popular. It's a good size for kids' lunches, and it's a sweet banana, which kids like. The reds are also popular, but there is a little bit of a learning curve."

This may be an area worth watching.

"There has been growth in specialty bananas such as plantains, reds and manzanos. Consumers developed more sophisticated taste profiles, and as trends in healthy eating and interest in new tropical foods continue to grow, so does the demand for exotic and specialty bananas," says Del Monte's Christou.



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Stores may find it advantageous to carry a couple of these specialty bananas in addition to the three basics — ripe, green and organic.

“We carry five or six SKUs of bananas,” says Tops Markets’ Cady.

In the Northeast it is also particularly important to give consumers the option of bagged bananas.

“You will find many retailers and wholesalers in the Northeast who prefer bags over naked. The trade is very accustomed to bags — specifically in New York,” says Turbana’s Tabard. “Also, most club stores sell bananas in 3-pound bags.”

Some major retailers have taken the bagged product nationwide.

“Bagged bananas originated in the Northeast to protect the fruit from cold weather, to retain freshness and to prevent consumers from breaking the banana clusters at the display,” says Christou. “However, today we find a number of retailers and club stores across the country choose to purchase bagged fruit.”

Because nearly everyone is familiar with bananas, merchandising can gain energy by emphasizing its many uses.

“The banana market penetration is very high across all demographics,” says Tabard. “When it comes to marketing bananas, it’s more about positioning bananas as an answer to different needs and occasions. For example, if you’re active, a banana is a great snack, a natural energy bar, regardless of age or ethnicity. If you’re looking for convenience, bananas fit perfectly in a lunchbox, whether you are taking it to grade school or to your corporate office.”

“We know that a big consumption of the product is during breakfast,” says Chiquita’s Adams, “but we are witnessing — within the past five to eight years — a growth in consumption as a snack and as a base for other meal preparations.

### Cross-Merchandising According To Usage

The many uses for bananas suggest many possibilities for cross-merchandising.

“Cross-merchandising is an effective way to grow sales in the category by increasing impulse purchases. When cross-merchandising, retailers have the opportunity to increase not only banana sales but also sales of related products,” says Christou. “Different ideas for cross-merchandising include pairing bananas with strawberries, other tropical fruit, cereal, salads, chocolate dips and peanut butter. Smoothies are becoming a big part of healthy lifestyles and bananas are a delicious

## Fruit Quality Is A Gas

**B**efore bananas reach the market, conditions in the ripening room go a long way toward determining how long they will maintain their quality.

Bananas are treated with ethylene until their own ethylene kicks in, this usually takes 24 hours, and then ripened under closely watched environmental conditions.

“The most common mistake is not giving the fruit adequate time to ripen,” says David Byrne, vice president of sales for Thermal Technologies, Blythe-wood, SC. “People are in a hurry. If you ripen slower, you typically get a longer shelf life. You need to give the process time; generally speaking, you should give at least five days in the ripening room.”

Some ripeners prefer to give the fruit a little more or less time to ripen, but failure to hit the sweet spot means either the fruit will be too green or it will fail to last on the produce department shelf long enough to give the consumer five or six days.

“Most ripeners take five days, but some take four days, and some take as long as seven days,” says Greg Akins, president of Catalytic Generators Inc., Norfolk, VA.

The gassing stage is the shortest and may be the simplest part of the ripening process.

“Bananas have ethylene inside them, and that’s what makes them ripen,”

says Karen-Ann Christenberry, manager at American Ripener Co., Charlotte, NC. “We sell the ethylene generators and the liquid ethylene you put in them. It jump-starts the process. It’s pretty simple. You use a quart for a standard one load ripening room.”

This part of the ripening process, according to Christenberry, is best done between 59° and 65° F.

“There are so many factors you want to get right in the fruit ripening process,” says Akins. “It starts with fruit being harvested at the right level of maturity. Most importers know what to look for in maturity.”

“Ethylene is always used, but that’s just one of the days,” says Byrne. “Temperature and humidity are the keys to the other four days.”

For many retailers, this process has to result in fruit that meets not one but two sets of specifications.

“Some retailers like to ship all the same color; other retailers like a greener and a riper SKU,” says Byrne.

Small independent stores, however, may not have large enough orders to bring in two or more colors.

“I don’t have the volume to order different levels of ripeness,” says Jim Reed, produce manager at Harry’s Supermarket, Pittsfield, MA. “I try to bring bananas in green, so they’ll turn. I could end up with three different colors on the floor.” **pb**

ingredient for energy-packed smoothies.”

They can even be effectively displayed at high-traffic areas outside Produce. “Placing bananas in displays in the front of retail stores is very effective, as most people will grab a handful of bananas to put in their cart as soon as they walk in,” says Levin.

“Bananas have always been a top-selling fruit,” adds Levin. “In terms of cross-merchandising bananas, an effective market technique is to place a banana display in the cereal aisle. Many people will grab a bunch of bananas to enjoy with their breakfast cereal selection.”

“While we as manufacturers have pro-

cesses in place to protect the fruit during the voyage from the tropics, most of the damage happens in the last 20 feet — from the back room to the shelf and on the shelf itself as consumers touch it and select their purchase,” says Chiquita’s Adams. “Innovation ranges from continuous prototyping and testing as well as support for the floor staff education for better handling.”

“It’s important to recognize that our data shows banana quality projects the expected quality of the whole produce area,” says Adams. “The location of the banana table is determinant then to create best full-category synergies.” **pb**

# Sustaining Citrus Profitability

Merchandising that educates and promotes citrus is a recipe for success. **BY KEITH LORIA**



According to the USDA's annual report, U.S. citrus production for the 2013-14 season totaled 9.4 million tons.

U.S. citrus production for the 2013-14 season totaled 9.4 million tons, according to the USDA's annual report.

While fall and winter months remained strong in citrus sales, the spring and summer took a tumble, as retailers saw declines in sales for those months.

"Without question the summer months are the most difficult to sell citrus because so many other seasonal options are available, such as cherries, melons and stone fruits," says Chuck Yow, director of U.S. sales and business development for Capespan North America, headquartered in Gloucester, NJ. "We work very hard at promoting summer citrus."

Citrus consumers are loyal to the category and want to purchase year-round, plus keeping citrus in the main display areas keeps the fringe consumer buying all year, which are additional sales in an already strong category.

That's why it's vital citrus companies put their best effort into not only growing, but also creative packaging and education about the fruit so the category captivates consumers' attention in store. Consumers will think about citrus more when they see a good piece of fruit and wonder where it came from because it stands out.

Tammy Wiard, director of retail marketing

for the Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC), says the organization is charged with the marketing and promotion of Florida Citrus products, which includes oranges, tangerines and grapefruit, as well as orange juice and grapefruit juice.

"The FDOC aims to raise awareness of the great taste of Florida citrus and its role in a healthy diet year-round," says Wiard. "By working with retailers and restaurants, the FDOC is able to highlight unexpected ways to enjoy Florida citrus — inspiring consumers to incorporate it into their diets."

Jasmine Hodari, vice president of marketing for Paramount Citrus, headquartered in Delano, CA, says the company chooses the best citrus for each market to ensure the freshest, best-tasting citrus is available to customers and easy for retail partners to promote citrus all year long.

"We also invest heavily in marketing to help pull popular citrus varieties through the channel," says Hodari. "For example, to support our recently launched Mandarin brand, Wonderful Halos, we have slated to spend a record \$100 million in the first five years of the brand as part of an integrated consumer campaign to market the 'pure goodness' and uniquely delicious taste of the sweet,

seedless and easy-to-peel fruit. This amount of marketing investment is unheard of for the citrus industry."

Robinson Fresh, the produce division of C.H. Robinson, provides fresh, high-quality citrus items packed in the well-known and respected Tropicana brand. These items include lemons, limes, grapefruit and oranges, which are all available year-round to retail, wholesale and foodservice customers.

"Today, consumers are continually looking to their retailer to guide their eating experience," says Gina Garven, category insights manager at Robinson Fresh, headquartered in Eden Prairie, MN. "Robinson Fresh works with customers by providing comprehensive solutions through data and category insights, merchandising and marketing support, as well as a consistent supply."

Joan Wickham, manager of public relations for Sunkist Growers, based in Valencia, CA, says the company markets millions of cartons of premium fresh citrus internationally each year to 40 countries.

"With more than 3,000 grower members in California and Arizona, the Sunkist cooperative reflects the values and legacy of its 120-year history: multi-generational family farmers committed to growing the highest quality

citrus, being responsible stewards of their land and dedicating themselves to innovation,” she says. “Sunkist offers more than 40 varieties of premium quality, fresh citrus year-round, including oranges, lemons, grapefruit, specialties and organics.”

Sunkist employs a variety of marketing programs to keep citrus relevant year-round to consumer, retail and foodservice audiences in its domestic and export markets, including usage ideas and tips, seasonality and nutrition.

“Education should be a primary objective for merchandising citrus,” says Wickham. “A recent study found consumers are often confused when shopping in the produce department. As new items are introduced all the time, retailers need a method of ensuring consumers can easily find the new items and describe and explain unique taste, nutrition or recipe usage. Displays and header cards can provide solutions to better educate consumers.”

### All Year Long

Industry experts agree the first step to success is providing quality year-round so the consumer has positive experiences.

Citrus, namely limes, is the lifeblood of Vision Import Group, doing business in River Edge, NJ.

“Our focus is to be in constant collaboration with our growers in Mexico and put out the best box of limes we can,” says Raul Millan, executive vice president. “We also have a lemon program that runs the length of the Mexican season.”

Capespan’s Yow says the company provides citrus year-round, shipping from California during its season and transitioning to summer citrus from South Africa and Chili so there are no seasonal gaps. The company also provides Clementines from South Africa, Peru and Chile, and then transitions back into California, usually around late October.

“In regards to keeping citrus on their minds year-round, we offer various forms of POS, merchandising and marketing tools in each season that helps our customers maximize sales and educate their consumers,” says Yow. “POS materials can be very useful to educate consumers as to where the citrus comes from that time of year and the strengths of growing regions.”

Secondary displays coupled with sampling programs are also important to both consumer education and confidence.

“We participate with our customers that choose to offer these programs with ‘King Citrus,’ the South African citrus industry lion



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

character, grower visits and in-store sampling programs,” says Yow. “In addition, we can partner in offering secondary display options such as popup bins.”

Yow also says features of other growing citrus products are a great way to grow the categories. For example, by featuring Cara Caras, Mineolas and South African Star Ruby grapefruit, the consumer expands his/her citrus purchasing habits.

“These can be even more successful with cross-merchandising options in conjunction with recipe cards to give consumers new choices for their home dining experiences,” he says.

According to FDOC’s Wiard, a wonderful aspect of Florida citrus is it’s a great choice any time of the year.

“While fresh produce is available in season, 100 percent Florida orange juice and grapefruit juice make excellent beverages year-round and are not just limited to the breakfast table,” says Wiard. “Both can be used as marinades, smoothies and cocktail ingredients.”

### Challenging Times

All marketers are challenged year-round with driving citrus sales and keeping the fruits top-of-mind with consumers. In order to succeed, they need to continuously think of creative ways to promote the citrus category, whether it’s through a national TV ad campaign, in-store promotions, retailer merchandising, branding, public relations efforts or any other marketing function.

“For example, grapefruit sales have been declining over the years. So, what can be done? Based on a recent Midwest test, we found if you develop a consumer branded Texas red grapefruit (Wonderful Sweet Scarletts, in our case) that tastes great, and arm the retailer with the tools to build attractive

displays, sales will follow,” says Paramount Citrus’ Hodari. “In fact, they did; sales increased two to five times with a re-purchase rate of more than 30 percent. The results were so promising that we will be launching our Wonderful Sweet Scarletts nationally this season [November to April].”

The biggest challenge with citrus sales — as with any fresh produce item — is weather. When the product cannot be harvested or growing is delayed due to weather conditions, this limits the amount of fruit available.

“Educating the consumers about what is going on with the product can help. We can involve the customer in the conditions so they know why the price is higher or why there is less available,” says Vision Import Group’s Millan. “It is also our job to source properly and get creative to make sure we always have product on the shelves. This past year we saw the scarcest lime market in history; we are proud to say we provided fruit to our customers throughout that time.”

According to Garven, Robinson Fresh’s research shows consumers want to know when items are in peak season and are looking to their retailers to educate them on the availability of these items year-round.

“The summer months are often the biggest challenge for citrus sales due to the wider assortment of other seasonal fruits,” she says. “In order to keep merchandising relevant, retailers can focus on promoting items like lemons and limes, which are often popular for grilling.”

### Holiday Happenings

When holidays come around, it’s critical retailers promote citrus and get people accustomed to thinking about the fruit during these times.



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Vision Import Group developed a “Party Pack” of limes specifically to aid retailers in holiday promotion. It is a 2-pound resealable, breathable bag with its Mojito label.

“This Party Pack allows consumers to get plenty of fruit at a great price,” says Millan. “The labeled packaging allows for retailers to create displays, as well as a sale to promote them.”

Daily and weekly sales indicate almost all nationalities use citrus in one way or another in their cooking.

“What makes the difference is the quality. We found if quality product is available, they will sell,” says Millan. “We also have at least one holiday or event each month where citrus can be promoted for either food preparation or celebratory drinks. Retailers can upsell citrus during these times.”

Seasonal display bins are a great way to take advantage of the holidays because they suggest to consumers a reason to purchase.

“Another great way to capitalize on sales is for retailers to offer two sizes of fruit — extra-large and traditional size,” says Capespan’s Yow. “The extra sizes can be promoted for fruit bowls and fruit baskets during certain holidays. In-store made fruit baskets featuring a specific holiday are also a great way to sell more citrus and other produce.”

Paramount Citrus’ Hodari agrees holidays are a great time to promote citrus.

“Our Halos mandarins and Sweet Scarletts Texas red grapefruit are available during Thanksgiving and Christmas,” says Hodari. “Retailers can utilize the high-graphic POS and display-ready packaging to build large displays not just in produce, but also in secondary locations like the store’s entrance.”

FDOC’s Wiard notes Florida citrus is an especially popular option for brunch-centered holidays, such as Mother’s Day and Easter.

“To take advantage of these spikes in sales, retailers should highlight the myriad ways — traditional and unexpected — Florida citrus can be used in a meal,” says Wiard.

Sunkist’s Wickham shares that the holiday season is also peak citrus season, and in her opinion, nothing brightens festivities like colorful, delicious citrus.

“To capitalize on the season, retailers should focus on education and usage. Sunkist offers packaging, displays and header cards that provide consumers with taste profiles, nutritional messaging, usage ideas and QR codes that lead to mobile recipe content,” says Wickham. “By providing this information, you encourage consumers to try new produce items they might be unfamiliar with — like seasonal specialty citrus varieties such as Moro



(blood) oranges, Minneola Tangelos, Pummelos and Cara Cara Navel oranges.”

Also, Sunkist offers retailers decorative holiday cartons to capitalize on seasonal consumer excitement around oranges, which have cultural significance in many cultures.

### Cross-Merchandising Matters

There are many opportunities to cross-merchandise citrus, and consumers are looking to retailers for ways to bring excitement to their meals.

“Staple items such as lemons and limes are easily overlooked in the produce aisle, so positioning them next to complementary items may give consumers ideas about how they can incorporate them into meals,” says Robinson Fresh’s Garven. “For example, placing limes near the beverage section or offering bagged items on endcaps near checkout lanes are great ways for retail customers to work through additional inventory and drive incremental sales through impulse buys.”

Breakfast products provide optimal cross-merchandising opportunities, but there are many more ways to highlight Florida citrus, Wiard believes, saying unexpected combinations, such as coupling Florida citrus with protein or back-to-school lunch staples, can provide new ideas and inspiration.

Recipe cards are another great cross-merchandising technique.

Studies done by Paramount Citrus have found grapefruit consumers are great citrus buyers and typically purchase Mandarins in the same basket. “That’s a great opportunity to cross-merchandise Sweet Scarletts and Halos,” says Hodari.

Sunkist’s Wickham says secondary displays provide creative ways to merchandise citrus outside of the produce section. For example, since citrus pairs impeccably well with seafood, displaying citrus in the seafood section offers convenience and inspiration to consumers.

### Out-of-the-Box Thinking

Jeff Fairchild, lead produce buyer and

merchandiser for New Seasons Market, based in Portland, OR, says specialty citrus items — Kumquats, Meyer lemons, Cara Cara Oranges and Ojai Pixie Tangerines — sell well November through March, but other times can be a challenge.

“They peak in early January and start trailing off by mid-March,” says Fairchild. “These are great produce items to keep customers interested in citrus at a time of year that doesn’t always have a lot of draw.”

A unique way New Seasons highlights these items is with an annual citrus festival held every January, where consumers can sample up to 25 different citrus varieties.

Millan says retailers should build a recipe-based display each week that includes citrus to show consumers new ways to cook.

“This can be done in the produce aisle or even in the meat section,” says Millan. “Have a small display with all the produce items needed for the recipe. Knowing space could be an issue, think about a fresh marinade or salad dressing, using the juice from various citrus items. This allows for cross-merchandising, citrus promotion and showing the consumer a new way of using our products.”

Capespan has had good success with its pop-up bins that show the colors of citrus and also tell the story of the product and country of origin.

“It is also good to use side stacks, wooden display cartons, high graphic boxes and case stacks in front of displays, allowing fruit to overflow from the section giving an abundance of fruit appearance,” says Yow. “Citrus items are also great to use with featured items, such as apples, for color breaks and a bright fresh produce section appearance.”

In Garven’s mind, demonstrations on new citrus varieties or general consumer education on how to use and prepare citrus is a good way to drive consumers’ fruit dollar spend toward citrus.

“Merchandising citrus items in bins is a unique technique and allows retailers to display items throughout the store as a tie-in with other departments,” says Garven. “For example, merchandising citrus items near cold medicine during cold and flu season helps consumers remember to purchase those items, as they are often popular accompaniments.”

### Marketing Matters

Having an appropriate mix of stock is a great way to maximize citrus sales all year long. According to Robinson Fresh’s Garven, the right number of SKUs depends on the format of the store, available space and seasonality.





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“Another innovation to the category that is experiencing growth is merchandising value-added citrus, including options that are cut, sliced or snack-sized,” says Garven. “Retailers can move to smaller pack sizes and reduce SKU mix in the summer season when citrus sales are slower than usual. This will help to keep price points more reasonable and relevant amongst traditional summer stone fruit and berries.”

According to Hodari, Paramount Citrus is known for being the first to transform commodities (Mandarins and Texas Red Grapefruit) into healthy brands consumers have come to know, love and trust. This has propelled the company to a leader in the field.

“Promotions are an effective tool for retailers,” says Hodari. “In-store, consider building prominent displays in areas not just in produce, but also in other areas, such as the entrance and checkout. Also, utilize ads to promote citrus.”

“Citrus is an incredibly versatile produce item and by educating consumers about usage ideas and tips that are seasonally relevant, retailers can drive sales for citrus all year round,” says Wickham. “While peak citrus season in California and Arizona is during the

winter months, there is delicious citrus varieties in-season during the summer and fall.”

For example, Valencia oranges, in season from February through October, are known for their perfect balance of sweet and tart flavors. As excellent juicing oranges, Sunkist is encouraging consumers to try fresh juicing at home — capitalizing on the current health trend.

“Lemons are also in season during the summer months. Tart and refreshing, lemons are the perfect complement to summertime dishes and are also wonderful for entertaining,” says Wickham. “With mixology becoming more popular in restaurants and bars, many consumers are now trying artisan cocktail making at home. From unique lemonades to mixed drinks, Sunkist is developing fun cocktail recipes consumers can make at home to ‘zest up’ their summer entertaining.”

Grapefruit is another delicious summertime citrus fruit. Research has indicated Millennial women are increasing grapefruit consumption, and Sunkist is leveraging this trend by introducing modern uses for grapefruit with the “Not Your Mother’s Grapefruit” campaign, aimed at reigniting the fruit’s popularity by educating younger consumers about this

nutrient-rich superfood.

An online grapefruit brochure with more information about the health and wellness benefits of grapefruit is available on Sunkist’s website.

Citrus is a versatile category that offers consumers many convenient uses and health benefits. Items like oranges, grapefruit and easy-peel citrus are packed with vitamin C that helps keep consumers healthy during the cold and flu season. Additionally, in the spring and summer, consumers can utilize lemons and limes as beverage garnishes.

Let’s face it, consumers are growing more health-conscious and citrus is one way for them to have healthy options readily available. Furthermore, citrus is very versatile and can be incorporated into many different meals, snack or usage occasions throughout the year. Citrus 12 months a year is a mantra all in the industry need to get behind.

“Citrus is a very versatile fruit, which is a delicious snack, ingredient — and even great for a number of household uses — from décor to cleaning,” says Wickham. “Providing consumers with usage ideas and tips can help retailers show the relevance of citrus all 12 months of the year.” **pb**

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# THE TOP 10 WAYS TO SELL PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS

Focusing on a few merchandising tips can profitably impact winter sales. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**



According to the Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association, in 2013, Peruvian asparagus represented more than 45 percent of the total U.S. import dollar value.

**P**eruvian asparagus has become a significant contributor to the overall category. “In 2013, the U.S. imported more than 403 million pounds of fresh-market asparagus of which Peruvian asparagus represented more than 47 percent of the total world supply,” says Priscilla Lleras, coordinator of the Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association (PAIA). “In 2013, Peruvian asparagus represented more than 45 percent of the total U.S. import dollar value — a significant contribution.”

While Peru’s season can be considered from June to January, the late fall and winter months are prime for promotion. “We grow, import and distribute asparagus from Peru year round,” explains Charlie Eagle, vice president business development for Southern Specialties in Pompano Beach, FL. “But the main ‘season’ for asparagus from Peru is mid-September to December with the highest volume in mid-October. There is also seasonal availability from April to August with lighter supply than the fall months.”

“October is peak time,” says Walter Yager, chief executive of Alpine Fresh in Miami, FL. “Retailers should really focus on promoting from September to November.”

Chloé Varennes, marketing manager at Gourmet Trading in Redondo, CA, agrees the time is right. “This year, Peru’s production curve is expected to follow the same trend as last year with peaks in late September through early November. This is the best time for retailers to promote along with the Thanksgiving holiday.”

Retailers who merchandise well reap ample rewards. “Peruvian asparagus is a key item,” says Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner’s Markets Inc. in Reading, PA. “It’s an item you can merchandise to generate more sales of other items. If merchandised correctly it increases ring.”

Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral, seafood and meat for Kings Food Markets in Parsippany, NJ with 25 Kings and six Balducci’s stores, agrees. “Good merchandising is very important. You have to put it in

high-traffic areas and merchandise it to appeal to customers. This generates impulse sales.”

## 1. Refrigerate Properly

Successful asparagus sales start with cold chain maintenance. “We recommend maintaining the cold chain to enhance quality and shelf life,” says Eagle.

“Keeping the refrigeration in the backend at 32 degrees to 26 degrees Fahrenheit helps extend shelf life and quality of asparagus,” explains Varennes. “Keeping the asparagus refrigerated while merchandising also extends the quality of the product helping lift sales.”

Peter A. Warren, Ayco Farms import director in Pompano Beach, FL, agrees it’s all about temperature. “Asparagus must be kept cold and at 98 percent humidity. The most common mistake retailers make is not keeping asparagus cold or wet enough.”

However, retailers can take exception to refrigeration while displaying volume promotions but with limits. “It’s acceptable to not refrigerate when using ice or when running a

# “For holidays like Thanksgiving, and when asparagus has a good price point, display it on an island by itself. This gives the product more visibility, and it will lift sales.”

— Chloé Varennes, Gourmet Trading

very hot ad,” says Warren. “If it moves fast it won’t need the refrigeration.”

“Stores should go off refrigeration only when doing end cap promotion,” advises Yager. “But they should not display more than a day’s expected sales.”

## 2. Rotate, Hydrate, Don’t Mist

Retailers should keep asparagus hydrated regardless of refrigeration. “If a retailer is selling a quantity of bulk asparagus over a short period and prefers to have the product free standing, we suggest hydrating in about a half-inch of cold water,” recommends Eagle.

“We will do a lot of merchandising throughout the store out of refrigeration,” says Redner’s Stiles. “We use racks where the asparagus sits in water. We turn it fast enough so this works for us. However, we always ensure we put it in refrigeration at night and while it’s in the back room.”

However asparagus should never be misted. “The most common mistakes when merchandising asparagus are misting and putting ice at the bottom of the display,” cautions Gourmet Trading’s Varennes. “Doing this will decrease the asparagus quality and shelf life.”

Stiles agrees. “You don’t want to dehydrate the product and, you don’t want to get the tips wet. These are the most common mistakes.”

Proper and frequent rotation also ensures successful sales. “Proper FIFO (first in, first out) rotation is crucial to quality displays,” says Alpine Fresh’s Yager. “One of the most common mistakes in handling is lack of rotation.”

“You have to turn the product,” says Stiles. “You can’t over order and be sitting on product.”

## 3. Make It Visible

A visible display will move product. “Location is crucial,” says Stiles. “I like customers to see it as soon as they come into the department. It’s a great item, so you want it to be visible.”

“In a PAIA Retail Opinion survey, many retailers suggested standalone displays, pyramid and table displays, as well as doubling displays when on ad as effective

ways to increase sales,” reports Lleras.

“For holidays like Thanksgiving, and when asparagus has a good price point, display it on an island by itself,” suggests Varennes. “This gives the product more visibility, and it will lift sales. One of the most important things to do when merchandising asparagus is to display it at eye level.”

Frequent promotion pushes product. “The key is to be on a promotion cycle,” suggests Alpine’s Yager. “Stores should be doing something either every other week or every three weeks.”

## 4. Focus On Nutrition

Promoting the nutritional aspects of asparagus also drives sales. “More and more consumers are seeking easy to prepare, nutritious and delicious options for their tables, and Peruvian asparagus fills all those requirements,” says Lleras. “They are concerned about weight maintenance as well as health aspects, both great areas to promote for asparagus.”

“Educating the customer regarding nutritional value always helps sell product,” agrees Stiles.

Retailers have a lot of nutritional bragging rights with asparagus. As stated in PAIA’s Category Management Plan, “Asparagus is a good source of potassium, vitamin A and vitamin C. It is low in fat and contains no cholesterol. Asparagus is also rich in rutin and folacin, which was proven important in the duplication of cells for growth and repair of the body.”

Lleras says asparagus offers something for everyone. “Health aspects of asparagus appeal to a wide segment of the market including active life-stylists, young adults, growing families and seniors.

## 5. Go Big For The Holidays

Asparagus moves especially well during the winter holidays. “Asparagus is a go-to vegetable for all major holidays,” says Eagle of Southern Specialties. “October is a good time to create promotions as product is in good supply and excellent pricing is available.”

“We know retail cares about asparagus



PHOTO COURTESY OF GOURMET TRADING



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during Easter, Thanksgiving and at Christmas,” says AYCO’s Warren. “Those are the must-have months. It’s about planning and running ads right before everyone else — and after.”

Stores can use all holidays, including the smaller ones, as promotion events. “Every holiday is a great opportunity to generate sales,” says Stiles of Redner’s. “Christmas and Thanksgiving are significant times, but we even promote asparagus at Valentine’s Day. Back in January, we had a recipe for asparagus in a salad. When there is ample product available to really get out and promote, we jump on it.”

“We have a program called Inspirational Pairings, which plays off our store motto,” reports Kings’ Kneeland. “We pair asparagus with roasts or poultry around holidays and really promote the high-end cross-merchandising.”

## 6. Cross-Merchandise With Style

Cross-merchandising asparagus holds great potential for increasing ring. “Just about anything you can tie-in generates impulse sales,” says Stiles. “There are so many different things we cross-merchandise with asparagus, and we really use it to generate extra sales.”



**“Cross-merchandising, especially with products contrasting in color to asparagus such as lemons and red peppers, really attracts customers and drives impulse sales.”**

— Paul Kneeland, Kings Food Markets

“Asparagus is a very versatile vegetable,” concurs Eagle. “Merchandise it next to grilling meats and seafood in the summer. Place it near cheeses, rice or other products in winter.”

“When merchandising asparagus, it is important to put it near other gourmet vegetables like mushrooms and artichokes,” suggests

Varennes of Gourmet Trading. “It is also suggested to put asparagus next to other produce contrasting in color such as red bell peppers. The two items go well together in a stir-fry and are visually appealing. Other items to display next to asparagus include hollandaise sauce packets, which can be an impulse buy for

a quick and easy side dish to a meal.”

A good partnership might mean moving the product to other departments. “Having alternate displays in the meat department, especially when we have filets on sale, generates extra sales,” reports Stiles. “Retailers should think creatively about the whole store.

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**“Display different product forms, such as multiple SKU’s, sizes and colors such as green, white and purple of fresh Peruvian asparagus to increase consumer purchase penetration and frequency of purchase.”**

— Priscilla Lleras,  
Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association

There are many customers who shop multiple supermarkets for different specials; so if you have someone coming in just for a special in meat or seafood, they’ll see the asparagus and pick it up.”

“We encourage retailers to feature asparagus dishes in their foodservice and prepared foods sections,” says Eagle. “Shoppers respond to ideas they see and also have an opportunity to taste the flavors of prepared dishes. Combine green, white and purple asparagus to create a salad sold in prepared food departments.”

Cross-merchandising attracts additional sales. “Cross-merchandising, especially with products contrasting in color to asparagus such as lemons and red peppers, attracts customers and drives impulse sales,” says Kneeland.

**7. Work With And Around Pricing**

Asparagus pricing can be unique in its effects. “Asparagus can be a price-resilient product to some extent,” says Stiles. “We can be \$1.99 or \$2.99 per pound, depending on availability, but still really sell volume regardless of the price point. Our customers don’t walk away from fresh asparagus when it is a little bit higher.”

However, there is a breaking point. “Our customers’ price threshold is around \$4.99,” reports Stiles. “That would definitely slow down sales. I would choose to take less gross to keep customers happy and push it through just to be below \$3.99.”

“Asparagus is all about retail ads,” says Warren. “At \$5.99 we sell a certain amount, at \$4.99 we sell 3 times that, at \$3.99 we sell 5 times, and at \$2.99 we sell 8 times more. It’s really that mathematical.”

At times when pricing is high, retailers

can try to sell value through education. “A costly component of distributing asparagus is air freight,” advises Eagle. “Consumers should be made aware their product is ‘air fresh.’”

Above all, it often comes down to value. “If the quality is there, then the pricing falls in line,” says Kings’ Kneeland. “We have asparagus on ad during the season about every three weeks. This gets people to try it, and if the quality is good, they’ll be back to purchase more even off-ad. If they’re satisfied with the value, they buy.”

**8. Communicate With Customers**

Utilizing POS materials and signage helps educate and stimulate consumers to buy. “It’s all about impulse,” says Warren. “We need to

make the consumer want asparagus. Signage helps drive this. For example, when buying a steak, if they see a picture of nice asparagus on the grill, they will buy.”

“Signage is important when the price is low, you’re running a promotion or there is a recipe to suggest with items nearby,” agrees Varennes. “Signage needs to be large enough to be noticed and also legible.”

Signage and other POS materials can help consumers better understand the properties and nutritional value of asparagus. “Signage helps to inform consumers,” says Eagle. “It can be particularly effective in describing white and purple asparagus.”

“We try to tie-in products with recipes provided by our nutritionist,” reports Stiles.



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“We always take advantage of any POP material offered by suppliers.”

### 9. Use Variety To Increase Sales

Provide variety to give consumers more opportunities to buy. “Display different product forms, such as multiple SKU’s, sizes and colors such as green, white and purple of fresh Peruvian asparagus to increase consumer purchase penetration and frequency of purchase,” advises Lleras.

And Varennes agrees. “Retailers can increase demand by giving consumers new items to try like offering all three colors of asparagus. Offering all three creates a vibrant display that is enticing to consumers.”

Many suppliers offer variety packs and

other value-added formats. Gourmet Trading Company offers tri-color asparagus packs for retail and foodservice from September through December.

“Southern Specialties offers a variety of value-added and bulk formats that look great on the shelf, provide added-value to the consumer and bring higher per unit sales to the register,” says Eagle.

### 10. Utilize Available Expertise

Making the most of your supplier partnership provides a wealth of tools and expertise. “We work with retailers to customize their approach to marketing asparagus,” reports Eagle.

Gourmet Trading Company offers POS and

other materials to its retail customers. “We suggest retailers ask their asparagus supplier for the correct information for POS,” says Varennes. “The asparagus experts at Gourmet Trading Company have the information readily available for their retail customers.”

The PAIA created and distributed a Category Management Plan Outline for Peruvian Asparagus to equip retailers, and the industry, with the type of information necessary to sell more Peruvian fresh-market asparagus.

“Specifically included within the outline are merchandising goals encompassing display ideas, promotion and advertising plans,” explains Lleras. “Many importers are utilizing the outline as a tool to distribute to their merchandisers.”

**pb**

## ORGANIC PRODUCE SHOWCASE



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# Good Business Practices Propel Detroit Produce Industry

Thriving suburbs help to offset problems found within the city limits. **BY BILL MARTIN**



(Clockwise) Rocky Produce: Tom Lucio, Steve Pizzo, Thomas Russo, Johnny Russo, John Vitale, Rocco Russo III, Ronnie Russo Jr., Joel Elias, Dominic Russo; Riggio Distribution: Phil Riggio Jr. and Dominic Riggio; Andrews Bros: Jim Russo, Dave O'Brien, Jeff Abrash, Bob Ventimiglia, Charlie Palazzolo and Jim Boggio Jr.; Ram Produce Distributors: Jim Bommarito

**W**holesale distributors on the Detroit Produce Terminal appear to be thriving as they share stories about business successes and express optimism about the future. You may wonder how this can be when in July 2013, the city of Detroit filed Chapter 9 bankruptcy. *The Detroit News* reported that billionaire auto baron Roger Penske, owner of the Michigan-based Penske Corporation, said the biggest municipal filing in U.S. history was “the right thing to do.”

Jeff Abrash is owner and president of Andrews Brothers, Inc., a wholesale distributor on the Detroit Produce Terminal, and he also serves as president of the market’s cooperative, Detroit Produce Terminal, Inc. He is proud of the market facilities, which are debt-free and offer relatively low rent for tenants.

“The produce companies here are strong, aggressive, and have kept expenses under control,” says Abrash, who is a fourth generation family

member of the company, founded by his great grandfather. While the operation does a little more retail business, it also has substantial food-service accounts.

Abrash adds that the 85-year-old market has wholesale operations that count on independent retailers to aggressively market the fruits and vegetables purchased on the market. In return, the independents bank on the wholesalers providing quality produce at a fair price.

Dominic Riggio is president of Riggio Distribution Co. (formerly Aunt-Mid Produce). The company was founded in 1948 and his family purchased the business in 1984. “We have a very diverse ethnic base allowing us to sell in large volumes,” he says. “Our geographic location allows us to sell across the [Detroit] River into Canada, and as far as the East Coast.”

Riggio says this past year the company launched a successful home-grown package under the Aunt-Mid label. The new pack is well

## FOOD DESERTS: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS PRACTICAL BUSINESS

BY BILL MARTIN

Whether there are so-called food deserts in Detroit is up for debate. In a 2012 report titled, *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Detroit*, which was commissioned by LaSalle Bank in Detroit, concluded in part, "... a fundamental underpinning of poor nutrition is the dearth of retail outlets that sell a range of nutritious foods at reasonable prices. Fast food and other fringe food outlets are everywhere, yet there are comparatively few quality grocery stores where fresh and healthy foods can be purchased."

The USDA defines food deserts as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options.

Nate Stone, general manager and chief operating officer of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Inc. observes, "It [food desert] is a catchy term, but I think people get the issues confounded. When people talk about food deserts, my question to them is, are you talking about a social responsibility, or in terms of practical business?"

Stone asks: How can there be a 100,000-square-foot retail store in Detroit, which lacks the population to support it?

Jeff Abrash is owner and president of Andrews Brothers, Inc. He describes the food desert conversations as relating to the Detroit inner city. He points out the city of Detroit has a population of around

700,000, while the surrounding metropolitan area has around 5 million residents. Abrash says there are "pocket" areas in the city, but there "is no such thing as food deserts."

At Ram Produce Distributing Inc., sales manager Jim Bommarito agrees. He also used the term "pocket areas," and says there may be certain residents that do not have easy access to food stores. He also notes Meijer, Inc. and Whole Foods Market Inc. opened stores in Detroit proper within the past year or so.

However, Stone is quick to point out the Meijer and Whole Foods stores are not located "in the most blighted areas" of Detroit. "There's not a business that could open in the most derelict areas and be successful."

Bommarito stresses that there definitely are not food deserts in Detroit's suburbs. If a problem does exist there, it may be there are too many retail stores. "Retailers have gotten a lot more competitive by reducing prices. This has made the Detroit terminal market even more competitive," says Bommarito.

Dominic Russo, buyer and sales manager for Rocky Produce Inc., recently read an article about 26 million people in the United States living in food deserts. "Detroit has had food deserts, but it is changing," he says.

Abrash at Andrews Bros. agrees that businesses are trying to change the problems facing Detroit. "It is still a tough inner city, with a lot of crime and a lack of resources."

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received and very popular between July and September when locally grown products are readily available.

He notes Riggio Distribution is well diversified with its business split about evenly between retail and foodservice customers. "However, there are more of our retailers purchasing foodservice packs, because they are selling more prepared foods, along with the retail items we have always sold," says Riggio.

Nate Stone has his own views of why the Detroit wholesale produce market is successful.

The general manager and chief operating officer of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons Inc. describes working conditions as "fun, interesting and ever changing. Being in the produce industry kind of reminds me of being a real sports fan, because of the range of emotions. That's what happens on the market every day."

Stone relates that sometimes one is feeling good, everything is running smoothly, but then a truck arrival is late, and an order is missed. "Some product arrives that didn't come

## RANDAZZO FRESH MARKET

BY BILL MARTIN

**Providing fresh foods in a modern age, with an old-world feel.**



As Sonny Randazzo, co-owner of Randazzo Fresh Market — a full service food specialty and gourmet marketplace — strolls through the produce department, he politely asks an associate to attend to a fruit display that isn't picture perfect. Later as he walks past the meat department he points out to another associate where a small portion of the stainless steel counter needs some spots removed.

"It is our tremendous attention to detail, exemplary customer service and excellent quality," says Sonny when asked how Randazzo Fresh Market competes with the large retail chains. Randazzo says he runs the family's three stores along with his sister, Maria Randazzo.

PRODUCE BUSINESS recently visited the Randazzo Fresh Market store, located in Sterling Heights, MI, a middle- to upper-middle-class-suburb, a few miles north of Detroit.

Sonny Randazzo proudly speaks of the freshness of the small chain's food, whether it's the scratch baked breads, seafood, gourmet grocery items, butcher meat, gift baskets, deli or fresh produce.

"I buy off of the Detroit Produce Terminal market for 95 percent of my produce, with the balance being with a few of the local farmers," he says. "You can save money buying direct, but I'm

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shopping at the terminal market seven days a week, and I hand pick everything.”

The retailer sees this as critical to assure customers about the quality of fresh fruits and vegetables they have come to expect.

Entering the 25,000-square-foot Randazzo store, one has a panoramic view of the produce department, which accounts for about one-third of the retail floor space.

“With most retail stores, you walk through the produce section and you never see it again,” observes Sonny. “Here, you enter the produce department and then go through the deli on one side, and come out of the deli on the other side and back into the other side of the produce department.”

The three Randazzo stores are located within a 20-minute drive of each other. The smallest is 18,000 square feet, while the largest totals 50,000 square feet, with the latter also serving as a warehouse with cooler space and dry storage.

Nino Randazzo, who is semi-retired, started the company in 1972. Sonny, who grew up in the family business, began running the operation starting in the mid-1990s.

Sonny notes the great care taken with designing the stores. “We have an eclectic, old world look, but with a lot of modern stainless steel. We have both at the same time, which gives it an edgy feel,” he says.

Shoppers not only have a lot of Italian and ethnic products from which to choose, but they have Italian music playing in the background.

As shoppers are checking out at the registers, one last temptation at Randazzo’s awaits. It is the quaint café, with a counter and stools. A large bowl of fresh-cut fruit on ice is center stage on the counter and is used to make smoothies. There’s also a nice selection of other tempting food items, plus a selection of private label coffee, such as the organic Brazilian variety, all of which is roasted locally.

A final touch is an old time Toledo brand scale that has been completely refurbished, and provides accurate weight for customers wanting to use it.

“When you come here, you know it is an Italian market,” stresses Sonny. “We are a fresh market. We want to have a fresh look, and we are constantly changing and evolving.”

pb

in quite like it was supposed to. One minute your head is flying in the clouds, the next minute your head is hanging down. But as a company, we’re all on the winning side of things — and it’s a great future.”

There is excitement in Stone’s voice as he speaks of Ben B. Schwartz president and chief executive Chris Billmeyer, who has two sons now working at the company. Both are University of Michigan graduates. The youngest son, Jake Billmeyer, came aboard soon after graduation, while Drew Billmeyer

spent seven years working a successful tenure at the Chicago Board of Trade before joining the family business.

“Both of these kids are still in their 20s, smart as can be, and are the hardest working guys you’ll ever meet,” says Stone.

At Serra Bros. Inc., salesman Brandon Serra notes the range of customers the wholesaler serves, ranging from Italian to Arabic to Jewish independent retailers. “They [independent retailers] care more about the product because they own their own stores. Sometimes

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with the big chains, the produce is not in top condition. With the independents, they have their own kids working there, unlike the large chains," says Serra.

Riggio concurs, asserting his company has always served many different types of customers. "We have always been diverse here. This has always been an ethnic driven market," he points out.

Dominic Russo is a buyer and sales manager for wholesale distributor Rocky Produce, Inc. "Our retailers do a phenomenal job. They drive

us to bring the best quality product in here. They are very creative about moving extra sales when needed. The relationships we have with our growers enables us to bring in the quality our independent retailers are looking for," observes Russo.

He notes there are buyers, who often are the owners of independent retail stores, walking the market and buying fresh fruits and vegetables, seven days a week. "They [independent retailers] want the best, freshest produce that arrives here on the

market," says Russo.

Riggio of Riggio Distribution agrees. "We definitely have a lot of strong independent retailers. They are on the street here [at the market] daily. They are looking for product that separates them from their competitors. They do a very good job."

### Differences Between Detroit And The Suburbs

The Detroit produce trade is generally aware of the negative image of the city around the country, and tend to acknowledge much of it is true. However, they also say there are many positives, especially when considering the modern, bustling suburbs, which rival many cities with positive imagery.

Stone at Ben B. Schwarz acknowledges most of the news about Detroit is generally bad. "Most people around the country will see some of the blight and create their own image of Detroit by looking at a dozen photos," says Stone. "But there are a lot of successful people here and a lot of successful companies."

Serra at Serra Bros. believes downtown Detroit is 20 years away from making a comeback. "The problem is more money needs to come into Detroit," he says. "People have to have money to spend money. But Detroit has tons of potential."

Some people think Detroit has already started turning things around. Stone says several large corporations recently moved their headquarters to Detroit. He specifically cites Quicken Loans Inc., moving to the city in 2012. Quicken is the largest online retail mortgage lender and the second largest overall retail lender in the United States, according to its website.

"There are bright spots," notes Stone. "But it's going to take a while. It's hard to turn these things around."

Riggio agrees and says he has buyers coming to his facility who cannot believe how much fresh produce is available. Some have said Riggio's produce is fresher than what they have seen at the point of shipping. "You have Detroit and you have Detroit metro. The metro area has some fantastic restaurants," he says.

Stone concurs the metropolitan area of Detroit is doing fine. He believes in order for the city of Detroit to turn things around it will require workers who used to be in the automobile industry to develop new skills. "They are making more cars than ever, and need fewer people than ever. They can make these cars in the dark, without air conditioning, without heat, without health insurance, and without worker's comp claims," he says. **pb**

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# What's Hot And What's Not In Foodservice

Vast array of produce offers endless opportunities for chefs to create the next big thing on the plate. **BY MINDY HERMANN**



(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF BALDOR AND LONGHORN STEAKHOUSE



Experts agree that chefs are enhancing flavor with heritage culinary techniques, which include roasting, grilling, smoking, and pickling.

**E**very year suppliers and the public at large wonder what's hot and what's not in the vast array of produce offerings at foodservice establishments nationwide. Kale, for sure — it's both hot and not. Other vegetables and fruits also stand out, but it's nearly impossible to name specifics without also considering preparation methods and trends such as seasonal, heirloom, local and global. Indeed, those are bigger than vegetables and fruits themselves. But first, a quick look at kale.

## Kale Makes It Easy To Be Green

This member of the cruciferous family — with relatives that include cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower — generates both smiles and groans from chefs. While kale appears in most sections of most menus, including smoothies and snacks, many chefs admit to being “so over” kale. Still, it likely has several more solid years as it continues to make the journey from fine dining, to quick serve, to the refrigerated-salad shelf and home cook.

“In our 2013-14 survey, kale was among the Top 10 most rapidly growing vegetables in fine,

casual and quick dining,” says Maeve Webster, senior director of research and consulting at Chicago, IL-based Datassential. “Furthermore, kale has one of the highest rates of penetration in fine-dining restaurants, topped only by radishes and cauliflower.” Nearly 28 percent of

fine-dining menus include kale, compared to only 8 percent of casual and quick serve.

“Kale opened the door for other greens,” says Cheryl Dolven, MS, RD, senior director of health and wellness at Orlando, Florida-based Darden. “Our chefs are now creating dishes



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with Swiss chard and Brussels sprouts, and they’re quite popular. For example, we couldn’t keep a Longhorn Steakhouse side dish of roasted Brussels sprouts with balsamic vinegar and a topping of Parmesan in stock.” Dolven predicts greens from global cuisines, such as Asian bok choy, will also grow in popularity.

Baby greens continue to be popular. “Our college students love baby kale and watercress,” notes Christian Fischer, vice president of culinary innovations, Chartwells Higher Education Dining Services in Rye Brook, NY. “They also look for anything sprouted — bean sprouts, pea shoots, alfalfa sprouts, sprouted grains — at the salad bar and in their sandwiches.”

**Pumpkin: From Mug To Plate**

The popularity of pumpkin-flavored coffee drinks and beers has demystified pumpkin and other types of squash on the menu. “Restaurants are introducing varieties that include kabocha, acorn, spaghetti, and delicata,” observes Webster. “What has changed even more, however, is the availability of products that are peeled, cubed, and ready to cook, and this is spilling over to other vegetables and fruits.”

“The pumpkin and squash trend is relentless, and every year’s cycle hits bigger and earlier,” says Bill Fuller, executive chef of Big Burrito in Pittsburgh, PA. One of Fuller’s favorite dishes is the lesser-known blue hubbard, which he roasts and purees for soup or side dishes.

**Much Ado About Mushrooms**

Several years ago, the San Jose, CA-based Mushroom Council teamed up with the Hyde Park, NY-based Culinary Institute of America to create a meat-mushroom blend to deliver



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEASONS 52

meatiness while lowering calories, fat and sodium. The combination became so popular that it’s appearing in dishes on restaurant and school menus alike.

Chef Robert Rusan, foodservice director, Maplewood Richmond Heights School District, St. Louis, MO, incorporates finely chopped mushrooms into meatloaf and meatballs. He says students also love topping their salads with various types of chopped mushrooms.

Chef Jehangir Mehta, executive chef and owner of Graffiti and Mehtaphor in New York City, creates a burger with 40 percent mushrooms (along with other vegetables) and 60 percent beef. “Mushrooms enhance the umami [a pleasant savory taste] of the meat and add their own meaty texture.” Mehta uses Portobello mushrooms, but other varieties such as Black Trumpet and Crimini/Cremeni also are growing in popularity.





PHOTO COURTESY OF SEASONS 52

**“Classic vegetables such as beets and artichokes are on various Darden menus. Corn, an age-old vegetable, is showing up in both traditional and new forms — on the cob or grilled in season and also sautéed, creamed, roasted, and pureed for thickening soup.”**

— Cheryl Dolven, Darden



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

fruit cups,” notes Patsy Ross, RD, director of nutrition, 7-Eleven, Dallas, TX.

### What’s Old Is New Again

“Few people could have predicted cauliflower would become the latest vegetable darling,” says Pamela Smith, RD, culinary consultant and founding principal for the Orlando, FL-based Shaping America’s Plate organization. Smith points out the naturally low-calorie, low-carbohydrate cauliflower was propelled forward by popular weight loss diets. Indeed, chefs use pureed cauliflower to lighten up mashed potatoes and add cream-free texture to soups.

Cauliflower of various colors and other colorful vegetables are put to a creative use at university and college dining facilities. “To make soups with school colors, chefs swirl purees of the appropriately-colored vegetables such as cauliflower,” says Chartwell’s Fischer.

The growing use of pea protein as a meatless ingredient may be raising awareness of and interest in peas. “Peas are poised for a comeback,” observes Rich Dachman, vice president of produce, Sysco Corporation, Houston, TX. At Kitchen 555, a corporate-dining facility in Rye, NY, Chef Ross Goldflam plans to feature snow peas and sugar snap peas on his menus in the coming months.

“Classic vegetables such as beets and artichokes are on various Darden menus,” notes Dolven. “Corn, an age-old vegetable, is showing up in both traditional and new forms — on the cob or grilled in season and also sautéed, creamed, roasted, and pureed for thickening soup.”

Availability creates trends. “This year’s bumper crop of heirloom tomatoes had us scrambling to use them while they were fresh

and also exploring ways to extend the tomato season by creating tomato products,” says Chef Fuller.

Chefs are exploring new preparation methods for classic vegetables. Fischer, of Chartwells, steams carrots over ginger orange tea and other vegetables over miso soup or Earl Grey tea to infuse them with delicate and unique flavor notes.

### Local Versus Global

Which has more influence on fruit and vegetable trends, local or global? The inspiration for tomorrow’s hot item could come from as near as the restaurant rooftop, as with the 19 varieties of heirloom tomatoes at New York City’s North Square, or as far as halfway around the world. However, a focus on local means produce trends will differ from region to region depending on what can be grown.

“As chefs, we want local and sustainable sources for the fruits and vegetables we eat,” explains Douglas Stuchel, MAT, CHE, who is foodservice management faculty advisor, Johnson & Wales University, Providence, RI.

Adding a personal touch to farm-to-table can create mini-trends. “When I introduce farmers to students, students build a closer connection to the food they’re eating,” notes Fischer.

“Our school district has three professional gardeners who help create trends by introducing new produce to our students,” says Rusan of Maplewood Richmond Heights School District. “Students now eat all types of greens, purple okra, heirloom tomatoes, aquaponic lettuce, and other foods they had previously never tried.”

Local and global are not mutually exclusive. “In Rhode Island, local communities receive

Dolven describes the ubiquitous presence of mushroom on Darden menus. “We use both wild and cultivated mushrooms in main and side dishes such as stuffed mushrooms, chicken marsala with mushrooms, and a burger with mushrooms mixed into the ground meat.”

### Beverages Jumpstart Fruit

“The popularity of smoothies has given a boost to banana, mango and apple,” says Laura Lapp, RD, director of nutrition, Chartwells Higher Education Dining Services. As creamy tropical fruits such as dragonfruit, cherimoya, Red Cactus pear, and papaya become better known, they are likely to make their way onto restaurant menus.

Fruit trends include increased availability and convenience. “While our fastest moving fruit is the banana, we are seeing a lot of movement in mango, apple, pineapple, grapes, and strawberries, the fruits that we offer in seasonal



(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY JOHNSON & WALES UNIVERSITY AND LONGHORN STEAKHOUSE

support for growing native produce from their home country,” says Stuchel. “Chefs jumped on board to source exotic items such as African vegetables from farms in our area.”

Webster notes that the expected emergence of Nordic, English, German, Brazilian and Peruvian cuisines may usher in Norwegian berries such as cloudbberries, lingonberries, and bilberries in desserts and beverages; and South American starches oca, mashua, and ulluco as fries and chips. Expect a wider variety of peppers too.

Trends are likely to include fruits and vegetables from Middle Eastern, Thai, Indian, and Korean cuisines, all of which are increasing in popularity. According to Datassential, tropical, Latin, and Asian fruits — coconut, dates, papaya, yuzu, and fig — are on the rise in fine dining and on a course to trickle down to a wider variety of consumers.

Established global cuisines such as Mexican and Chinese have become more adventurous in their offerings. “We are incorporating more jicama, different types of chilis, and a variety of Mexican and ethnic herbs,” says Barbara Sibley, owner of La Palapa Cocina Mexicana restaurant in New York City.

“We enjoy pairing Mexican and Asian flavors,” notes Fuller. He adds yuzu to margaritas, creates tacos with yuzu, lobster, and the ever-popular avocado, and looks for new food partners for ingredients such as galangal and Kaffir lime.

### Stretching Seasonal

“Seasonal eating allows you to enjoy fruits and vegetables at their best,” says Pamela Smith, who helped launch Darden’s Seasons 52

and Bahama Breeze. But seasons are short.

John Abels, chef instructor, Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts, Chicago, IL, encourages chefs to take full advantage of the seasonal produce in their cooler. “Pickling and canning are making a comeback and will be the wave of the future for minimizing waste.”

Fruits and vegetables that are suitable for pickling such as cabbage, turnips and radishes are likely to increase in popularity. “Darden restaurants showcase dishes such as a Vietnamese Bahn Mi sandwich with pickled carrots and papaya relish, grilled pastrami with pickled jalapenos, pickled Asian vegetables as a side dish, and classic burger accompanied by pickled cucumbers served in a decorative jar,” says Darden’s Dolven.

### Focus On Flavor

The quest for flavor is reshaping produce on the plate. “Deliciousness is trendy,” says Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, founder and president, Farmer’s Daughter Consulting, Carmichael, CA. “Chefs are enhancing flavor with heritage culinary techniques that include roasting, grilling, smoking, and pickling.”

“We prepare vegetables as we would meat,” says Fischer. “Our vegetarian menus include smoked carrots, roasted squash ‘ribs’ topped with barbecue sauce and grilled cauliflower steaks. Many can stand alone as entrées on the plate.”

Chef Daniel Yacashin, chef de cuisine, Village Social Kitchen + Bar restaurant in Mount Kisco, NY, takes advantage of specialty equipment to enhance the flavor of vegetables. “We char tomatoes in our wood-fired pizza oven and then use them as a base for sauces. Our experimentation with sous vide

[cooking technique] has led to the introduction of watermelon steaks, a Swiss chard stem side dish and even a sous vide gazpacho.”

Taste bud roulette is popular. “Seared shisito peppers currently are the rage,” observes Myrdal Miller. “Some are spicy hot and some are not, and there’s no way to know which is which. They add an element of surprise to dining.”

“Flavor is about texture too,” observes Chef Mehta of Graffiti. “I use avocado, papaya, banana, and other fleshy fruits to make sorbets that have a rich ice cream-like mouthfeel.” Many chefs use creamy vegetables such as avocado and pureed squash as the base for sandwich spreads. Although avocado is not new, it was mentioned by several chefs as among the most popular menu items.

### Choose MyPlate

Health, nutrition, and obesity initiatives are driving changes in foodservice. The government’s nutrition guidance icon, MyPlate, depicts the ideal plate as being half vegetables and fruit. “The entire industry is looking to deliver on the demand for health and wellness by increasing the amount and variety of vegetables and fruits on the plate,” notes Myrdal Miller.

“Foodservice is doing its part to help reduce obesity by putting more produce on the plate,” says Sysco’s Dachman.

“Fruits and vegetables are highly emphasized in popular diets such as paleo, gluten free, and Weight Watchers,” observes Darden’s Dolven. When patrons start requesting an uncommon vegetable, for example, sunchoke, a diet book or plan may be the initial source of the inspiration.

# Bake Up Holiday Sales Of Dried Fruits And Nuts

High margins and low shrink help these items boost the bottomline. **BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD**



Fourth quarter sales in 2013 represented a 22 percent increase over the average 3.2 percent of produce sales dried fruits and nuts contributed during the 52 weeks ending July 26, 2014.

**D**ried fruits and nuts typically take center stage in the produce department during the November and December holidays. After all, if it's not figgy pudding or chestnuts roasted over an open fire and blended into the cream filling of a chocolate Yule Log, then it is hundreds of other handed-down cake, cookie, bread and pie recipes that entice shoppers to seek out these ingredients for their festive baking.

These high-margin, low-shrink ingredients contributed a considerable 4.1 percent of produce dollar sales in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2013, according to data supplied by the West Dundee, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group. Fourth quarter sales represented a 22 percent increase over the average 3.2 percent of produce sales dried fruits and nuts contributed during the 52 weeks ending July 26, 2014.

Retailers that provide a variety of dried fruits and nuts in the produce department and suggest these ingredients for baking through recipes and advertising will be rewarded with the bonus of incremental sales.

## Key Ingredients

"Raisins, dates, dried cranberries, shelled pecans, walnuts and almonds are some of the items we promote for holiday baking in November and December," says Richard Stiles,

director of produce and floral at Redner's Markets, a Reading, PA-based chain which operates 46 warehouse markets and 14 convenience stores in three states.

What items should make up a merry winter baking display?

Dried cranberries (39.3 percent), raisins (10.0 percent), prunes/dried plums (7.9 percent), apricots (7.1 percent) and dates (5.3 percent), tallied as the Top 5 dried fruits sold out of produce during Q4 in 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.

"The No. 1 selling item [in our company] within the dried fruit category is our 20-ounce canister of raisins," says Joe Tamble, vice president of retail sales for North America, for Sun-Maid Growers of California, headquartered in Kingsburg, CA. "Other top-selling items are the bag-in-box raisins, golden raisins and moist baking raisins. Zante currants spike in sales during the last three months of the year."

Sunsweet Growers, Inc., in Yuba City, CA, introduced its 7-ounce resealable pouch bag of diced dried plums called Amazins in 2011 and expanded the line to include 5-ounce resealable pouch bags of Amazin Cranberries (diced dried cranberries and plums) and Amazin Berry Blend (diced dried cranberries, plums, blueberries and cherries) in 2013.

"Amazins have a lower moisture content

which makes them great for adding in baked good recipes such as quick breads and cookies," explains product manager, Stephanie Harralson. "In addition, the 7-ounce bag of plum Amazins equals about 1 cup and makes measuring into a recipe easy."

Dates are another popular and festive addition to bread recipes, cakes and cookies.

"Year after year we see the holidays are one of the peak times for Bard Valley Natural Delights Medjool date sales," says Erin Hanagan, marketing manager for Datepac LLC, in Yuma, AZ.

Dried fig products also spike in sales from October to January.

"If dried figs indexed over a 12-month period at 100, then sales during the holidays would index more than 200," explains Linda Cain, vice president of marketing and retail sales for Valley Fig Growers, in Fresno, CA. "The two primary products are Mission figs, which have a figgier taste compared to the mild or slightly nutty flavor of Golden figs."

A diversity of holiday recipes calls for an assortment of dried fruit products.

"Include products in the baking display like dried apricots, apples, cherries, pineapple, papaya and mango to create a one-stop shop," says Sun-Maid's Tamble.

Pistachios (37.8 percent), almonds (18.1 percent), walnuts (16.6 percent), peanuts (8.9

## DRIED FRUITS AND NUTS

percent) and pecans (6.6 percent) represented the Top 5 types of nuts sold out of produce during Q4 in 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.

"Pistachios are a popular snack nut, however we are seeing shelled pistachio sales as an ingredient for baking growing," says Joseph Setton, vice president of domestic sales for Terra Bella, CA-based Setton International Foods, Inc.

Shelled is the No. 1 form of pecan sold at supermarkets.

"The big time to sell pecans at retail is for the holidays," says Richard Merritt, president and owner of the Merritt Pecan Company, in Weston, GA.

Retailers start to bring chestnuts into the produce department in early November.

"Small retailers and mom-and-pop grocers will buy the 25- or 55-pound bags, but the chain stores want chestnuts pre-packaged. The benefit of packaging is the information. For example, you have to cut the chestnut across before roasting or it will explode," explains Salvatore Vacca, president of A.J. Trucco, Inc., in Bronx, NY.

### Build A Baking Center

"Most retailers are building large holiday baking displays in the produce department," says Ben Antongiovanni, sales manager at Atlas Produce & Distribution, Inc., in Bakersfield, CA. "Building large displays at eye level in high-

traffic areas such as the banana table or berry display will maximize sales of dates and other dried fruits and nuts in the fall."

Bristol Farms, a 15-store chain headquartered in Carson, CA, features special merchandising displays of dried fruits and nuts in October, November and December. "For us, this display depends on the store size and layout," says John Savidan, director of produce merchandising. "It might be a shelf gondola, or separate display like an endcap, or standalone island display."

Tables set front and center in the produce department are a good way to create this kind of display, according to Paul Rich, vice president of sales for the Durham-Ellis Pecan Co., Inc., in Comanche, TX. "This type of display should be two to three times the size of the dried fruit and nut display the rest of the year."

This year, suppliers of Natural Delights-branded dates will feature a new floor stand shipper display, which features holiday recipes as well as hold packages of Medjool whole, pitted and/or organic dates.

"We are playing up the theme of 'Naughty or Nice' with respect to what type of items can be created, decadent to healthy, using our dates," explains Datepac's Hanagan.

Build big floor displays with back-to-back shippers to really grab impulse sales.

"We've seen retailers do this with multiple items and multiple brands. It makes a great visual," says Sunsweet's Harralson.

## Trendy Ways To Sell More Dried Fruits For Holiday Baking

**H**ealth and wellness combined with good taste are two big reasons customers shop in the produce department. These attributes are a great platform to gain incremental sales of dried fruits during the holiday baking season. How? Pureed dried plums are an excellent fat substitute and date paste is a great sugar substitute in baked goods recipes. Both of these ingredients are simple to make from dried plums and dried dates.

"Prune puree is easy to make. Simply combine 8-ounces of prunes or dried plums and 6 tablespoons of hot water in a food processor and blend until smooth," explains Stephanie Harralson, product manager for Sunsweet Growers, Inc., in Yuba City, CA. "Replace half the


butter or oil called for in a recipe with prune puree. This works well in recipes like brownies and banana bread."

Similarly, blending 2 cups of dates with a half cup of hot water can make date paste.

"We are finding that many consumers are looking for ways to incorporate natural sweetening elements into their baking routines, and Natural Delights Medjool date paste is a perfect addition to any recipe that calls for sugar normally," says Erin Hanagan, marketing manager for Datepac LLC, in Yuma, AZ. "We created an eBook full of recipes and ideas focused on this topic. Recipes include Spiced Medjool Date & Walnut Brownies and Medjool Date Pudding Cake with Caramel Sauce. **pb**



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### Get The Recipe Word Out

The festive season is a time when many customers already know what they want to bake when they come in-store to shop. Yet, this doesn't diminish the valuable nature of recipes as these can be used to expand usages and cash register rings.

"We will build separate displays in the front of the store with all the ingredients in one spot," explains Redner's Stiles. "This means dried fruits and nuts along with grocery items like flour and sugar."

Sunsweet Growers offer tear pads with recipes for a festive Berry Chutney Torte, Plum Pastries and Orange Oat Cookies, entertaining tips and a 55-cent off coupon. These pads can be affixed to shippers displaying the company's Amazins products. Similarly, Sun-Maid Growers has a variety of recipe booklets for its dried fruit products.

"Our website has a range of recipe ideas, and our web address is on our packaging. We also do a lot of recipe sharing on Pinterest for social media active fig lovers, as well as online contests where consumers share photos and recipes of their dishes for a chance to visit Boston and watch the filming of America's Test Kitchen. We are a sponsor of this TV show and have worked with them on recipe development," says Valley Fig's Cain.

Setton International Foods enlisted the help of celebrity chefs, Jenny Engel and Heather Goldberg, who own Los Angeles, CA-based cooking school as well as gourmet vegan food company Spork Foods, to develop both seasonal as well as year-round recipes using the company's Pistachio Chewy Bites. This product is made of shelled pistachios, dried cranberries and agave nectar fashioned into bite-sized bars.

"The idea is to take this finished dried fruit and nut product and help time-starved consumers turn it into a 5- to 10-minute meal or dish," says Setton.

Holiday-oriented recipes include Chocolate Covered Pistachio Chewy Bites, Scones and Cranberry Sauce.

"These recipes will be available for our partner retailers to use electronically on their own websites or social media sites. In addition, we'll be launching a public relations campaign to get these recipes out to magazine editors and TV food shows," explains Setton. "These are much more direct methods of delivering recipes to consumers rather than have them stumble across them in store."

### Price Promote

Price promotions can spur even greater sales of the produce department's prime seasonal

baking ingredients.

"We will promote dried fruits and nuts by 'everyday low pricing' through the baking season and via spot ads. For example, we might go from an in-store retail of \$2.99 to 2 for \$5 as the 'everyday low price,' to \$2 in spot ads," explains Redner's Stiles.

Many suppliers offer promotional support in the form of ad allowances. "A promotion, regardless of the depth of the discount, moves the needle on sales. While some retailers tend to be more aggressive in pricing than others,

there is no need to make dried fruits a loss leader," says Sun-Maid's Tamble.

There are two ideal times to promote dried fruits and nuts for holiday baking. "The first is two weeks prior to Thanksgiving consumers not only use dried fruits in baking, but also use them in turkey stuffing and side dishes like sweet potato casserole. The second is throughout the month of December for baking as well as for use in appetizers and holiday gifts like homemade trail mix," suggests Sunsweet Harralson. **pb**



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# IS PMA'S FRESH SUMMIT WORTH ATTENDING?



Last month we discussed the challenges that were made by upper management to attend Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) Fresh Summit and the cost entailed. We will now examine the second part of management's concern regarding the conference.

After attending the convention, at the first staff meeting, it is inevitable that management will ask Produce to share with

the group everything they learned and what was new and different at the show. This is obviously a question aimed at providing the justification for the cost of sending one or possibly more team members to the show. They demand to see and be presented with concrete examples of the value of the show. Once again management shows that "they just don't get it!"

I have attended the PMA convention for more than 30 years, and in every staff meeting immediately following the conference, management always wants a short and concise discussion of what was learned and how it will benefit the operation. The values of attendance at PMA for retailers goes beyond discovering what is new in the industry and those opportunities that will equate to improved performance and/or profitability for the retailer.

While keeping pace with new developments in the industry and seizing opportunities are very important, it is the networking and conversation with peers in the industry that is the true value of PMA. In my experience, many times chance encounters and conversations prove to be more valuable than some of the new items or opportunities that you uncovered during show.

These benefits are not only reserved for the retailer, but the exhibitors, vendors and suppliers also can reap the benefits of these chance meetings and discussions. In many cases, the exhibiting companies and the vendors attending the show gamble their company's future success on the ability to meet their target customers. For the exhibitor, this is a key aspect as there is a substantial cost to being an exhibitor at the PMA. Many times successes are judged against the number of retailers and key customers that they were able to connect and converse with in their booth. For those without a booth, the key to success depends on those chance encounters and the ability to locate and

engage key customers on the floor. Failing to find and contact these individuals can ruin a strategy for success and growth of a company.

While management is concerned over the fact that conventions, inherently, are perceived as being one big party with lavish dinners and considerable consumption of adult beverages, working a convention successfully from the retailer's side or the vendor's viewpoint involves a considerable amount of effort and time. This is especially true of a huge gathering such as PMA. The sheer size and number of people, booths, and vendors makes meeting and conversing in a meaningful manner with your key contacts a difficult task at best. The challenge of negotiating through the maze of booths, and the mass of humanity in

the hall can be intimidating and frustrating to the attendee, whatever his or her affiliation.

Perhaps the size and importance of PMA that draws all the people to attend is becoming a liability in terms of achieving success. Having lived on both sides of the fence, I experienced the inability to discover all of the new items or opportunities in the industry, and the frustration of not being able to present new ideas and opportunities to key customers because the show is so large you cannot find all your key customers. In fact, it is nearly impossible for a single person to see the entire show and discover all the potential opportunities

and new items that are available. In all the years I attended the convention, it has grown from one that could be covered by one person to one that requires several people assigned specific areas to reasonably cover the show floor. It is especially frustrating for vendors, with or without booths, to locate and engage the retailers attending the show. Because of their importance, these retailers (as well as other buyers) are often mobbed by potential vendors when they walk the floor, which slows them down and prevents them from properly exploring the conference.

While a discussion of the solutions to these challenges facing humanity is a subject for another column, it is clear that attending PMA's Fresh Summit and having a successful outcome depends on the effort, strategy, and new opportunities that a vendor can show to the retailer. For all concerned, it is a tough grind that exhausts all of the participants. Upper management can rest easy knowing that their personnel, regardless of the side of the industry they are on, are working diligently for the company and exhausting themselves during their attendance at the PMA convention.

**I have attended the PMA convention for more than 30 years, and in every staff meeting immediately following the conference, management always wants a short and concise discussion of what was learned and how it will benefit the operation. The values of attendance at PMA for retailers goes beyond discovering what is new in the industry and those opportunities that will equate to improved performance and/or profitability for the retailer.**

**By Don Harris**

Don Harris is a 40-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from "field-to-fork" in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to [editor@producebusiness.com](mailto:editor@producebusiness.com)

# EXAMINING PRODUCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE US IN EUROPE



**O**n any visit to an international fruit market in Asia, Latin and Central America or neighbouring countries, such as Mexico and Canada, one will see a range of U.S. fresh produce on sale — often visibly promoted to a high standard. The U.S. is a major player in the global fruit market, and of course, benefits from a large domestic market. This puts the U.S. in a strong

position, but the European Union (EU) now seems to be less of a priority than in the past.

The U.S. spent considerable time, money and effort in the past building market share in Europe. There is a danger as U.S. exporters look for new markets in Asia and elsewhere — essentially, their eye is taken off the ball. Our experience is that it can take a long time to build an export market, but it can be lost much more easily. It takes considerable effort to win them back. Never a truer word spoken is the phrase often used in marketing circles, that ‘it is five times easier to keep an existing customer, than win back a lapsed one.’

U.S. exporters sometimes struggled to supply the EU market, and of course, face competition from locally based producers and found that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) can work against them. But no export market is easy. This barrier to trade might well be removed when the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and U.S. comes to fruition, although this will not happen overnight. With often significant, locally-based EU production, and imports from other parts of the world — notably the Southern Hemisphere — the U.S. assumed the position of a niche supplier to the EU, but still has a loyal following in the commercial trade for a number of products.

The EU still has a number of highly attractive factors, though, for any export source to consider. The following are all worth bearing in mind for U.S. exporters:

The EU is home to more than 500 million consumers, and levels of wealth are relatively high, despite the economic problems of the past few years. The threat of double-dip recessions seems to be fading — although in some cases, full economic recovery is still fragile and some way off.

There are 28 markets to choose from ranging from the mega

markets of Germany, the U.K., France, Italy and Spain to much smaller markets such as Ireland, Belgium, and the Scandinavian countries.

A number of EU countries act as an *entrepot* for significant re-exports to other parts of Europe, North Africa, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union markets, which are sometimes difficult to reach on a direct basis.

The range of customer types is wide — from the discount giants of Germany to the high-end retailers such as Waitrose and Marks & Spencer in the U.K. and just about everything in between.

Leading EU retailers all have significant expansion plans in areas such as Africa, parts of the Middle East and Asia as part of their plans to globalize their business. Global retailers will seek global suppliers.

EU markets are technically demanding, but often present far less commercial risk compared to the emerging markets where doing business is inherently difficult.

The physical infrastructure is good — roads, rail, air and sea freight routes all work effectively.

The concentrated nature of the market in many countries means U.S. exporters will often only need a relatively small number of customers to gain potentially significant market shares.

The foodservice sector is well established, consolidating and still growing. With U.S. expertise in the foodservice channel well established, this could be an opportunity for the future.

Doing business in the EU, as in any export market, is only really for the long-termer and highly professional, but the development of the Free Trade Agreement will be a massive boost to develop trade across the board. The EU is still a major destination for many international produce suppliers, such as the Southern Hemisphere, despite the obvious temptations and attraction of Asia and other emerging markets. The regulatory environment will move in favor of U.S. exporters over time, but efforts are needed to build those all-important commercial relationships, as well as retain and nurture the ones that already exist.

Taking a long-term view of what opportunities are in Europe presents a major challenge for the U.S. produce trade. Turning a back to Europe now might see the market opportunity closed for some time to come — just at the very moment when the prospects for U.S. exports seem better than they might have for some time.

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By John Giles

John Giles is a divisional director with Promar International, a leading agri food value chain consulting company and a subsidiary of Genus plc. He is also the current chair of the Food, Drink & Agricultural Group of the U.K.-based Chartered Institute of Marketing and can be contacted at the following email: [john.giles@genusplc.com](mailto:john.giles@genusplc.com)

# IS THERE ROOM FOR ANOTHER BANANA BRAND?



**A**s you might have read, AgroAmerica Fruit Co. recently announced the launch of its new brand, ONE BANANA “The Better Banana Co.,” in September. In speaking to industry leaders about this program, many questioned whether the industry needed another banana company.

When you sit back and examine the number of established banana brands, it’s a great question. My thoughts go immediately to where would a new brand best fit into the marketplace? Would a new brand be most successful with a lower or higher quality spec? Should it focus on a low cost, equal price or premium price? Would the company be more successful by focusing on a commitment to the environment and social responsibility? Is there any innovation missing in the industry, and how might a different approach be marketed? What kind of company could effectively step in to provide this type of solution? In breaking down these questions, I think it’s best to start with the consumer. As the true decision-makers, we need to understand what primarily drives their purchasing decisions.

Industry studies show the most important things that influence buying are appearance and quality. Consumers buy with their eyes. They are easily put off by visual defects like scarring and staining. They look for a variation of color plus hand size. The complicating factor for a banana company is many retailers ripen their own fruit. As such, a banana grower cannot readily control what its products look and feel like at the retail level.

What growers can control is their packing standards and specifications. The question then is should this specification be lower, the same or higher than the industry standard? In examining what matters most to the customer, the best course of action is to always exceed industry quality standards. That means farms in growing regions will need to consistently deliver a slightly larger average bunch size in packing and incorporate protection standards that prevent cosmetic defects and substantially reduce latex staining. In addition, due to the potential for major weather events, any new company must have a built-in risk diversification program where it can multisource

from different growing regions to ensure customer supply.

The second most important driver for the consumer is price. To gain marketshare and give retailers an incentive to change brands, a new company must be able to provide a strategic cost advantage to gain trial. This means being more efficient than the competition and fully integrated in all areas of production, shipping, and distribution.

When you look at the costs of bananas versus other commodities over the past 10-plus years, price increases lagged, and farming costs outpaced price increases. Given this trend, a strategy must be established to offer a much more efficient shipping, port, and inland delivery system.

Aside from quality and price, it’s also important to be a responsible international partner. Any new player must show a 100 percent commitment to Quality Standards, Social Responsibility and Sustainability Practices. The widest-recognized industry leading programs for such standards are Global G.A.P. and Rainforest Alliance.

Today’s and tomorrow’s banana customers value transparency and want to buy from environmentally sustainable farms, where workers, families and communities are supported with better living conditions. In addition, companies that adopt

positive socio-economic programs like ensuring employees are paid living wages, producing clean energy, reducing water waste, and promoting forest conservation will generate goodwill with customers, as well as receive credit for their efforts with retail buyers.

Finally, there needs to be an element of innovation. As a category, banana growth is relatively flat and in need of a new way of doing business. Custom-tailored retailer solutions, along with powerful storytelling through social media and other new media platforms represent the future.

Now back to our original question, “Is there room for another banana brand?” The answer is, yes. There is room for a banana brand provided that it’s different. A new banana company must be disruptive, set new industry leading standards, and be better. I see a bright future for companies like ONE BANANA. It has more than 40 years experience in the North American and European markets and is committed to being a “better banana company.” I wish the company the best of luck in its quest to make a difference — ONE BANANA at a time.

**When you look at the costs of bananas versus other commodities over the past 10-plus years, price increases lagged, and farming costs outpaced price increases. Given this trend, a strategy must be established to offer a much more efficient shipping, port, and inland delivery system.**

**By Craig Carlson**

Craig Carlson is a 30-year veteran of both the retail and foodservice industries. Carlson is presently consulting in all matters of the produce supply chain, strategy, marketing and business development. For questions or more information, visit [carlsonproduceconsulting.com](http://carlsonproduceconsulting.com)



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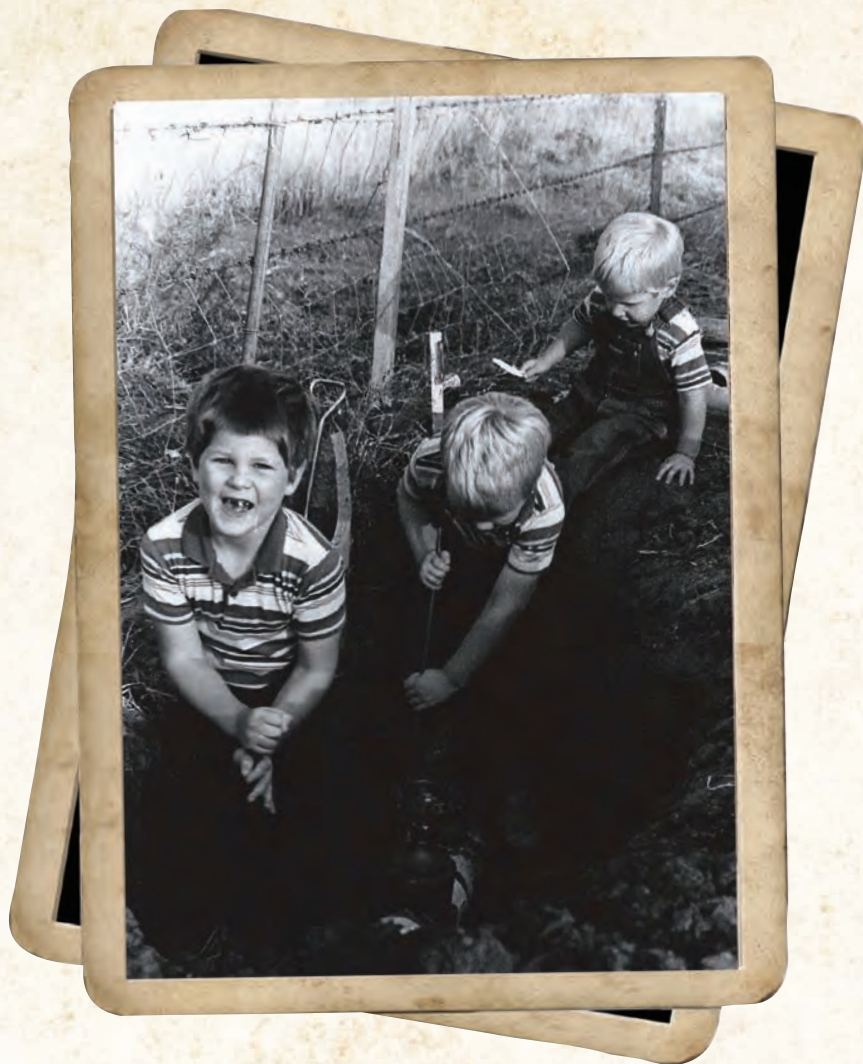
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## ‘TAKE IT OUTSIDE!’

**T**he Brown brothers, Andrew (pictured at around 6 years old), Adam (pictured at around 4 years old) and Justin (pictured at around 2 years old) may have thought they were helping their father, David Brown, with farming chores the day this photo was taken, “but in reality, we were more likely getting in the way,” jokes Justin Brown, fifth generation Sunkist grower. “We were playing in a hole our father dug to make repairs/updates to the irrigation system — which was installed in the late 1970s — at the Hill Lemon Ranch.” One of Justin’s early memories when his brothers and he were creating a raucous was his mother expounding her famous line, “Why don’t you kids take it outside!”

The Brown’s became involved with Sunkist because of the family’s long history with the cooperative, which dates back to the very beginning of the Sunkist cooperative in the late 1800s — when the Brown family started farming citrus in Southern California areas such as the Redlands, Upland and Riverside.

By the early 1930s, the family moved to its current farming land in the Central Valley, and began growing and packing citrus in the Visalia, Woodlake, Orosi and Orange Cove areas. By the 1980s, David established Orange Cove, CA-based D Bar J Orchards (while still maintaining Hill Lemon Ranch), and the new company’s involvement with Sunkist was

simply a natural progression.

Although the Brown family has been growing California citrus for five generations, Justin is the second generation for D Bar J Orchards. Today, Justin runs the farm’s day-to-day operations with his father. Andrew works for the Loveland, CO-based Crop Production Services and consults with the farm operation’s pest and nutritional needs. Adam works in the citrus industry as well for a large grower/packer/shipper.

Because of D Bar J Orchards’ location, which is at the foot of the southern Sierra Nevada mountain range, it is highly diversified with several varieties of navel oranges (early-to-late season), lemons, pummelos, as well as mandarins. The farm also grows specialty citrus items such as Meyer and seedless lemons, Moro Blood oranges and Cara Cara navel oranges.

The family prides itself on innovation in sustainable farming, and continuously makes an effort to conserve water. David started converting to micro-sprinkler irrigation in 1985, and he planted their first Clementine orchard with drip irrigation in 2012. “We are constantly striving to make the best use of our precious resources,” says Justin. “Answering the demands of consumers’ concerns about food safety, we are Global G.A.P. certified, and we take pride in practicing the best and responsible methods for growing fresh, healthy, and nutritious citrus.”

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or email [info@producebusiness.com](mailto:info@producebusiness.com)

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