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# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

## LIFTING CONSUMPTION



**INSIDE**

INDUSTRY CHALLENGE TO LAUREN SCOTT, PMA'S NEW MARKETING OFFICER  
FRESHFIELDS FARM • TASTE • WINTER MERCHANDISING  
MISTING SYSTEMS • IMPORTED SWEET ONIONS • CITRUS  
MEXICAN AVOCADOS • ARGENTINA • CENTRAL AMERICAN PRODUCE  
BANANAS • PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS • HOLIDAY BAKING  
REGIONAL PROFILE: DETROIT



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*Contact your Dole representative to add DOLE® Organic Bananas to your store.  
For more info on DOLE® Organic Bananas, please visit [Dole.com](http://Dole.com)*



## cover story

**30**  
**LIFTING CONSUMPTION**  
 Broadened trade, greater availability are part of a winning formula



**58**

## commentary

- 14** **FRUITS OF THOUGHT**  
Now That We Have A New President...
- 101** **RETAIL PERSPECTIVE**  
Post-PMA Observations: Interpretation Versus Reality
- 102** **WHOLESALE MARKET**  
Giving Thanks
- 104** **EUROPEAN MARKET**  
Generation Z Habits — Something To Smile About
- 105** **PRODUCE ON THE MENU**  
The Sense And Sensibilities Of Southern Cooking



**42**

## features

**42**  
**ALL IN GOOD TASTE**  
 New flavors are building sales, consumer base as technology takes center stage.

**46**  
**WINTER MERCHANDISING**  
 Retailers prepare with smart merchandising strategies to move the season's commodities.

**51**  
**PRODUCE MISTING**  
**LITERALLY PREVENTS SHRINK**  
 Finer spray is better in modern systems.

**54**  
**WINTER'S IMPORTED**  
**SWEET ONIONS ARE HOT**  
 A bright future is in store as productivity increases and popularity continues on an upswing.



**54**



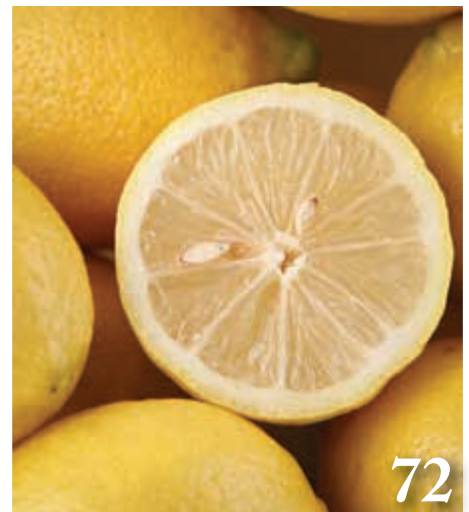
**51**

**58**  
**A CENTRAL AMERICAN BONANZA**  
 Produce imports are on the rise, as this region helps supply America's fruit and vegetable needs during the fall and winter months.

**67**  
**MEXICAN AVOCADO PROMOTIONS**  
 Aggressive marketing can move the product from a niche specialty to a major success story.



**72**  
**ARGENTINA: A VITAL SOURCE OF**  
**COUNTER-SEASONAL PRODUCE**  
 The country fills important niches in year-round fruit and vegetable supply.



**72**

## special features

**16**  
**RISING STARS**

**24**  
**FROM THE PAGES OF PERISHABLE PUNDIT**

Industry Challenge To Lauren Scott, PMA's New Marketing Officer: Can The Industry Produce Consistent Quality To Enable Effective

**28**  
**ASCENDENT INDEPENDENTS: FRESHFIELDS FARM**

Well-known brands, locally grown produce and outstanding value keep customers coming back.



**91**  
**DETROIT REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE: Spotlight On Detroit**

The city's produce scene experiences a resurgence.

**96**  
**FOODSERVICE PROFILE: ANDIAMO**  
 The 20-year-old Detroit chain of nine Italian-themed restaurants aims to impress.

**97**  
**RETAIL PROFILE: PRODUCE STATION**  
 This retailer follows a mantra for tasty fruits and veggies.



## departments

### MERCHANDISING REVIEW

**75** **5 CITRUS-CENTRIC MERCHANDISING TIPS**  
 Year-round supply offers bonanza for savvy retailers.

**82** **BANKING ON BANANAS**  
 Popular fruit helps retailers boost storewide sales.

**87** **KEY STRATEGIES FOR MERCHANDISING PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS**  
 A few seemingly innocuous mistakes can derail otherwise sound tactics.

**98** **DRIED FRUITS & NUTS HOLIDAY BAKING CAN SELL MORE DRIED FRUIT AND NUTS**  
 Between Thanksgiving and New Year's, shift the retail marketing focus to maximize profits.

## in this issue

- 6** QUIZ
- 8** WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE
- 10** PRODUCE WATCH
- 20** FORWARD THINKING
- 22** RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE
- 23** COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS
- 106** BLAST FROM THE PAST
- 106** INFORMATION SHOWCASE



### CORRECTIONS

In the September 2016 issue of **PRODUCE BUSINESS**, Bella Sun Luci's PMA Aisle by Aisle listing on page 102 was incorrectly spelled. Our regrets for the error.



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and Markets**

Visit us at The New York Produce Show  
and Conference, December 5–8, 2016,  
at booths 160–165 at the Javits Center.

## THIS MONTH'S WINNER



**ED GILARDI**  
Produce Buyer  
United Markets  
San Rafael, CA

In traditional fashion, Ed Gilardi is a die-hard produce enthusiast. "I worked before and after high school as well as during my college days at our local markets," he recalls. "When I finished college, I wanted to continue in the grocery business and applied at United Markets — that was in 1979. Now, 37 years later, I'm the produce buyer, and I still love getting up and going to work."

Since his early days in produce, Gilardi

believes one of the greatest shifts in the industry stems from organic and local products. "While we sourced local products for many years, organics now account for the fastest growing section — about 50 percent of our departments. While packages and convenience products are increasing in sales, our customers prefer fresh products."

Attention to consumers' demands requires a delicate balance. For more than 50 years, United Markets has been a family-owned business. Gilardi says the independent retailer built its reputation as a leader in providing the highest quality at the lowest prices. "Our selection of local and organic produce, along with our commitment to our community, is unmatched."

**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 TOMMY BAHAMA WATCH

The Paradise Pilot timepiece from Tommy Bahama is the perfect combination of rugged and refined. Features 3 easy-to-read sub-dials (seconds, minutes and 24 hours), water resistance to 330 feet, and quartz movement. Inspired by vintage pilot watches of yesteryear, the Paradise Pilot is loaded with distinctive elements that make it a true standout for men and women.



### QUESTIONS FOR THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

- 1) What color is the state of New York on the apple's PLU sticker shown on the New York State ad?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What brand of bananas uses the tagline "The Nature of the Best"? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What Commission uses iconic comic book-style illustrations for its ads? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What is the name of Sun Pacific's brand of California Clementines? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is the Statue of Liberty holding in the Fyffes ad? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) What are the two new types of family-size salad kits from Dole? \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:  
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# The Power Of Fresh



BY JULIE MANES, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

**Y**ou may have heard the expression “democracy is not a spectator sport.” Essentially, if any individual or group is going to have issues and needs addressed by policymakers, they’re going to have to actually make contact with elected officials who are in office to put policy needs into action.

In politics, as in so many things, standing on the sidelines generally doesn’t get you anywhere. While advocating for a change to public policy can take a long time and oftentimes is frustrating, not speaking up guarantees things will not change in your favor and that others, who may not have your best interests in mind, will be setting the policies that you have to abide.

The need for the fresh produce industry to speak out about the government policies that harm or benefit fruit and vegetable providers is heightened by the fact so many Americans, including policymakers, have no real understanding of where their food comes from.

That’s why it is so important for fresh produce providers from across the country to convene each year in Washington, D.C., for United Fresh’s annual Washington Conference. The conference is the only time each year members from all segments of the fresh produce industry from across the country convene in Washington.

This year’s conference, held in September, brought more than 400 fresh fruit and vegetable providers together to make our industry’s voice heard on Capitol Hill.

The centerpiece of the Conference is the March on Capitol Hill, during which all participants fan out and conduct dozens of meetings with congressional offices in both the House and Senate. Each of these

meetings gives members of Congress and their staff a chance to hear from produce industry representatives across the production chain and give a voice to common concerns.

This year’s conference highlighted key issues such as immigration reform, nutrition and trade policy. With each meeting, policymakers gain a greater understanding of what our industry means to the overall economy as well as local communities, and what federal government policies mean to our ability to provide Americans with a steady supply of nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables.

In recent years, Congress responded to the advocacy efforts of the fresh produce industry by: including a comprehensive specialty crops section in the Farm Bill, passing much-needed transportation and infrastructure funding, promoting fresh fruits and vegetables in school feeding programs, and pulling the plug on harmful legislation to require the use of the E-Verify system without also providing for an effective agriculture guest-worker program.

Advocacy works, but only if it is vigorous and sustained, making each year’s conference essential to maintaining the profile of our industry on Capitol Hill.

But the effort to bring our message to policymakers involves more than just delivery. Effective messaging also means providing United Fresh members with information and perspective through education sessions on the aforementioned topics, as well as other issues that have a significant impact on fresh fruit and vegetable production.

This year’s conference also featured heavily attended sessions on environmental regulations and the Farm Bill. Conferees heard speakers, such as: Senator Thom

Tillis of North Carolina, and political pundit Frank Luntz provide updates on the legislative outlook for the rest of this year, as well as the current state of play in presidential and congressional elections. Presentations like these give participants background information that helps them successfully make a case in congressional meetings.

To further enhance our industry’s ability to develop a policy agenda that addresses the most important needs of produce providers, all of United Fresh’s councils and boards meet to focus on issues that impact specific segments of the production chain. Through these discussions, we sharpen our message on issues such as transportation, food safety, labor policy and industry best practices, among others.

The council and board meetings also spotlight upcoming industry events of interest to association members. In addition, the conference provides a rare opportunity for industry members to meet face to face with their colleagues to learn more about what’s happening in other parts of the supply chain and how they can work together, in the policy arena, and also with consumers.

Each year’s conference is an important opportunity to tell the fresh produce story in Washington and also sets the stage for ongoing advocacy efforts throughout the year, as participants also receive information about how to maintain contact with key legislators and regulators.

Next year’s conference will also have the added value of giving the industry the chance to make a first impression on new members of Congress and a new Administration. With the help of active and informed industry members, we can set the stage for a productive new era in produce industry policy.



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TRANSITION

**J&J FAMILY OF FARMS**

J&J Family of Farms, Loxahatchee, FL, has named **Michael Butler** senior vice president of operations. With more than 25 years of operations and logistics experience, Butler has held leadership roles at Castellini Group of Companies, Hexion Specialty Chemical, Reynolds Consumer Products, Old Dominion Freight Lines and United Parcel Service. He has been an active leader in the produce industry for more than seven years, including roles with PMA and United Fresh.



TRANSITION

**MARKET FRESH PRODUCE**

Market Fresh Produce, Nixa, MO, welcomes two new members to its team. **Cybil Louderbaugh** (pictured) has been named customer satisfaction specialist.



She is responsible for seeking out and developing new leads and other opportunities to expand profits, as well as drive sales efforts by promoting the company's branded products. **Cory Eckels** has been named produce intern. With more than 14 years' experience in the produce industry, Eckels will

be responsible for learning all aspects of produce procurement by working under various supervisors to gain the necessary training needed to source high-quality, safe product that meets USDA and customer specifications. In addition to procurement, Eckels will train with other departments, including operations, finance, human resources, sales and marketing, and sourcing to learn all aspects of the business.

TRANSITION

**MADA WAGNER OFFERS CONSULTING**

**Marcos Mada**, formally of Fresh Del Monte and Wal-Mart, and **Jerry Wagner**, formally of Farmers Best International, have started a new agribusiness consulting business. Mada Wagner LLC offers a wide range of consulting services to the produce industry with a focus on project management, best practices reviews and implementations, and strategic planning. The new company is located in Tucson, AZ.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**DUNCAN FAMILY FARMS MOVES GROWING OPERATIONS**

In order to continue supplying leafy greens to its customers year-round, organic grower Duncan Family Farms has transitioned growing operations to Imperial Valley, CA, and its Goodyear, AZ, headquarters. The company has transitioned organic green and red curly kale, lacinato kale and Italian parsley to Imperial Valley and organic baby spinach, spring mix, arugula, baby kale, dill, green curly kale, Salanova lettuce and culinary herbs to Goodyear. In addition, the company is growing organic chards, beets, broccoli, cauliflower and herbs in Imperial Valley, as well as carrots and strawberries in Goodyear.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**GOOD HOUSEKEEPING PARTNERS WITH DOLE**

Dole Fresh Vegetables is an inaugural partner of the Good Housekeeping "Nutritionist Approved" program. Dole Fresh Vegetables is one of nine initial brands to qualify for this first-of-its-kind incubator program. The program is designed to help consumers simplify the process of making better food choices. Twenty-seven Dole Salad SKUs have been approved for the exclusive emblem.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**RAINIER FRUIT CONNECTS WITH RUNNING WORLD**

After securing its position as the "Official Apple" of the Boston Marathon, Rainier Fruit, Selah, WA, has introduced a new marketing campaign to reach health-minded consumers across the United States. With the tagline, "Wholesome to the Core," Rainier Fruit says its campaign



is about connecting with individuals seeking a healthy, active lifestyle. The company participated in the Twin Cities Medtronic Marathon and the Portland Marathon, reaching more than 100,000 consumers while partnering with local retailers for in-market promotions and event sampling of organic Honeycrisp apples.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**GROWERS EXPRESS ADDS TO PALEO LINE**

Following the popularity of the original Cauliflower Crumbles, Growers Express has added to its Paleo-friendly line with Cauliflower Crumbles "Fried Rice" Blend and Sweet Potato & Cauliflower Crumbles. Using the same patent pending process, the Green Giant Fresh Crumbles products stay fresher and whiter longer. The products are 100 percent all-natural vegetables, GMO-free and gluten-free. In addition to the new Crumbles line extensions, Growers Express is launching Sweet Potato Noodles. With a 14-plus day shelf life, the noodles are a replacement for pasta or potatoes, and can be used in everything from cold salads to hot entrees.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**CRUNCH TIME PARTNERS ON NEW APPLE**

Crunch Time Apple Growers, Wolcott, NY, has partnered this apple season with food retailers across the nation to sell its new SnapDragon apple. Created by apple experts at Cornell University, SnapDragon was created using old-fashioned cross-breeding, with the popular Honeycrisp as one of its parents. Many grocery stores will be showcasing SnapDragon in eye-catching high-graphic bags and display bins; some retailers will be offering in-store sampling.



ANNOUNCEMENT



**NORTH SHORE LAUNCHES ORGANIC LINE**

North Shore Greenhouses Inc., Thermal, CA, grower of North Shore Living Herbs, has launched a line of living and organic herbs and microgreens under the brand North Shore Organic Living. The line features potted herbs, clamshell herbs for the wet rack and microgreens.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**UESUGI FARMS EXPANDS RETAIL LINE**

Uesugi Farms, Gilroy, CA, brings its third value-added product, mini sweet peppers, to retail grocery stores in convenient 1-pound bags. The branded and bagged mini sweet peppers stand out on grocery store shelves with their bright colors and packaging design.



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POM POMS might be small but they're big on profits. Not only are they the #1 seller in the category making up 85% of all fresh arils sales when they're in season, POM POMS can actually double your revenue. Talk about seed money. To sweeten the deal, POM's multimillion-dollar marketing campaign includes national TV, multiple full-circulation FSIs and in-store POS. Back that up with the largest merchandising team in the industry and it becomes obvious—this little aril has a lot of juice.

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Source: RI 12 Weeks Ending December 28, 2014, Total Arils Dollar Sales, MULO & Total US Grocery.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## TRULY GOOD FOODS LAUNCHES SALAD TOPPINGS

Snack food manufacturer and distributor Truly Good Foods, Charlotte, NC, has launched My Salad Bar, four flavorful and bold salad topping combinations conveniently packaged and ready to enjoy. Each combination has four delicious toppings. My Salad Bar Original contains walnuts, cranberries, sunflower seed and sesame sticks; My Salad Bar Sesame Bits/Mini Fruits contains sesame salad bits, mini fruit mix, blackened pumpkin seeds and soybeans; My Salad Bar Indian Cuisine has spiced rice flour noodles, crispy fried lentils, whole lentils with lentil twigs and fried split chickpeas; and My Salad Honey Roasted Peanuts/Golden Raisins contains honey roasted peanuts, golden raisins, pumpkin seeds and black bean sticks.



ANNOUNCEMENT

## DOLE LAUNCHES ORGANIC SALAD MIXES, KITS

Dole has launched its first comprehensive line of organic salad mixes and kits. Certified by the USDA and CCOF, the new Organic Salad line features six organic baby lettuce mixes and two new organic salad kits. The line includes Organic Caesar Salad Kit, Organic Apple Dijon Salad Kit, Organic Super Spinach Mix, Organic Baby Spinach Mix, Organic Super Spinach Mix, Organic Baby Spinach and Arugula Salad Mix, Organic Spring Mix, Organic 50/50 Salad Mix and Organic Kale Salad Mix. Three of the mixes are available in family size, bringing Dole's organic SKUs to 11.



Spinach Mix, Organic Super Spinach Mix, Organic Baby Spinach and Arugula Salad Mix, Organic Spring Mix, Organic 50/50 Salad Mix and Organic Kale Salad Mix. Three of the mixes are available in family size, bringing Dole's organic SKUs to 11.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## TASTEFUL SELECTIONS COMMITTED TO NON-PROFIT

Tasteful Selections, a specialty potato brand from RPE Inc., Bancroft, WI, is celebrating its fourth year in partnership with Katie's Krops, a Summerville, SC-based non-profit focused on empowering young growers to plant vegetable gardens and donate the harvests to the underserved

in their communities. To do its part, Tasteful Selections is donating proceeds from packages of Tasteful Selections Ruby Sensation and Honey Gold potatoes, available October through January. Katie's Krops has donated thousands of pounds of fresh produce to organizations helping people in need. Currently, there are 100 Katie's Krops gardens growing across the country in 32 states. The organization is committed to creating and maintaining 500 gardens across all 50 states.



Produce & Floral Watch are regular features of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a 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.

ANNOUNCEMENT



## PROCACCI, SANTA SWEETS START SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation, Philadelphia, and its regional affiliated farming operation, Santa Sweets Inc., Cedarville, NJ, have established the "Estrella Naciente" (Rising Star) Scholarship fund, in partnership with the Spanish Sports Network and Camden Catholic High School (CCHS), Cherry Hill, NJ. The scholarship fund provides tuition assistance to CCHS's Hispanic students. Procacci Brothers and Santa Sweets donated \$16,100 — \$100 for every home run hit by the Philadelphia Phillies during the 2016 Major League Baseball season. Fund recipients will be selected based on demonstrated academic achievement, financial need and community involvement.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## BRIGHTFARMS SECURES \$30 MILLION IN FINANCING

In a move to expand operations for future growth, New York greenhouse producer BrightFarms Inc., has secured \$30.1 million in financing. The funds will aid BrightFarms with growth plans in production and marketing, enabling the company to respond to rising retail demand for its products. For the past three years, BrightFarms has established a solid foundation providing local, greenhouse-grown products to a wide variety of key retailers in the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast and Midwest markets including Mariano's, Giant Food, Wegmans, Acme, McCaffrey's, Kings and ShopRite. The company operates three local greenhouses near Washington, D.C., Chicago and Philadelphia, partnering with retailers in these regions and delivering more than 2.5MM pounds of fresh produce annually.



ANNOUNCEMENT

## SCOTT FARMS EXPANDING

Sweet potato farm Scott Farms International, Lucama, NC, continues to expand and innovate with a new 60,000-square-foot automated packing facility, an international office in the Netherlands and completed construction of an 80,000-square-foot storage and curing facility. In addition to infrastructure expansions,



Scott Farms is expanding product lines. In August, the company's new Steam-in-Bag line was added to complement its other added-value products.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## TANIMURA & ANTLE'S NEW HOLIDAY PACKAGING

Upholding its commitment to quality, service and innovation, Tanimura & Antle, Salinas, CA, has released its new seasonal label and online consumer campaign for its Artisan Lettuce. From now through Dec. 27, the company's "Eat Healthy, Be Merry" label will help drive consumers to www.artisanlettuce.com, where consumers can find recipes, preparation tips, as well as register for a chance to win one of four \$500 gift cards. The new packaging reflects messaging deemed as most important to consumers in a recently completed independent consumer study on types of lettuce, flavor profiles, and special offers and promotions.



ANNOUNCEMENT



## CALAVO GETS FAIR TRADE CERTIFICATION

Calavo Growers Inc., Santa Paula, CA, has been approved for fair trade certification by the third-party certifier Fair Trade USA for its Intense Tomato, a hybrid tomato that has the appearance of a Roma on the outside and a thicker, meatier wall that results in fewer gel cavities and zero juice purge. Shipped in Zip-lock gusseted bags, there is a recipe for Intense Marinara sauce printed on the back. Intense Tomato is also available in foodservice packs.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## PROCACCI CELEBRATES GOLDEN EMPLOYEE ANNIVERSARY

Noreen Sims recently celebrated 50 years with Philadelphia-based Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation. Sims came to work for the company at age 16 as a secretary. Over the years she has held many positions within the company's accounting department, including stenographer, payables/receivables clerk, billing manager, personnel manager and business office manager.



stenographer, payables/receivables clerk, billing manager, personnel manager and business office manager.

New!



# When It's Good, You Want More

*Dole is dishing out two new kits based  
on its most popular salad kit.*



Introducing the DOLE® Family Size Ultimate Caesar Salad Kit—Dole's most popular kit, now in an ideal size to share with family and friends. Plus, meet the first-ever Creamy Balsamic Salad Kit. New DOLE® Creamy Balsamic Salad Kit combines the crisp romaine lettuce and premium toppings that shoppers love in our top-selling Caesar kits with a creamy balsamic dressing that is sure to keep them coming back for more.

To add the **NEW DOLE® Family Size Ultimate Caesar Salad Kit** or the **DOLE® Creamy Balsamic Salad Kit** to your stores, contact your sales representative.



# Now That We Have A New President...

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It is said that Will Rogers, the famous American humorist, used to include in his act a comment that when a President was elected, we instantly knew one thing for certain about him: An awful lot of people didn't want him to be President. This is forever so, and maybe more so this year. Will Rogers was referring to the people who voted against the winner, and this year there seems to be an exceptionally large number of people who aren't thrilled even with the people they voted for.

More than this, the nature of disapproval of the other candidate seems more intense than usual. People who can't tolerate Trump see him as misogynist, racist, incompetent, and indeed insane, while those who oppose Clinton see her as a power-mad liar, who is corrupt and not only a criminal, but part of a criminal family enterprise. Now this is not completely unheard of in our history. Allegations of illegitimate children, etc., go back a long way. But it is hard to imagine these two, or even their respective supporters, getting together over a beer to hash out what is good for the country, or even what is a politically possible compromise, in the way political opposites such as Ronald Reagan and then Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill were able to do back in the 1980s.

This piece is being written before the election and you are reading it after the election, but being a brilliant prognosticator, I will predict, in the spirit of Will Rogers, that many people will be not just unhappy, but despondent over the results.

Certainly one should never assume things will work out for the best, but the ability to be serene in times of stress is a virtue. One is reminded of when Sir John Sinclair, founder of the Board of Agriculture, promoter of the Statistical Account of Scotland, and author of innumerable pamphlets on a multitude of subjects, brought Adam Smith, the British author of *The Wealth of Nations* and an exceptional political economist, the news of the surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga in October 1777. The event marked a turning point in the U.S. War for Independence, as the American victory gave France the confidence to side with America. Sinclair exclaimed that the nation was ruined. "There is a great deal of ruin in a nation," was Smith's serene reply.

Or put another way, each problem provides the opportunity to think things through and find new ways to proceed and make improvements. One of the most important issues to reflect upon is what type of people we want elected and whether the system encourages people of excellence to rise to the top. If you think about the Founding Fathers, it is striking enough that people of such brilliance existed in the small backwater that was America at the time. Yet even more extraordinary is a culture and system that elevated such men and

brought them all together in one place at one time, in such authority that they were able to draft and endorse the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Even in more recent times, a habit of deference to excellence still reigned. Political commentator George F. Will recently told a story about an important Republican Senator, Robert Taft (1889-1953):

*A President's son, he was "Mr. Republican" during his 14 years representing Ohio in the Senate... Then as now, Ohio had many blue-collar industrial workers, and Taft's critics said he could not represent them.*

*So, in 1947 a reporter asked Taft's wife, "Do you think of your husband as a common man?" Aghast, she replied: "Oh, no, no! The senator is very uncommon. He was first in his class at Yale and first in his class at the Harvard Law School. We wouldn't permit Ohio to be represented in the Senate by just a common man."*

*In 1950, Taft was easily reelected.*

Yet today it is said the most accurate predictor of who will win an election is the answer to this question: "Which of the candidates would you most like to have a beer with?"

Even the thrust to make voting easier – registration when one gets a driver's license and easy early and absentee balloting – one senses this is not a function of conviction that it will make governance better but some kind of blind faith that the more democracy the better. This is an attitude the Founders did not have and, in fact, they devised a system of government to prevent the short-term passions of people from moving the levers of government.

The late Senator Sam Ervin, who famously chaired the Watergate committee, once said, "I'm not going to shed any real or political or crocodile tears if people don't care enough to vote. I don't believe in making it easy for apathetic, lazy people. I'd be extremely happy if nobody in the United States voted except for the people who thought about the issues and made up their own minds and wanted to vote. No one else who votes is going to contribute anything but statistics, and I don't care that much for statistics."

In order for us to have better governance, we must have better people in government, which means we need systems and a culture that defers to excellence. This is not a common mode of thought today, but perhaps the deep dissatisfaction with both candidates will lead to a reconsideration of the way we have been proceeding. Perhaps we should remember that folk definition of insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results. **pb**

**In order for us to have better governance, we must have better people in government, which means we need systems and a culture that defers to excellence.**

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On Saturday, Oct. 15, at the PMA Fresh Summit convention in Orlando, FL, **PRODUCE BUSINESS** — in conjunction with sponsors, MIXTEC Group and Four Seasons Produce — hosted the 13th Annual Rising Star Reception to celebrate this year's 40-Under-Forty\* class. In addition to the class of 2016, 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 [producebusiness.com](http://producebusiness.com) and clicking on our June 2016 issue. You can also nominate candidates for next year's class by clicking on the 40-Under-Forty icon.*



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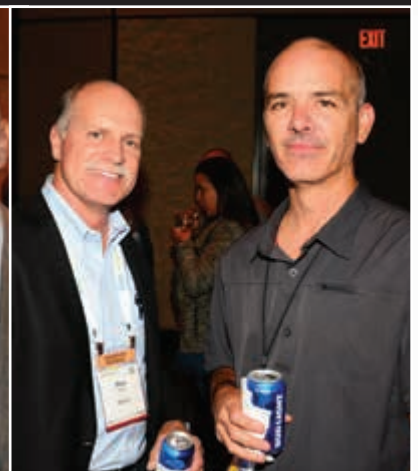
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**Robinson Fresh team**



**(L-R) Joe Ange of Markon, Brian Church, Tom Bramers, Chance Pengelly of Church Brothers Farms and Andy Siegel of Fresh Connect**



**(L-R) Dave Hahn of Four Seasons Produce Inc., Karin Gardner of The Oppenheimer Group, Jon Steffy, Robert Teraskiewicz and Wayne Hendrickson of Four Seasons Produce, Inc.**



**Sun Belle team**



**(L-R) Ken Whitacre of PRODUCE BUSINESS with Shane Rogers of J&J Family Farms**



**(L-R) Gino Dibuduo and Doug Sankey of Sunwest Fruit Company, Katelyn Grace of New York Produce Show & Conference**



**(L-R) Brett Libke, Ariel Giddings, Stephen Young and Jason Fung of The Oppenheimer Group**



**(L-R) Ryan Fukuda of Avocados From Mexico, Dave Cruz of California Avocado Commission and Gahl Crane of Eco Farms**



**(L-R) Ken Whitacre of PRODUCE BUSINESS with Heath Shoup of West Pak Avocado**



**(L-R) Doug Meyer of West Pak Avocado, Alondra Rodriguez of Baldor Fresh Cuts and Heath Shoup of West Pak**



**(L-R) Zan Chow, George Uribe, Bill Vogel of Vision Produce Company, Ashan Fahan, Steven Moi and Tim Wachter of Fresh Direct Produce**



**(L-R) Dan Welk and Jeff Freeman from Mann Packing**



**(L-R) Jim Prevor of PRODUCE BUSINESS with Alejandro Torro of Vega Produce**



**(L-R) Ken Whitacre of PRODUCE BUSINESS with Rachelle Schulken of Renaissance Food Group**

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Headquartered in the center of the Vidalia® growing region in southeast Georgia, family-owned Shuman Produce has been in the sweet onion industry for more than 30 years. The legacy began in the mid-1980s with a small family farm in Reidsville, GA, and today has become a leading grower and shipper of sweet onions year-round. This, in part, is thanks to long-term partnerships with a family of farms that help meet the goals of Shuman Produce's Vidalia sweet onion program.

John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce, proudly shares what kept the family of farms together through three generations. Shuman explains, "To us, it's always been about more than just onions. It's about growing a family, a business, a culture of giving back, and a product that we're proud to share."

From the beginning, Shuman Produce found its sweet spot with a combination of staying committed to doing things right, always being loyal and faithful to others, and operating with integrity every day.

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In Peru, Shuman Produce operates a sweet onion growing and packing facility to promote efficiency in its supply chain throughout the fall and winter months.

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Another major impact of the Peruvian sweet onion import program is the Southeast United States' economy, where the Shuman family lives. Shuman Produce imports all of its Peruvian sweet onions through the Port of Savannah — the fourth busiest and fastest growing container port in the U.S.

The Georgia Ports Authority, which operates the Port of Savannah, has an economic impact on more than 370,000 jobs of Georgians who live, work and shop in their local communities. "This is especially important to our retail partners in the southeast as they are able to put local economic sustainability into action," says Shuman. By importing these onions through a local container port, Shuman Produce can also maintain a highly skilled labor force throughout the year in both business management and packaging phases of the operation. This labor force understands the demands of our retail partners better than anyone else due to year-round consistent product supply.

New this year, Shuman Produce will begin growing and marketing Georgia grown sweet potatoes and broccoli to its retail partners.

"These crops are a great fit to leverage our existing resources and accompany our long-standing sweet onion program," says Shuman.

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**Conference Management:** Amsterdam Produce Show and Conference, Amsterdam

**Phone:** 31 (0) 20-5219371

**Email:** Tommy.leighton@producebusinessuk.com

**Website:** amsterdamproduceshow.com

### NOVEMBER 3 - 5, 2016

#### FPAF CONVENTION

**Conference Venue:** Tubac Golf Resort, Tubac, AZ

**Conference Management:** Fresh Produce Association of the Americas, Nogales, AZ

**Phone:** (520) 287-2707 • **Fax:** (520) 287-2948

**Email:** mar@freshfrommexico.com

**Website:** freshfrommexico.com

### NOVEMBER 4 - 6, 2016

#### RETHINK FOOD

**Conference Venue:** Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, Napa Valley, CA

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

**Phone:** (845) 451-1457

**Email:** j\_smyth@culinary.edu

**Website:** ciaprochef.com

### DECEMBER 1 - 3, 2016

#### HEALTHY KIDS COLLABORATIVE

**Conference Venue:** CIA Greystone, Napa Valley, CA

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

**Phone:** (707) 967-1100

**Email:** mark.p.linder@gmail.com

**Website:** ciaprochef.com

### DECEMBER 5 - 8, 2016

#### NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE

**Conference Venue:** Jacob Javits Convention Center, New York City

**Conference Management:** Eastern Produce Council, Short Hills, NJ and PRODUCE BUSINESS, Boca Raton, FL

**Phone:** (212) 426-2218

**Email:** info@nyproduceshow.com

**Website:** nyproduceshow.com

### JANUARY 4 - 6, 2017

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**Conference Venue:** Marriott Marquis, San Francisco

**Conference Management:** National Potato Council, Washington, D.C.

**Phone:** (202) 682-9456 **Fax:** (202) 682-0333

**Email:** questions@potato-expo.com

**Website:** potato-expo.com

### JANUARY 5 - 8, 2017

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**Conference Venue:** Savannah International Trade and Convention Center, Savannah, GA

**Conference Management:** Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association, LaGrange, GA

**Phone:** (877) 994-3842 • **Fax:** (706) 883-8215

**Email:** katkinson@asginfo.net

**Website:** gfvga.org

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**Email:** mark.p.linder

**Website:** ciaprochef.com

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**Conference Venue:** Moscone Center, San Francisco

**Conference Management:** Specialty Food Association, New York City

**Phone:** (212) 482-6440

**Email:** kfarrell@specialtyfood.com

**Website:** fancyfoodshows.com

### JANUARY 24 - 26, 2017

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**Conference Management:** Leisure Time Unlimited, Inc., Myrtle Beach, SC

**Phone:** (843) 448-9483 • **Fax:** (843) 626-1513

**Email:** info@hmrsss.com

**Website:** hmrsss.com

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#### FRUIT LOGISTICA

**Conference Venue:** Berlin ExpoCenter City, Berlin, Germany

**Conference Management:** Messe Berlin GmbH Berlin

**Phone:** (493) 038-2318380

**Email:** goring@messe.berlin.de

**Website:** fruitlogistica.com

### FEBRUARY 9 - 12, 2017

#### HEALTHY KITCHENS, HEALTHY LIVES

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# First to Market Owns the Market: Emerging Merchandising Trends in Produce

BY ANNE-MARIE ROERINK, PRINCIPAL, 210 ANALYTICS

**M**egatrends, shopper demographics, e-commerce, mergers, acquisitions and more are driving profound changes in the food retailing landscape. Working closely together with food manufacturers, retailers continuously adapt strategies to ensure maximum relevance to their shoppers while optimizing traffic, sales and profits. According to FMI, retailers see product and merchandising innovation as the No. 1 way to drive top line growth and differentiation in a deflationary marketplace. This was ahead of pricing and promotional strategies, in second.

“First to market owns the market” is a tried-and-true saying among category managers relative to the importance of new items and concepts in driving new sales. Many shoppers are creatures of habit — buying the same items again and again. The *Power of Produce’s* purchasing decision tree research underscores the importance of habit for both fruit and vegetables. Cutting through habitual purchases requires innovative and inspiring merchandising tactics aimed at driving impulse in the short term and loyalty in the longer term. After all, as mentioned, shoppers are creatures of habit and tend to keep purchasing items at the store where they first made their new item discovery.

Actual sales numbers by data insights firm IRI underscore the importance of frequent new item introductions to the financial health of food retailers. In 2015, IRI measured more than 65,000 new items in the marketplace that were responsible for generating more than \$72.6 billion in sales. In a produce-related example, Nielsen Fresh found that retailers introduced more than 500 new organic produce items in 2015 with corresponding sales increases of 14.9 percent.

So, step one is the continual introduction of relevant new items based on your store audience. Step two is trying new programs or merchandising tactics addressing how

items are brought to market. The *Power of Produce 2016* looked into several programs, including grown locally or in the USA, non-GMO, organic, ugly fruit, fixed weight and “each” pricing that are in various states of development among U.S. retailers.

- **Programs that tell a story** — Origin, organic or non-GMO, it is programs that tell a story about the product or production process that drive great interest among shoppers. For instance, 61 percent of shoppers want their store to add more locally sourced produce, and 56 percent want more U.S.-grown produce. Interest in GMO-free is much lower at 39 percent.
- **“Ugly fruit”** — A few U.S. retailers started experimenting with programs seen in Europe and Australia focusing on less-than-optimal-looking produce. As a largely unknown concept in the U.S., ugly fruit draws relatively low interest among total shoppers, at 31 percent, when positioned as a program to reduce food waste. With many shoppers focused on money-saving measures, angling ugly produce as a way to save will likely draw higher shopper interest although the environmental angle is resonating much more with Millennials, at 41 percent.
- **Fixed weight produce** — Influenced by shoppers increasingly seeking convenience in every step of the path to purchase, fixed-weight merchandising is reaching critical mass in several categories, with the sales share exceeding 70 percent for 10 produce categories and 40 percent for 20 categories. It is important to balance shopping convenience with shoppers wanting control over selecting their items — which is different for each category, format and generation. For instance, fixed weight is three times more popular among club shoppers

than specialty organic store shoppers, but overall only 19 percent of shoppers agree with adding more bagged/wrapped produce in a blanket statement, not specifying particular items.

- **“Each” pricing** — 35 percent of shoppers agree with introducing more each (or per unit pricing) in the produce department, such as 99-cent green peppers versus \$1.99 per pound. Segments of the population with a higher interest for “each” pricing include supercenter shoppers and lower-income households.

Importantly, no one item or program works for every store or company. Explore, execute, evaluate and adapt are still key in discovering how you can make “new” work for you.

*Source: The Power of Produce 2016 — Shopper research by the Food Marketing Institute, made possible by Yerecic Label and Hill Phoenix and conducted by 210 Analytics.*



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



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

# Much More Than Meets The Eye

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

**I**t is practically a truism that consumers often say one thing and do another. It is also true, though, that the actions of businesses are not in line with their own interests. This fascinating quote is a great example:

“According to FMI, retailers see product and merchandising innovation as the No. 1 way to drive top line growth and differentiation in a deflationary marketplace. This was ahead of pricing and promotional strategies, in second.”

Retailers are almost certainly correct in this assessment. So one would expect retailers’ procurement policies would focus heavily on supporting those producers that are highly regarded for product and merchandising innovation. In fact, however, the opposite is true; retailers are increasingly focusing on private label.

Now why is this?

There are certainly a few retailers — Trader Joe’s comes to my mind — whose focus on private label is a focus on developing unique flavor profiles. This ability to offer a differentiated sauce or cookie can be a tremendous competitive advantage.

But in most cases, retailers are not developing unique flavor profiles... as much as possible they are trying to ape current branded flavor profiles that consumers already love. In fact, what private label is all about is removing a tranche of cost from the system — the money that branded producers spend on marketing and research and development.

With this expenditure gone, retailers can split the funds and offer consumers lower prices while making higher margins. This is true in most grocery items, but rarely so in produce, where margins were never that thick to begin with.

In any case, whatever the margins are, when the retailers succeed in driving them out of the system, it leaves questions: Who is going to spend the money to develop new products for the category in the future?

**Though retailers may revere product and merchandising innovation, the opposite is true; retailers are increasingly focusing on private label.**

Who is going to market and fund merchandising efforts that will introduce these new products and expand consumer interest in the category?

In fact, the drive to private label means less product and merchandising innovation, and that means a tougher future for retailers.

It is also true that we must carefully review the research results. Here is an example:

“In a produce-related example, Nielsen Fresh found retailers introduced more than 500 new organic produce items in 2015 with corresponding sales increases of 14.9 percent.

Although it is a little unclear what this precisely means, the opportunities for confusion abound. One possibility is that these 500 new organic items helped increase organic sales by 14.9 percent -- great news! But, surely, these 500 items required space that had previously been devoted to non-organic produce – so how much did those items decline in sales when their space was reduced? Was there a net increase in sales – organic and conventional?

Another possibility is that retailers, anxious to reduce their SKU count, decided to handle only organic on low volume SKUs. So, previously they were handling, say, a conventional leek; some consumers were asking for an organic leek, but rather than take on the expense of procuring, warehousing and displaying a separate organic SKU, the retailer decided to eliminate the conventional leek and replace it with the organic one. Do this across a few items and a climb of organic sales of 14.9 percent is very easily obtainable – but the increase

in total sales is much smaller because the conventional SKU sales in these categories are now zero.

Another thing to consider is the issue of price vs. volume. Most reports on sales are given in dollars, not pounds. Yet retailers are not only concerned with dollars; they want to know that the “share of stomach” in their service area is also going up. If 500 new organic items take the place of 500 conventional items, and if the organic items are priced 20 percent higher than conventional, and total sales of these 500 new organic items come in at 15 percent higher than the sales of the organic items they replaced, then although dollar sales are up, pounds of produce sold are down. And, most likely, this retailer’s “share of stomach” is down as well. That may not be a triumph after all.

Another issue is to distinguish between the substance of a program and its marketing. It may be true that, say, putting up signage with cut-outs of farmers and showing video and brochures highlighting local farmers may produce a sales bump. But from that story alone, we can’t divine the importance of “local” vs the importance of marketing. Perhaps cut-outs of a multi-generational Italian farmer, with videos and signage, would also be a story consumers would like. It is important in testing to try one variable at a time.

Innovation is crucial, and an enormous opportunity abounds for produce, where new varieties and new products are created by fresh-cut forms every day. But “tis many a slip ‘tween the cup and the lip,” so pay close attention to what the best information we have actually means.

# Industry Challenge To Lauren Scott, PMA's New Marketing Officer: Can The Industry Produce Consistent Quality To Enable Effective Marketing?



JIM PREVOR  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

One of the marquee announcements made at PMA's recent Fresh Summit conference was the appointment of a chief marketing officer for PMA. Here is the way PMA promoted the hiring:

**Lauren M. Scott joins PMA as Chief Marketing Officer; Will lead strategic marketing, demand creation efforts**

Newark, Del. — To boost demand for fresh fruits, vegetables and floral, the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) has named a lead staffer for its strategic marketing efforts: Lauren M. Scott. Scott has 20 years' experience in consumer goods marketing, innovation and brand management, and joined PMA Oct. 13, 2016 as its chief marketing officer.

"We are thrilled to have Lauren on board," said PMA President Cathy Burns. "Lauren will work with our members to build even greater demand for their products by implementing recommendations from PMA's Marketing Task Force."

Scott, a self-described foodie, has worked as a marketing executive in beverage companies, including Diageo and PepsiCo. She has led marketing, global brand and category strategy; innovation concepts; and brand activation and development. Reporting to Burns, she will be responsible for global strategic leadership to increase consumer demand for fresh produce and floral products through association and industry marketing initiatives. She will also establish and work with a volunteer marketing committee to guide strategy.

We haven't met Ms. Scott yet, and we certainly wish her every success. She has a blockbuster resume, having worked for Colgate Palmolive, PepsiCo and Diageo; and a quick glance at her website shows she is clever and makes you want to like her. As she explains, "The 'M' stands for marketer, manager, muser and mom with an unorthodox mindset, unique problem-solving skills and a witty attitude."

But her personal note revealing her acceptance of the PMA position also shows why she is going to have a tough time moving the needle on consumption:

*I am absolutely thrilled to have been named Chief Marketing Officer for the Produce Marketing Association, a global trade organization representing companies from every segment of the fresh fruit, vegetable and floral industries.*

*Growing up in New Jersey, I experienced why it truly is the Garden State. I ate plump red tomatoes straight from my dad's small plot in the backyard and harvested fuzzy peaches from family farms in Monmouth County.*

*I am excited to be immersed into a new industry and lead the marketing agenda to drive category sales and consumption in a meaningful, fun and positive way.*

*And for those who know me, if you thought I was a veggie evangelist before, just you wait...*

*PS: I think bacon is really yummy*

We like the way Ms. Scott thinks... after all, we wrote a column, *Two Cheers for Bacon*, almost five years ago that laid out an approach to boosting consumption focused on culinary technique. We concluded with this:

*Want to get children to eat more vegetables? Try adding cheese. We've had an extraordinary boom in consumption of Brussels sprouts over the past five years, and we can credit one very important ingredient: Bacon. All over the country, top chefs are adding pancetta, braising in bacon, topping with prosciutto bits, not to mention olive oil, Pecorino Romano, crumbled blue cheese and Parmesan.*

*The most immediate and flexible way to bring flavor to produce is through cooking techniques. Maybe the health department wants to offer three cheers for steamed vegetables, but I say let us offer two cheers for bacon... and by selling more flavorful produce, diets will be overall*





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*healthier than if we try to enforce an asceticism that turns people away from produce and toward less healthy alternatives.*

Ms. Scott's charming note about her dad's tomatoes — "straight from my dad's small plot" — and peaches "from family farms in Monmouth County" are emotive, but the problem is they have almost nothing to do with the product Ms. Scott is actually assigned to promote.

And there is the rub. The PMA represents producers, importers and retailers of stone fruit that is sometimes delivered mealy and is often distasteful to American consumers, just as much as it represents delicious, juicy, sweet stone fruit delivered in season or jet-fresh from abroad.

And this is the dilemma. It is easy for executives in the produce industry to note the power of marketing dollars and marketing techniques used on behalf of Coca-Cola or, in Ms. Scott's case, Pepsi. It is easy for executives to think that if only we had these same techniques and budgets, produce sales would boom.

But these expenditures and techniques work because if a batch of Pepsi is somehow off, it gets thrown away. Whereas the worst produce is marketed as earnestly as the best. Indeed, in our critique of "Eat Brighter," we once mentioned that some clever produce marketer might think that brand would be just the thing to help him move his #2s.

The industry is going to look to Ms. Scott to sell their product, but we hope she will take on a larger role of telling the industry what has to be done as a prerequisite to marketing effectively.

We wish her every good fortune. Her success will be our own.

### **Pundit's Mailbag Response By Tim York**

Your column on Lauren M. Scott, PMA's new chief marketing officer, and the unique challenges she faces in moving the needle on produce consumption reminds me of a piece you wrote some years ago on delivering a consistent brand promise for produce, especially fruit. Your example was Krispy Kreme's "hot now" button.

Krispy Kreme's "hot now" button lights up in stores when fresh donuts emerge from the oven. It's a sacred brand promise known only to donut lovers. Like lab rats, we are easily trained: the light goes on, and we turn into the store expecting another batch of original glazed donuts still warm from the oven. It's a powerful lure until the promise is broken and the melt-in-your-mouth experience turns inconsistent at the hands of store managers cheating the system to get bodies in the door.

A broken brand promise turns consumers off for the foreseeable future, if not forever. It happened to Krispy Kreme, and there's a lesson here that shouldn't go deaf on "produce" ears, even if you've heard it before.

Delivering on the promise of a delicious piece of fruit can be a challenge — more so than vegetables, which are often cooked and/or part of a larger culinary experience. It's easy to tell if a donut is "hot now." It's either warm or it's not. Poor tasting melons, mealy apples or sour grapes look similar to a flavor-packed counterpart.

Until buyers — retailers, wholesalers, distributors, foodservice operators or consumers — are willing to test and reject sub-par fruit, the market will find a place for it. Until all of us demonstrate that

the market has no place for poorly flavored fruit, it will continue to be a produce marketing vulnerability and a turnoff to consumers. Lauren Scott can't fix that on her own, but the industry can if it's up to it. The question is — are we?

To your second point regarding adding the likes of bacon to a produce dish as a culinary strategy, this is a proven winner. The produce industry has long said flavor is important, but we don't use it to drive purchasing decisions and practices. A couple of years ago, Markon and Paramount Citrus (now Wonderful Citrus) funded a collaborative PMA, National Restaurant Association and International Foodservice Distributors Association initiative to double usage of produce in foodservice. A number of solid recommendations surfaced from a think tank of foodservice thought-leaders, not the least of which was to reimagine the restaurant experience with a stronger produce presence.

Lauren Scott would do well to revisit the findings of that think tank, even resurrecting it and giving it new life. It was that good. And because of that, some of its recommendations found their way to the marketplace on their own. At last year's Ideation Fresh Foodservice Forum at The New York Produce Show, for example, Chef Gerry Ludwig from Gordon Food Service spoke about what he calls the veg-centric trend.

Chef Gerry identified six elements to this trend: small protein portions; crave-ability; flavor layering; aggressive cooking methods; the use of protein elements such as broth; and "beyond vegetarian" — not meatless. He noted that classic cooking methods, including grilling, smoking, braising and spicing coax a larger and more complex flavor profile out of the vegetables. Roasted Brussels sprouts with pancetta are not vegetarian, but they are delicious and very trendy.

PRODUCE BUSINESS (July 2016) calls the trend veggie-forward. Whatever the term, the movement toward reducing protein portions and increasing the vegetables at restaurants is pervasive and an industry opportunity.

Greg Drescher, vice president of strategic initiatives at the Culinary Institute of America, has long advocated that grower-shippers realize their role must evolve from simply putting product on a truck and waving goodbye. They must teach consumers and operators how to use a product. Frieda Caplan taught us this 40 years ago, with stickers on products telling us how to prepare them. No one would have known how to use and cook spaghetti squash had she not put a sticker on the squash telling us how to do so. Mann Packing and Church Brothers are two companies that understand they need to tell us how to use products, make them more flavorful, and appreciate that their role extends beyond the back door of a truck to the dinner plate.

Hiring a marketing veteran like Lauren M. Scott is a timely strategic move on the part of PMA President Cathy Burns. Guidance from PMA's marketing task force and a marketing committee notwithstanding, success will come from Burns and Scott putting their imprint on and executing against a game plan that includes managing the challenges raised by the Pundit and others.

—Tim York  
President

Markon Cooperative  
Salinas, CA



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To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 14, 2017, and fax back to 561-994-1610 or go to our website at [producebusiness.com](http://producebusiness.com) and look for the 40 Under Forty icon to link to the online application.

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

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# Freshfields Farm

Well-known brands, locally grown produce and outstanding value keep customers coming back.

By Carol M. Bareuther



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES

There's no need to advertise the freshness of the produce at Freshfields Farm. The classic red-painted barn façade says it all. This is the first sight customers see as they enter this iconic retailer at either its Orlando or Jacksonville, FL, locations. What Freshfields Farm isn't is a conventional supermarket. There is no grocery, bakery, deli, floral, frozen foods or beverage aisles. What draws customers to the store — for everything from weekly shopping to destination trips from miles away — are two departments: produce and meat.

"High-quality, fresh, great-tasting produce is in demand as much or more than ever," says Earl McGrath, director of produce operations in Orlando. "There is great opportunity for those who can provide fresh product to their customers."

The retailer began as a small meat market in 1973. Produce was added in 1981, with expansions in 1983, 1999 and 2001 to its current 12,000-square-foot size. In 2008, the name

changed from Momm's Meats and Popp's Produce to Freshfields Farm. In 2013, the retailer opened its second location in Jacksonville. An additional 5,000-plus square feet was added to the Jacksonville store in January 2016, making it more than twice the size of its Central Florida counterpart.

Both Orlando and Jacksonville are great locations for a produce-centric store. Both cities are in the Top 25 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. As of 2013, both have estimated median household income of more than \$40,000, and both are home to residents of Caribbean, Filipino and Arab descent, where fruits and vegetables are a staple part of the diet.

"We service a wide cross-section of different cultures and backgrounds. Essentially, our goal is to be the ultimate destination for anyone who cooks by providing them with great products and outstanding value," says McGrath.

The first step in this process is produce procurement. Freshfields Farm sources

chiefly from nearly two dozen name brand suppliers. These include Driscoll's, Columbine Vineyards, Del Monte, Calavo Growers, Dole Food Company, Tanimura & Antle and Potandon. Only 5 percent of produce comes from wholesalers. McGrath says this buying method not only "levels the playing field" for Freshfields Farm compared to larger competitors, but also gives the small retailer "a leg up" in terms of freshness and value to its customers. For example, when a supplier calls with extra product, McGrath works nimbly to take advantage by getting it in-store quickly and signing it with an attractive price. It's a procedure that offers a great buy to customers and helps long-time suppliers by moving extra product. It's sheer volume and velocity of sales, McGrath says, that enables Freshfields Farm to compete effectively with bigger rival retailers.

"Our Meat and Produce Departments operate in separate buildings, therefore product is kept in separate areas," says McGrath.

Product to be briefly stored is moved



**Earl McGrath, director of produce operations at Freshfields**



directly from trucks to the retailer's 38-degree produce-only cooler in Orlando — about 1,000 square feet in size. All other product goes immediately to the 4,000-square-foot, 58-degree sales floor. Fresh-cut fruits and vegetables are displayed in a separate 38-degree refrigerated case.

On the food safety front, Freshfields' managers are required to undergo state certification food safety training. All produce employees receive one-on-one training with management and also undergo web-based training. Employees in the fresh-cut area, which is an employee's-only section in the middle of the sales floor, wear gloves and hairnets at all times, and clean and sanitize cutting board prep areas. The retailer also conducts internal food safety audits.

There are 120 employees at the Orlando location, with 31 in the Produce Department.

The store features an average of 200 fresh produce SKUs. This selection of gourmet, organic, conventional, exotic and locally grown fruits and vegetables represented 39 percent of total store sales in Orlando during 2015. The five top sellers were Driscoll's strawberries,

Driscoll's blueberries, Driscoll's raspberries, conventional bananas and red seedless grapes. Fifteen to 20 of these SKUs are fresh-cuts and 20 to 30 are organics. Organic fruits and vegetables make up 15 percent of total produce sales. Organic choices may include apples, carrots, mushrooms, berries and salad mixes, and are spotlighted by green signage labeled "Organic Pick."

Locally grown is well-represented at Freshfields Farm stores and identified with red signage labeled "Local Picks." An average of 40 items, or 20 percent, of fresh produce SKUs are locally grown fruits and vegetables, defined as within 400 miles of either store. Local is a year-round program at the retailer thanks to Florida and the southeast region's climate. Strawberries, collard greens, corn and mushrooms are some of the locally grown selections. McGrath says local vendors, as well as those that supply nationally and internationally grown produce, must comply with all mandated federal and state laws and guidelines for food safety.

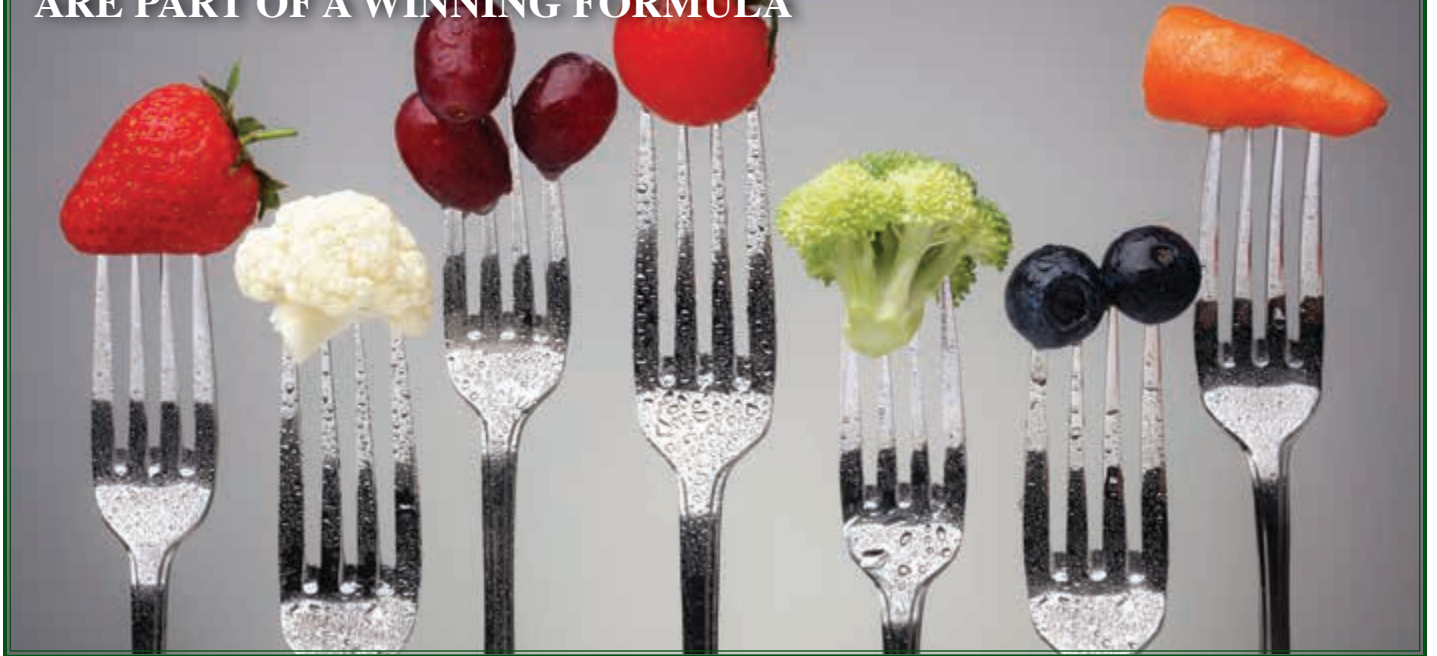
A unique feature at this retailer is a lazy river format that channels customers to walk by the product as they ultimately wind their way to the check out. Mass displays of chiefly bulk produce create a real farmers market feel, albeit indoors. There are separate checkouts in the Produce and Meat departments. In fact, there's an ice cream stand between the departments. This means vegans and vegetarians never have to pass the meat to get to produce.

Freshfields Farm is as equally renowned for its meats as its produce. There's all-natural and grass-fed beef, free-range lamb, antibiotic-free poultry and locally caught seafood. All meat is hand-cut and packaged in-store.

McGrath anticipates branding and marketing playing a greater role in the future. "Backing a consistently high-quality fresh product is proving to be a powerful tool in reaching consumers and bringing them back to the store time after time. Repeat customers are looking for that great grape or strawberry variety they had last week. They are noticing brand and variety information more than ever and research of individual brands is only a few clicks away with smartphones." **pb**

# LIFTING CONSUMPTION

BROADENED TRADE, GREATER AVAILABILITY ARE PART OF A WINNING FORMULA



Industry experts discuss the numbers and share valuable lessons.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER

**T**he old saying, “the more things change, the more they stay the same,” is relevant to the produce business. Despite industry innovations, per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables in the United States is relatively flat. More specifically, between 1994 and 2014, fresh fruit and vegetable consumption increased only 1 percent, or from 318.5 to 321.6 pounds, according to the USDA’s Economic Research Service’s Food Availability (per capita) Data System, published Feb. 1, 2016.

The good news is that this flatline on intake isn’t universal. Consumption of some fruits and vegetables has jumped over this same time-frame, according to USDA data. These include berries, asparagus, peppers, avocados and tangerines. (See Top 10 Fruits & Vegetables In Per Capita Consumption – 1994-2014 on page 41).

“The categories that have seen growth and are winning within the produce department are ‘trendy’ products that offer bold flavor, snacking opportunities, and health and convenience benefits, while the more ‘staple’ fruit and vegetable category sales are stagnant or declining,”

says Jennifer Campuzano, account manager for the Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group.

This rise in some produce items over others stems from factors both external and internal to the produce industry.

“Over the past decade the fresh produce industry has been aided by an increased number of food-related television show, social media and the continued demand from consumers for flavorful, healthy and convenient-to-eat foods,” says Keith Buscemi, vice president of produce for Eden Prairie, MN-based SuperValu, the fifth largest food

retailer in the U.S. market. “The exposure certain fruits and vegetables receive through media and marketing campaigns excites food-centric consumers. These campaigns, tied with in-store promotions, drive increased sales as consumers move their purchasing dollars from more familiar fresh produce commodities to the trendier offerings,” he says.

In tandem with this, chefs are incorporating more produce into their offerings on everything from QSR to white tablecloth menus. Thus, sweet potatoes and Chipotle peppers have seen triple-digit



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growth in penetration rates in foodservice between 2005 and 2016, according to Datassential statistics found in the *Fresh-Cut/Value-Added Produce Marketing Trends* presentation given by Roberta Cook, Ph.D., professor emerita and cooperative extension specialist at the University of California, Davis' Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. Cabbage, capers, red peppers, Romaine, celery, cucumbers and jalapeño peppers have increased more than 40 percent, while asparagus, carrots, scallions, green beans, corn and spinach have risen in use 20 to 37 percent.

"Consumers dine out and experience new produce items or familiar items prepared in new ways and want to try this at home," says Kathy Means, vice president of industry relations for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE.

On the industry side, sources for the article mention five intrinsic developments that took place and led to a huge impact on the volume growth of the Top 10 fruits and vegetables listed. These are produce characteristics like flavor and nutrients; broadened trade and greater availability; technology innovation such as varietal development and greenhouse cultivation; and advances in practices like ripening and packaging improvements. Key are



**In a 20-year span blueberry consumption grew by 599 percent.**

how grower/shippers have capitalized on these opportunities, and their success offers clues as to how growers of all fruits and vegetables can move the needle on consumption.

### PRODUCE CHARACTERISTICS

The health piece is huge when it comes to boosting produce sales, says Elizabeth Pivonka, president and chief executive of the Produce for Better Health Foundation

(PBH), in Hockessin, DE. "Sweet potatoes and berries, for example, have a great nutrition story to tell."

Beyond this is the affect of marketing of some fruits and vegetables as superfoods.

"All produce is healthy, so on its own that doesn't seem to be a motivator. But call something a superfood and off it goes," says PMA's Means.

A good example of this happened in the

## RETAILERS' ROLE IN INCREASING CONSUMPTION

Retailers play a crucial role in increasing the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

"It starts with sourcing high-quality great-tasting produce," says Earl McGrath, director of produce operations at Freshfields Farm, a two-store independent with locations in Orlando and Jacksonville, FL. "This is what our customers look for. Price is like number eight down on their list. However, some retailers tend to focus too much on shelf life and longevity, and that can lead to sacrifices in these two key selling points, as well as sales."

Keith Buscemi, vice president of produce for Eden Prairie, MN-based SuperValu, the fifth-largest food retailer in the United States, underscores the importance of the freshness factor. "Fresh produce has a finite shelf life, making it imperative that once the product is harvested, it gets on the store shelves as quickly as possible. To make this happen, many fresh produce ship-

ments traveling to one of our distribution centers are sent via team truck drivers. By removing critical time out of the supply chain, a consumer can enjoy a fresher, more flavorful product."

As for assortment, Buscemi adds, "Retailers work hard to identify consumption trends, which allow them to spotlight the fresh produce that can be incorporated into daily cuisine while providing new flavor experiences to meet consumers' growing and evolving palates. For example, fresh-cut fruits and vegetables such as mango, pineapple and peppers resonate with consumers, as they are perfect for on-the-go snacking and cut down the preparation time of a meal."

Promotion is a key piece to drive customers into the store and to the produce department, says Chad Miller, vice president of procurement at Sprouts Farmers Market, a Phoenix-based chain with more than 250 stores in 13 states nationwide. "Once they get there, it's all

about customer service to convey the attributes of fresh produce, including the nutrient and health benefits."

Buscemi agrees and says in-store education at SuperValu is accomplished through a variety of methods, from highlighting new or local offerings with in-store signage, to performing in-store demonstrations and tastings.

"The education retailers provide to their employees also helps increase fresh produce consumption. For example, trained field merchandisers in our wholesale regions continually train and educate our wholesale customers. We also educate associates at retail banners on the produce they stock every day. When armed with a greater understanding of the product on the shelves, employees feel comfortable interacting with curious consumers. These conversations help create store loyalty and feedback about what consumers are looking for from their fresh produce department," says Buscemi.

**pb**



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late 1990s when the Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group, the Center for Science in the Public Interest, ranked the sweet potato No. 1 in nutrients of all vegetables. The result is that per capita consumption rose 70 percent in the past two decades. Demand grew to year-round. In turn, marketing groups such as the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission, in Benson, NC, touted expanded usage ideas.

"We've promoted sweet potatoes beyond a holiday dish with new recipe ideas such as mashed as a substitute for Russet potatoes,

grilled in the summer, French fries in foodservice and even diced in ethnic dishes like burritos," says Jason Stemm, vice president of New York-based public relations firm PadillaCRT.

Since 2005, commodity groups like the Folsom, CA-headquartered U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council have invested more than \$4 million at two dozen research institutions to study the health benefits of blueberries. So far, 20 scientific papers have been published with results picked up by the consumer press.

"In 2013, Americans were nearly twice as

likely as they were in 2004 to buy blueberries in the coming year; 84 percent cited awareness of blueberry health benefits, up 115 percent over 2004," says Mark Villata, executive director of the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council.

Ways in which the Council has used this information include working with registered dietitians, including those who work in retail, to spread news of blueberries' nutritional benefits to consumers via traditional and social media channels, as well as to their patients and clients. Dietitians are a group the Watsonville, CA-based California Strawberry Commission, too, has targeted with the creation of its *8-a-Day Retail RD Toolkit*. Information includes store tour cheat sheets, strawberry nutrition facts, cooking demo scripts, recipe cards and a calendar of easy-to-execute ideas to plan in-store events.

"Consumers may choose produce for its nutrition, but they eat it for the taste," says PBH's Pivonka.

As a result, there's continued flavor development on the grower side, says Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms LLC, in Naples, FL. "Five years ago there was little proprietary blueberry production. In the next five, everything will be proprietary and focused on flavor and quality, as well as yield."

The Mushroom Council combined its extensive library of nutrition research, conducted during the five years in the early 2000s when a Supreme Court ruling shut down its checkoff advertising program, by working with chefs at the Culinary Institute of America to develop its blendability concept. The concept combines the umami flavor in mushrooms with a way to lower fat and cholesterol in beef-based dishes when the two are combined.

Health and nutrition — combined with flavor — will continue to be potent motivators of fruit and vegetable consumption. This means expanding to include the latest trends.

"Sustainability is now growing as a part of the health and nutrition concept," says Kathleen Preis, marketing manager for the Redwood Shores, CA-based Mushroom Council.

"This fall, the food website *Epicurious* promoted recipes as sustainable. Not only does a blended burger have less calories and fat than all-beef burgers, it also uses less land, less water and creates less of a carbon footprint."



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example of this is asparagus, which has grown 200 percent in per capita consumption in the past 20 years. One big reason is imports from Peru.

"Many growers/packers and importers continue to upgrade their irrigation programs, certifications and packaging programs, as well as invest in training, technology, traceability and social responsibility to meet consumers' needs with quality product," says Priscilla Lleras-Bush, coordinator for the Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association. "Importers

also work together with buyers, whether they are retailers and/or foodservice. For retailers, for example, importers provide solutions to sell more asparagus, whether it be packaging solutions with variety packs, asparagus tips, and green-and-white asparagus that equips retailers to create vibrant attractive displays."

Lemon supply in the United States has benefited from Mexican imports from July to December, says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for the Vision Import Group, in Hackensack, NJ. "Lemons have been grown

in Mexico as a commercial crop for Coca-Cola for years, but the crop has shifted more to the fresh market with the decreased production out of California and Arizona. When Mexico is out of season, we import from Spain and Chile for year-round supply to our customers."

To capitalize on greater availability and the latest consumer trends, Limoneira, a global agribusiness company headquartered in Santa Paula, CA, created its "Lemons for Life" campaign.

"This provides consumers with recipes and tips using lemons for beauty, green cleaning, nutrition and lifestyle applications," says John Chamberlain, director of marketing. "Registered Dietitian Megan Roosevelt is the spokeswoman for the campaign and the founder of Healthy Grocery Girl. She has a large YouTube following and shares content on a weekly basis."

Tropicals such as papayas and mangos have transitioned from specialty to mainstream and have grown by triple digits in consumption in the United States since 1994, due to increased imports. The main papaya suppliers to the U.S. market are Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Brazil and the Dominican Republic; for mangos it's Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Haiti, Ecuador and Peru. There is virtually no commercial production of these two fruits in the United States.

"We have partnered with multiple spokespeople, sponsorships, social media outlets and influencers to raise mango awareness and education, and ultimately demystify this delicious superfruit with U.S. consumers," says Angela Serna, communications manager for the National Mango Board, in Orlando, FL. "Through the years, the partnerships have included celebrities Tony Abou-Ganim, Ingrid Hoffmann, Aarti Sequeira, Clinton Kelly and Julie Johnston, who have generated more than 12 billion media impressions since 2006."

"Weather patterns have shifted in recent years causing new patterns in volume and seasons for the mango exporting countries. In years to come, these patterns can help boost mango availability among consumers in the United States," says Serna.

The other side of the coin, says Limoneira's Chamberlain, "is matching the growing demand with an equal growing volume, with a special note that the growing volume has to be evenly spread over 52 weeks of the year."

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at a time when snacking is a hot trend. A good example is pineapple, which has grown from less than 2 pounds to nearly 7 pounds in per capita consumption in the past two decades.

"We helped to revolutionize the pineapple category with the introduction of the Del Monte Gold Extra Sweet Pineapple in the mid-1990s, a move credited for a 250 percent

increase in fresh pineapple consumption in the United States," says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce, North America Inc., in Coral Gables, FL. "To help our partners increase sales, we align our whole and fresh-cut offerings with consumer trends, needs and shopping behaviors. For example, with the rise of the

## VOICES OF EXPERIENCE – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

What about fruits and vegetables that are flat or declining in per capita consumption? How can grower/shippers of these items give their produce a boost? Here is a sampling of recommendations from industry professionals who have experienced success with their products:

"It starts with quality and taste; packaging that differentiates is certainly a plus, but if consumers don't easily find the item in the produce department, don't expect growth. Create excitement around your product and do something different with the product that captures the retailer's and the consumer's attention and in turn gets your product improved visibility in the department and more frequent sales promotion."

— Bob DiPiazza, president,  
Sun Pacific Marketing

"First, understand your consumers and learn why consumption of the fruit or vegetable is flat or declining. Second, talk to your trade customers and learn from them. From that knowledge base, you can identify opportunities. Do you need to introduce the fruit or vegetable to new, possibly younger consumers? Are there untapped product usages that you can promote? Are there health benefits with the product that consumers are not aware of? Can your product add value for chefs and foodservice operators? Can you change your marketing mix to help retailers? How can you leverage your brand advocates? Every product is different, but fruits and vegetables have near-magical opportunity for growth."

— Jan DeLyser, vice president of  
marketing, California Avocado Commission

"From a marketing perspective, we always keep a focus on connecting

our product to our customers' needs. We work hard to promote blueberries to the right customers at the right place and time, and in a context that speaks to their needs. These needs may differ from one group of customers to the next, so promotions must consider the many cultural, social, personal and psychological factors impacting purchase decisions. Consumers are drawn to produce items that help them lead their desired lifestyle."

— Mark Villata, executive director,  
U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

"Developing useful-yet-fun content targeted to audiences is a big plus. Mobile continues to grow, especially with Millennials, so content needs to be targeted to where people are (not just at desktops). Developing an ambassador program that can help spread the word about your products is also really helpful."

— John Chamberlain, director of  
marketing, Limoneira

"Our research programs have allowed us the opportunity to share new results to both the industry and consumer media. Having relevant content to stay top of mind has helped mango to continue to grow in popularity."

— Angela Serna, communications  
manager, National Mango Board

"In 1982, Iceberg lettuce was 86 percent of our lettuce sales; today it is 34 percent. In the 1940s, the Southern Pacific railroad defined itself as a railroad. Had they thought of themselves as a transportation company, you would be flying Southern Pacific."

— Rick Antle, chief executive and  
president,  
Tanimura & Antle

'on-the-go' consumer, we have developed innovative packaging and expanded our pineapple line to include fresh-cut cylinders, chunks, rings and spears in a multitude of sizes. We also launched our new Del Monte Fresh Cut Grab-N-Go pineapple cups."

Varietal development and greater snacking have also propelled pepper, cucumber and tomato intake by double digits.

"New sweet mild red, yellow and orange bell peppers have evolved in the past 20 years," says Mike Aiton, marketing director for Coachella, CA-based Prime Time International. "While there has been some cannibalization of green bells by the other colors, the opportunity to present retailers with a choice of twenty-some varieties, if you count the hot chilis too, is growing the entire category. Small, sweet mini peppers have especially witnessed incredible growth, even as a snack item by kids. We've seen retailers go from ordering six pallets when on ad to straight loads."

Greenhouse-grown mini-cucumbers meet consumers' demand for healthy hydration, flavor and portability, according to Doug Kling, senior vice president and chief marketing officer for Village Farms International, based in Heathrow, FL. Similarly, says Kling, tomatoes were only used for slicing, sauces and salads. Now, they are a huge snack item.

"Nielsen Perishables Group data for the 52 weeks ending July 2, 2016, shows snack-sized cherry tomatoes grew 63.5 percent in volume; specialties like our Mini San Marzano's were up 19.4 percent and Campari's up 8.8 percent, while tomato volume overall was up only 2 percent," says Kling.

Consumers will continue to search for healthy, tasty, portable products to satisfy their snacking needs while on the go, says Del Monte's Christou. "We foresee channels such as convenience stores continuing the push for fresh items as they re-engineer themselves into a fresh food destination for consumers. Fresh produce snacking items offer great opportunity to meet those needs."

#### ADVANCEMENTS IN RIPENING TECHNIQUES

Avocados' growth in per capita consumption has soared nearly 400 percent, from 1.3 pounds in 1994 to 6.1 pounds in 2014. This fruit is a prime example of an item that has benefited from pre-conditioning programs to reliably place ripe fruit at point-of-sale.

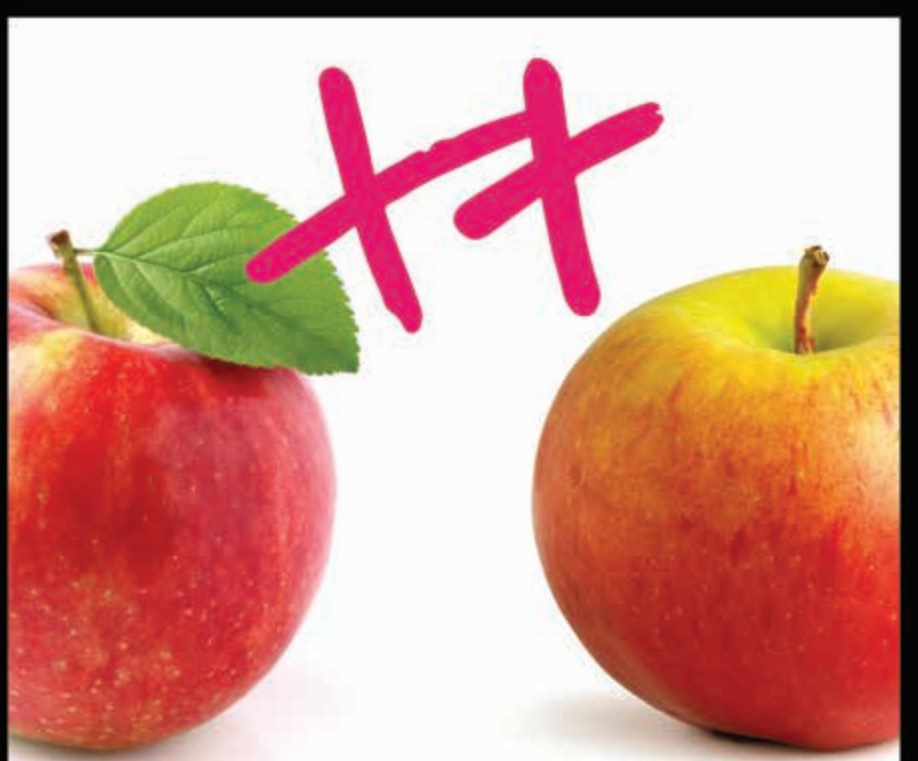
"The industry has invested in technology and infrastructure to deliver ripe fruit to consumers on a daily basis," says Emiliano Escobedo, executive director of the Hass

Avocado Board (HAB), based in Mission Viejo, CA. "Consistent year-round supply of ripe fruit equals increased sales and profitability due to customer satisfaction."

Simply offering ripe fruit doesn't guarantee customers will buy. This takes an aggressive outreach program, something HAB committed to when it invested nearly \$500 million between 2002 and 2016.

"Advertising, promotion and public relations all have had a huge role in building the category," says Jan DeLyser, vice president of

marketing for the Irvine, CA-headquartered California Avocado Commission. "For example, nutrition research and education helped move consumer perception of avocados from a fattening food in the 1970s to a healthy one today. In fact, with the recent serving size change for avocados from one-fifth medium to one-third medium, the FDA now allows marketers to use the word 'healthy' when describing avocados. The fact that we couldn't use 'healthy' for years — when some non-produce items could — was a challenge



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**“The fact that we couldn’t use ‘healthy’ for years — when some non-produce items could — was a challenge the industry overcame by disseminating all the good nutrition truths about the fruit.”** — Jan DeLyser, California Avocado Commission

the industry overcame by disseminating all the good nutrition truths about the fruit. In addition, along with brand building, campaigns include messages about the versatility of avocados, advancing usage beyond just guacamole. Now more than 40 percent of avocado consumers in the West eat them at least weekly at both lunch and dinner; 31 percent eat them for snacks and 17 percent for breakfast.”

Going forward, the avocado industry’s challenge in the fresh fruit supply — predicted to surpass the 3 billion-pound mark in the United States in the next two years — will be to keep supply and demand in balance.

soups and casseroles; and they are preservative-free and gluten-free. Our Broccoli Wokly product comes in a steam-in-bag package, making preparation a snap for consumers.”

Shelf-stable, resealable tubs that are easy to work with at retail and are convenient for customers is a packaging innovation that has stepped up the consumption of dates.

“Medjool dates are no longer just a holiday specialty,” says Erin Hanagan-Muths, director of marketing for Bard Valley Date Growers, in Yuma, AZ. “Shoppers now prize Medjool dates for their quality and flavor, and are consuming them daily as a health snack, especially among performance-oriented athletes, fitness enthusiasts and health-minded shoppers. We are just at the beginning of driving this shift in consumer behavior and expect this trend to continue for the foreseeable future.”

Branded produce accounts for a third of sales and has the fastest growth in produce, according to data supplied by the Nielsen Perishables Group. From 2011, branded produce has climbed from 28 to 36 percent in dollar share of produce. Looking at the five-year compounded annual growth rate, branded produce is up 12 percent while private label and unbranded grew 9 percent and 2 percent, respectively, during the same time.

Tangerines, especially Mandarin-hybrids like Clementines and W. Mercotts, have benefited from mega-branding campaigns that have grown per capita consumption from 2 to 4.8 pounds in the past 20 years.

“We were instrumental in pioneering the California Mandarin crop. Early on we developed the right growing and packing techniques to deliver on the promise of sweet, juicy, easy-to-peel and seedless,” says Bob DiPiazza, president of Sun Pacific Marketing, based in Pasadena, CA. “We improved our packaging over the years, added point-of-sale (POS) materials to support retail promotion and, along with our partners at the time, were the first brand to invest in a robust market-

### PACKAGING IMPROVEMENTS

Packaging innovations from bags to branding have driven double-digit increases in per capita consumption of Romaine and leaf lettuces, broccoli, and a triple-digit rise in dried fruits like dates, while other dried fruits’ intake has remained flat or decreased.

“Over the past two decades there has been significant growth in Romaine and leaf lettuces at the expense of Iceberg,” says Rick Antle, chief executive and president of Tanimura & Antle, in Salinas, CA. “As retailers began cross-merchandising Caesar dressing and croutons alongside the Romaine, consumers seized the opportunity to create their own signature salad. Packaged salads, specifically Caesar kits, allow consumers to experience restaurant-quality salads with the convenience of it all being in a single bag.”

Convenience packaging is something that will continue to resonate with tomorrow’s shoppers.

“Millennials, like most of us, are into convenience and quality. Mann’s Broccoli Wokly fits the bill,” says Jacob Shafer, marketing and communication specialist with Mann Packing, in Salinas, CA. “All the veggies are washed and ready to cook, and versatile enough for multiple uses, such as in salads, stir-fries,

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## TOP 10 FRUITS & VEGETABLES IN PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION 1994-2014

### FRUIT

1. Blueberries (+599%)
2. Raspberries (+400%)
3. Avocados (+369%)
4. Papaya (+266%)
5. Pineapple (+257%)
6. Limes (+222%)
7. Mangos (+166%)
8. Tangelos/Tangerines (+140%)
9. Strawberries (+97%)
10. Lemons (+31%)

### VEGETABLES

1. Asparagus (+200%)
2. Spinach (+114%)
3. Okra (+100%)
4. Romaine/Leaf (+88%)
5. Sweet Potatoes (+70%)
6. Eggplant (+60%)
7. Bell Peppers (+50%)
8. Broccoli (+48%)
9. Mushrooms (+47%)
10. Cucumbers (+38%)

Source: ERS/USDA based on data from various sources ([www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-\(per-capita\)-data-system/food-availability-documentation.aspx](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-(per-capita)-data-system/food-availability-documentation.aspx)). Data last updated Feb. 1, 2016.

ing plan that included a national television presence."

This season, Delano, CA-headquartered Wonderful Citrus, grower/marketers of Halos brand Mandarins, invested a record \$30 million in a new campaign that includes new television advertisements, digital, print, billboards, public relations, in-store POS and more. The campaign, which celebrates kids making healthy choices, launched Oct. 31. The company also has six free-standing inserts (FSTs) during its November to May season.

Increased consumption of tangerines, like Mandarins, has come at a cost. Per capita consumption of oranges plummeted from 12.5 to 9.1 pounds from 1994 to 2014. The challenge in the future for grower/marketers will be to grow overall consumption of citrus.

### FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Looking forward, which food categories will be the fastest-growing? According to Nielsen Perishables Group, products with

more than \$50 million in sales and with the highest compound annual volume growth rate between 2011 and 2015 are, in descending order, teas (primarily Kombucha-based), kale, waters (coconut water makes up 96 percent of dollar sales in this sub-category), completes/kits (salad greens with dressing and proteins), smoothies (especially greens and berry-flavored), sweet peppers (mainly minis), organic salads, Honeycrisp apples, raspberries and value-added snacking vegetables — nine of the Top 10 snacking items in volume sales

are either carrots or celery sticks and snack packs; and some include a dip.

Consumers are changing the way they eat, which is elevating the importance of fresh produce. According to Nielsen's *Global Health & Wellness Survey* (2014), 50 percent of Americans are trying to lose weight. "One of the top methods is incorporating more fresh foods (59 percent) and less processed foods (45 percent). Produce categories that adapt to contemporary consumer demand are winning," says Nielsen's Campuzano. **pb**

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# ALL IN GOOD TASTE

New flavors are building sales, consumer base as technology takes center stage.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAKATA

**N**ot so long ago, the Red Delicious apple was the gold standard for produce. It is pretty, withstands shipping, hides bruises, and stores well. But it often doesn't deliver in taste. In fact, Nielsen Perishables Group reports that while dollar sales of managed varieties such as Pink Lady, Ambrosia and Honeycrisp are up, Red Delicious and other traditional varieties have dropped.

Millennials lead the charge toward flavor. Mintel's Lynn Dornblaser notes that Millennials seek fun and flavor over value or convenience. Millennials also enjoy dining out and trying new foods, so it's no surprise chefs are influencing produce flavor expectations.

## THE FLAVOR REVOLUTION

Ideas for new varieties often come from chefs. Michael Mazourek, Ph.D., assistant professor, School of Integrative Plant Science, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, spends lots of time creating new cultivars from hybridized heirlooms. "I need an audience, and that's where chefs come in," says Mazourek. "They want great new ingredients, and that creates a dynamic exchange between us." The white cucumbers and mini-sized squash he cultivated for chefs will soon be available at retail.

## BREEDING FOR FLAVOR

Breeding for flavor is relatively recent. "In 2008 and 2009, we decided to rebuild

our company around flavor," says Jim Beagle, chief executive, The Grapery, Shafter, CA. "We changed everything—farming methods, harvesting, and retailer buy-in. In the beginning, a few small retailers took a chance on our new products, and their grape sales went up within a week."

Seed breeders incorporate genetic mapping to help them identify desirable traits and cultivate new items such as tomatoes of different colors, shapes, and sizes that still maintain quality and consistency while delivering on flavor. "Breeding without technology is like driving without a map and hoping to get where we want to go. Technology tools are our maps and GPS," says Carl Jones, Ph.D., global accelerated breeding technologies lead, Monsanto Vegetable Seeds, Woodland, CA. "The breeding process and challenges are the same as in the past, but we have a powerful set of tools and technology to deliver all the flavor traits that customers desire."

The USDA-supported RosBREED project applies modern DNA tests and related breeding methods to deliver new cultivars of apples, berries and stone fruit. The project is co-directed by Amy Iezzoni, Ph.D., professor, Department of Horticulture, Michigan State University, East Lansing. "DNA tests allow you to combine traits more efficiently, like good texture with a right acid-sweetness profile.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEMILT

With markers for disease resistance and fruit quality, we can identify seedlings that have those qualities in the greenhouse and not have to plant acres of seedlings. I am developing tart cherries with a higher sugar-acid ratio and am exploring crossing tart cherries with sweet cherries for more complex flavors.”

Seed breeders also use analytical chemistry tools to identify the biochemical underpinnings of flavor. In the Melorange melon, for example, breeders worked with an existing genetic variation and identified molecules responsible for ripening and great aroma. “Technology allows us to bring high-flavor products year-round to the consumer,” says Jones. On the consumer side, Chow-Ming Lee, Ph.D., consumer sensory lead at Monsanto, conducts monthly focus groups to help connect consumer liking scores to genetic profiles and sensory properties.

In the end, flavor is key. “Quality attributes, primarily those associated with appearance, will be responsible for the initial purchase of the product but flavor and texture drive repeat purchases,” says Larry Pierce, Ph.D., director, celery research and seed operations, Duda Fresh, Oviedo, FL.



The Grapery's new Teardrop grapes

## SWEET TASTE

Flavor is a complex blend of tastes — sweet, sour, bitter, salty, umami (savory) — with aroma, texture, mouthfeel, and other sensory properties of fruits and vegetables. For example, “People tend to prefer more sweetness and less bitterness in celery, lettuce, and other items that are consumed raw,” says Pierce. “But certain varieties under certain growing conditions can range from sweet to bitter or sour.”

“In our apples, we seek balance between sweet and tart, plus the right texture, to give the palate a great ‘wow’ experience,” says Don Roper, vice president, sales and marketing, Honeybear Brands, Elgin, MN. “Our goal is a light, delicate cell structure that allows the apple bite to cleave off with a crisp snap. Subliminally, that signals to the consumer the apple is fresh and wholesome.”

“Consumer expectations are very high for flavor, because they experience great flavor in items from farmers markets, specialty retailers, and restaurants,” says Alecia Troy, senior marketing manager, Sakata Seed America, Morgan Hill, CA. “We commission third-party flavor analyses to measure our Infinite Gold melon and Touchstone Gold beet against the

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competition.”

### A HIGHER STANDARD

Growing and harvesting conditions affect product quality. Zespri, for example, employs a comprehensive quality system to ensure consistent flavor in its Green and SunGold Kiwifruits, and links a percentage of grower payments to the taste profile of the fruit. Glen Arrowsmith, market manager, Zespri North America, Newport Beach, CA, explains Zespri sets guardrails for brix measurements prior to picking. “For the first time this year, our kiwifruits will be available through the spring, because we assess the optimal time for picking.”

Table grapes are among the leaders in today’s flavor revolution.

“We are pioneering, adopting, and refining various farming practices, including feeding, drip irrigation, and exposure to sunlight, to result in optimal flavor,” says The Grapery’s Beagle. “During the harvest, our team picks only those grapes that are ripe and ready to be carefully packed and shipped.”

“Flavor is not just variety-related but also related to how one manages the growing and harvesting of the vineyards,” says Scott Reade, vice president, sales and marketing, Pandol Brothers, Delano, CA. “Some of the newer varieties allow the grower to hold the fruit on the vine for more maturity and a true improvement in flavor.”

Growers continue to face and overcome challenges in growing delicious tomatoes. Certain aromatic compounds associated with

tomato flavor are released when the tomato cell wall softens; a softer tomato is more vulnerable during shipping.

### FLAVOR REVOLUTION

“Apples are a hot commodity in produce,” says Roper of Honeybear. “They deliver great gross margins and have an enviable consumption curve.” Honeybear was among the first Honeycrisp growers in the United States and supports a dual-hemisphere strategy that maintains a year-round crop. Honeybear and others cross the popular Honeycrisp with other apples to create new and flavorful varieties.

Roper explains its Pazazz apple, introduced in 2015, harvests a month later than Honeycrisp and maintains its flavor well in controlled atmosphere (CA) storage. “Moms will pay for flavor. The Honeycrisp changed the paradigm of produce pricing and promotion forever. The simple act of introducing a product with ‘real flavor’ reinvented the apple industry.” He notes, however, shoppers may not continue to support boutique pricing in the future.

### WHAT’S NEXT?

Roger Pepperl, marketing director, Stemilt, Wenatchee, WA, expects the flavor revolution and season expansion to continue. “Technology and better parent varieties are speeding up the development of newer, even more flavorful apples. What used to be great in apples is not good enough anymore.”

Stemilt is introducing its new Rave apple next summer, a full six weeks before the first



Sakata's smaller size Takara shishito peppers

New York crop. A cross between Honeycrisp and MonArk, Rave has full color, fractures like a Honeycrisp, is very juicy, and offers a different flavor profile. Its Piñata (bred from heirloom Golden Delicious, Cox's Orange Pippin and Duchess of Oldenburg) has a unique bite and fracture, is among the best apples for pie, and is available from November to April. The company's recently planted Royal Red Honeycrisp has high crunch and acid, packs and ships better than Honeycrisp, and

holds up to long-term storage.

The variety of grapes continues to expand, with new varieties joining The Grapery's Tear Drops, Cotton Candy and Gum Drops. Pandol is importing new varieties from the Southern Hemisphere and Mexico to extend its season into winter and spring.

Cornell's Mazourek anticipates growth in smaller-sized varieties convenient for snacking with the added benefit of more concentrated flavor. Among the leaders is Sakata

with smaller-sized Takara shishito peppers, melons, watermelon and butternut squash. Mazourek also expects more purple vegetables. He cautions, however, "color compounds can impart a bitter or astringent taste, so breeders have to select varieties that deliver both sweetness and color."

### SELLING FLAVOR

Retailers play an important role in reaching influencers. "Sampling is huge. People who have a great eating experience are more likely to buy," says Honeybear's Roper.

Michigan State's Dr. Iezzoni encourages produce departments to provide history and descriptions of new items as a way to attract consumers.

Customer feedback is most important. "Technology allows us to have real conversations with consumers that we couldn't have 15 or 20 years ago," says Beagle. He adds breeders, growers and pickers join retailers in appreciating information from customers on whether products are meeting their flavor expectations.

"Millennials in particular share every taste experience, good or bad, via social media, making flavor more important than ever," says Duda's Pierce. **pb**

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# WINTER Merchandising

Retailers prepare with smart merchandising strategies to move the season's commodities.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

**W**inter starts on December 21 and lasts through the end of February. In between are the year-end holidays, the health-focused resolutions of the New Year, Super Bowl Sunday, and National Heart Health Month, which all provide retailers opportunities for special promotions and merchandising that will keep both produce sales and consumers healthy all winter.

## THANKSGIVING THROUGH NEW YEAR'S

Commodities such as sweet potatoes, cranberries and winter squash have a strong association with Thanksgiving, which signals the transition to winter. The holiday is traditionally a time for turkey and stuffing, which spurs sales of parsley, sage and thyme. These and other fresh herbs have become a prominent part of produce departments across the country, thanks in large part to cable TV cooking shows.

"Fresh herbs are a big trend nationally," says Chick Goodman, vice president sales and marketing for Coosemans Worldwide, headquartered in Christiansted, Virgin Islands. "They have a 15-year track record of double-digit growth."

Fruits and nuts make great gift basket fillers and complement holiday-themed gatherings. It is suggested retailers cross-merchandise both during the holidays to increase sales.

Susan Noritake, market development manager USA for Zespri Kiwifruit, based in New Zealand, suggests retailers "place all of the ingredients for appetizers and cocktails together to help promote healthy party foods and drinks."

Zespri developed recipes to feature kiwis in drinks, appetizers, entrées and desserts. Noritake suggests using recipe cards and other POS materials to inspire consumers to purchase kiwis and other ingredients.

"A display of creative edible holiday arrangements inspires consumers to incorporate vegetables and fruits into their holiday décor," says Ande Manos, marketing/business development, Babé Farms Specialties, based in Santa Maria, CA. Manos says retailers should "collaborate with the floral department to create artful holiday veggie arrangements utilizing the contrasting shapes and colors of the season; red and white French breakfast, white icicle radishes, conical Romanesco cauliflower and cranberries make for a truly unique holiday centerpiece."

The holiday season is also prime time for tubers. Potatoes are

year-round kitchen staples for sure, but many more Idaho potatoes get mashed this time of year. "It is important to properly merchandise potatoes by making them clearly visible, merchandising all varieties in one location, and clearly marketing pricing and promotions," says Jamie Bowen, marketing manager for the Idaho Potato Commission, based in Eagle, ID. "Consumers will buy multiple varieties of potatoes if they are clearly visible."

### HEALTHY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

After the overindulgence of the holiday season, many of us make New Year's resolutions. These typically include promises to lose weight, eat better and improve overall health. Retailers can take advantage of these good intentions by promoting the health benefits of any number of commodities.

Manos recommends retailers "market to the consumer who is looking to the produce aisle after the holidays for that healthy start to a new year. Introduce healthy alternatives with in-house demos showcasing simple fresh ideas that can easily be executed by the most novice at-home chef."

Some of her suggestions for healthy food swaps include substituting butter with mashed avocado on toast; spaghetti squash in place of pasta; and green cabbage leaves as a wrap instead of a hamburger bun.

Colorful graphic display risers provide retailers the opportunity to convey the health message in store. Advertising is an opportunity also, as Zespri's Noritake points out, "I do see an opportunity for retailers to 'tell a story' about the benefits of eating kiwi in their print ads or social media pages. I think a similar approach for citrus could be extremely beneficial to build up resistance to colds and flu."

This message would certainly resonate with parents, but Millennials are prime targets too. "Retailers understand that traditional TV and print advertisement is less effective, and Millennials spend more time with digital engagement," says Noritake. "I see retailers making this adjustment to reach Millennials through these channels."

Potatoes are so commonplace that their health benefits often get overlooked, but retailers can remind consumers of the healthy aspects of spuds. "Idaho potatoes are the only potatoes certified by the American Heart Association as a heart-healthy food," says Bowen of the Idaho Potato Commission. "It's important for us, as well as retailers, to educate consumers on their health benefits."

February is National Heart Health Month, and retailers would be wise to keep the health

message strong right through the last month of the season. "The retailers that include health messages on signs and have dietitians on staff are seeing increased lift in sales," says Noritake. She believes larger displays, signage and tie-ins with social media will further strengthen the health message. For its part, Zespri works with supermarket dietitians to promote health awareness to the wider community.

Winter may hamper most outdoor physical activities, but many people use these months to train for athletic events in the spring. Andy

Tudor, vice president of business development and marketing for Rainier Fruit, based in Selah, WA, has seen success marketing toward such events.

"We have not focused on one specific holiday as much as we have focused on healthy lifestyles with our new consumer marketing campaign #RunWithRainier," says Tudor. "Last year, our partnership with the Boston Marathon allowed us to do unique in-store packaging that was highly received by both consumers and retailers and created a unique

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market position that got consumers excited and didn't blend in with other traditional marketing noise."

### SUPER BOWL

The Super Bowl in February is essentially a U.S. national holiday, and it's also a great time to promote items for use in fruit bowls and vegetable trays. "I obviously have a bias," says Bob DiPiazza, president of Pasadena, CA-based Sun Pacific, "but Cuties and Mighties make great snack items for the holidays and for the game. Other snacking items like vegetable trays, peeled cut carrots, cut fruit or other fruits eaten out of hand are easy to consume while glued to the screen."

DiPiazza believes cross-merchandising avocados with other guacamole ingredients is a great idea, and nut shippers should be used for promoting nuts as snacks for game day.

Potatoes are seldom sidelined during the Big Game, and Bowden of the Idaho Potato Commission suggests merchandising them with bacon bits, salad dressings and other toppings.

"Using items like these to inspire dishes, such as Idaho Potato Skins, would be very successful during the Super Bowl."



Walter P. Rawl and Sons, Inc., based in Pelion, SC, offers cookbooks to help consumers plan for more than just football. "We create several e-cookbooks throughout the year themed to different occasions, such as seasons, tailgating, smoothies, and eating healthy," says Ashley Rawl, vice president of sales, marketing

and product development at the company. "These are available to be cross-branded with retailers as opportunities arise. We also offer retailers social media content such as posts, photography, quick hack videos and infographics."

### ADDING COLOR TO THE MIX

For Moe Issa, it's all about color. Issa is the owner of Brooklyn Fare, which has locations in Brooklyn and Manhattan. "I try to get bold and bright colors to the front and leave the rest to the side," he says. "I like apples — the greens, the reds — I like to mix the color in there. When you walk into the store through produce, you want to have the colors front and center."

"Even in the gray days of the winter, the sun never sets on the produce aisle," says Manos at Babé Farms Specialties. This gives retailers even more incentive to make it shine inside the stores. Manos suggests retailers create illuminating produce displays "utilizing a bright array of winter root vegetables; red, gold and stripe beets, an assortment of colored carrots, turnips, kohlrabi and even specialty radishes. A winter crop of brilliantly colored cauliflower also makes for an eye-catching display."

For retailer A&N House of Produce in Philadelphia, PA, produce display decisions are made daily. "Our store is broken down into 80 percent fixed location and 20 percent dynamic," says store manager Dan Dvor. "That 20 percent dynamic is going to be filled with hot items or special items that are moving for that time of year." This gives produce an opportunity to highlight specific items for special eating occasions. "Customers get tired as they go through the store," says Dvor, "you have to give your 'wow' item at the beginning and at the end where the register is, because in the middle, from a customer perspective, it gets a little overwhelming."

### POS TELLS THE STORY

Sun Pacific uses risers and other POS support materials when displaying Cuties Mandarins and Mighties kiwis. "We have seen a great deal of success, and retailers report dramatic sales increases with POS materials that help tell a story and/or visually enhance displays that shout 'buy me' to the consumer," says DiPiazza. "These risers tell stories: sweet, juicy, easy to peel, and seedless on Cuties; ripe and ready to easily scoop and eat, and nutritionally dense on our Mighties kiwi; and the "Heirloom Story" and qualities of our Vintage Sweets Navel oranges."

DiPiazza believes this type of merchan-

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dising combined with good-sized displays creates an impact on the consumer. When properly positioned, high-quality product is offered at a value and that is a combination that creates sales.

Noritake at Zespri believes in the importance of educational POS information to show consumers how to choose, eat and store their fruit. She suggests print ads as a great tool for getting commodities, such as kiwifruit, to the attention of consumers.

“Demos are another important tool to educate consumers on the great taste, health benefits and easy ways to eat kiwifruit as an anytime, standalone snack with the simple cut, scoop and enjoy method. Most importantly is bringing kiwifruit forward in the produce department with more prominent merchandising and displays.”

### WARMING COMFORT FOODS

For shoppers in the northern part of the U.S., where winter temperatures routinely fall below zero, hearty dishes are what the mind and body crave. That means soups and stews are another great opportunity for retailers to move multiple varieties of winter commodities.

Soup kits are a great way to entice time-pressed home cooks, according to Goodman at Coosemans Worldwide. “If you’re in Minnesota, Wisconsin or Iowa, and it’s 10 degrees below zero, it’s really soup and stew season, because you’re not going to want to go out to the market every day,” he says. “You’re more likely to stay in and make a stew that you can eat for two or three days.”

Goodman sees retailers have success by pairing onions with other root vegetables and overwrapping them together

in a tray or packaging them in a clamshell to promote as quick meal starters. “Merchandising soups and stews for the winter with a couple sprigs of rosemary and some sage is a good winter merchandising idea,” says Goodman. He also recommends giving potatoes extra attention during winter as well. “Potatoes are rib-sticking comfort food, and winter is meatloaf and mash potato season.”

Bowden of the Idaho Potato Commission has some recommendations for proper potato merchandising. “All potatoes should be

merchandised together, not in separate areas of the store,” she says. “Once a consumer makes a selection on their potatoes, they most likely are done shopping for that product and will not look around for any additional offerings. Potatoes normally have their own table and this should be continued.”

As one of the most frequently purchased and largest volume items in the store, potatoes should be given proper space and focus. Bowden believes signage is extremely important as well, and the Idaho Potato Commission makes kits

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available to retail stores to display.

Megan Ichimoto, marketing supervisor for San Miguel Produce headquartered in Oxnard, CA, reminds retailers to add greens to the equation. She thinks retailers already do a good job conveying the health message of greens to their customers and the holidays are a good time to capitalize on awareness.

“The health benefits of dark leafy greens are the driving force behind the category,” says

Ichimoto. “The holidays are the prime season for dark, leafy greens, and a big part of holiday family meals. Ensuring the shelves are stocked and available is key.”

Rawl believes cross-merchandising and cross-promotion strategies are effective ways for retailers to showcase the versatility of their products. “With produce, it is a little harder to do special displays since the items usually require refrigeration,” says Rawl, but there is

a way. “For example: to show the versatility of kale to a shopper who does not frequently make smoothies, place a display next to the kale with fruit such as apples or pineapples with a recipe card to show the versatility of both commodities.”

Wilting greens can present issues for retailers, especially those located in areas where commodities travel from farther away during the winter months. While this is a challenge for retailers, it’s also an opportunity to set the bar high for the produce department.

Goodman at Coosemans Worldwide explains, “January and February are the time to build for the whole year in produce, because if you have good-looking fresh produce then, you can lock them into that store for the rest of the year. That’s the challenge for retailers: making sure during the after-holiday season, their stuff looks fresh and crisp.”

### PROMOTING COLD AND FLU FIGHTERS



Winter is also cold and flu season and consuming produce, especially citrus fruits, can be an effective weapon in fighting bugs and viruses. Fruits and vegetables from Central and South America keep commodities in the aisles for much longer than would have been allowed even a generation ago. When cold weather comes, this is appreciated for those suffering the winter blues and seasonal blahs.

The vitamin C found in kiwifruit will be a sight for itchy, watery eyes once winter is in full force, and product should be given prominent space. According to Zespri’s Noritake, “Kiwifruit has often been merchandised in the tropical section, but we have seen success bringing it to the front of the produce department by displaying it next to stone fruit in the summer and apples and pears in the winter. It’s also useful to have multiple displays within the department.”

Apples are also well represented during this time and for Tudor at Rainier Fruit, variety adds to appeal. “In the apple category, variety is really one of the most important characteristics that drive sales,” he says. “It is also about proper display allocation based on consumer demand.”

Tudor recommends retailers take the space taken up by varieties with sagging sales numbers and give it over to high-flavor apples. “There is no reason to put forth effort promoting varieties that continue to decline in both sales volume and category dollars. The addition of new high-flavor varieties within our ‘Rising Star’ category like Honeycrisp, Junami and Lady Alice allow consumers to have multiple choices and keep them coming back to the category generating new sales.” **pb**

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF CORRIGAN MIST

# Produce Misting Literally Prevents Shrink

Finer spray is better in modern systems.

BY BOB JOHNSON

**T**he technology for keeping produce moist and fresh has come a long way since the early days when retailers would put the greens to bed by covering them with moist burlap sacks.

Modern misting systems can boast incredible precision when directing moisture onto the produce, without causing dangerous wet spots on the floor or irritating spray on customers. Filters, UV light and ozone can all be incorporated to ensure the mist reaching the produce is pure and safe.

But faced with a dizzying array of available bells and whistles, the choice of which misting system to buy comes down to, most of all, the question of which one will avoid costly breakdowns.

“I would want the most reliable system I could get,” says Mike Corrigan, chief executive of Corrigan Mist, Gurnee, IL. “Anybody’s system will pay for itself pretty quickly, but if you have a system that breaks down for a day or two, you can lose a lot of produce.”

## CONTINUOUS MISTING

Miatech of Clackamas, OR, commissioned a study that showed

vegetables literally shrink if they are not properly misted. The study (found on its website) bared that broccoli lost nearly 4 percent of its weight in 16 hours when not misted, while it added almost 5 percent in weight over that period of time when it was misted. Some vegetables are even more prone to weight loss, as carrots lost more than 7 percent of their weight in just 16 hours when not misted.

Even vegetables that are relatively immune to this problem, such as cauliflower and cabbage, lost more than 3 percent of their weight when not misted, but added 2 or 3 percent when properly misted.

Reliability of the employees responsible for keeping the misting system running well is paramount to avoiding a breakdown that could quickly become costly.

“It’s crucial to have a good service plan,” says Serhiy Hrytfay lead designer for Miatech. “You need good maintenance for any equipment that works with water. You need to replace the filters on time. You basically can’t ensure the system won’t break down, but we provide a warranty.”

Faced with the prospect of losing up to 5 percent of their produce

weight literally overnight, produce retailers do well to think long and hard about which providers they trust to install and service a reliable misting system.

“An important point is the reliability of misting and the associated maintenance costs,” says Corrigan. “If retailers are throwing away more product, then their equipment is not doing its job. Misted produce is better quality produce that lasts longer. When a misting system is broken down, retailers’ investments are thrown away.

“A recent customer, that did not previously have a misting system, reported he weighed the product he was throwing out before and after installing the system. He determined that he saved more than 75 percent in lost product,” he says.

Suppliers of misting systems generally moved toward materials that resist corrosion and breakdown under the stress of constant moisture.

“We use materials that are resistant to corrosion from the water,” says Corrigan. “We use a lot of plastic.”

The most likely place for the system to break down is clogging of the filters that ensure only the finest water is misted on the produce.

“The trouble can come with reverse osmosis systems, because if you don’t change your filters on a regular schedule, it causes problems,”



says Vered Kleinberger, marketing director at Prodew, Marietta, GA. “Our regular misting systems don’t go down. We have some out there that have been working for more than 10 years.”

#### MAKE IT FINER

Corrigan has seen many advances in the technology since the days when his father invented the first misting system in the late 1970s. The latest improvement is in supplying a finer mist.

“If you go back to when most produce was

wrapped in plastic, at night they would take burlap sacks and lay them across the produce,” says Corrigan. “My dad, who was an engineer, invented produce misting so you wouldn’t have to do that. There have been improvements in nozzle designs. There are low flow nozzles that give you a gentle mist. We’re just trying to protect the plants; refrigerating and misting protect the plants.”

The goal of the system is to produce a constant mist that is always around the produce, and never anywhere else.

## ■ WATER QUALITY

A misting system can be no better than the quality of the water pumped through the nozzles to create the produce preserving fog. Although most municipal water is of good quality, there may still be chemical imbalances that must be remedied if the misting system is going to enjoy maximum longevity.

“The cleaner the water the better,” says Serhiy Hrytfay, lead designer for Miatech, Clackamas, OR. “The less minerals, the better. Usually we install our own systems with reverse osmosis.”

If you have hard water, and you don’t filter it through reverse osmosis, it scales up quickly, says Mike Corrigan, chief executive of Corrigan Mist, Gurnee, IL. “Poor water quality will clog nozzles and create scale buildup on mirrors, cases and water using equipment. A reliable reverse osmosis or water filtration system will prevent this from occurring. A good humidity system will not require filtration with most city water supplies.”

Even when the water is of the highest quality, it is common to install filters to prevent sediment from penetrating the system, according to Corrigan.

Water contaminated by pathogens must be treated with ozone or UV light before it touches the produce.

“Bacteria is carried through the filter process,” says Jim Gross, president of Ozone Water Technologies, Greenville, SC. “If you use ozone, the bacteria, and possibly the odors that go with it, are eliminated. We’re putting ozone systems into laundries in hotels all over the world. It cleans up the water.”

He estimates a UV treatment system capable of handling the water in a large swimming pool, for example, would cost in the range of \$8,000 to \$12,000 to install.

“We have a system that uses UV light to treat water,” says Gross. “It has to be done the proper way, but it works.”

These systems, when needed, worked without fail to prevent food safety prob-

lems that result from misting.

“There have never been food safety issues or harm associated with misting equipment,” says Corrigan. “In the United States, produce misting systems are supplied water from municipal sources that are regulated by the EPA, local health departments and are tested for safety. Ozone is a terrific anti-microbial agent and can be added to any system where additional safety is desired.”

Once the water has been turned to mist, it generally does not have to be managed because it disappears into the produce or evaporates.

“After it has already been used, the water for misting generally adheres to the produce; it is either absorbed or evaporated,” says Tom McKinney, sales manager at Ecologix Environmental Systems, Alpharetta, GA. “If retailers have runoff, they would need an oil/water separator, a sand filter — depending on what water treatment standards are in the area.”

pb

“A good humidity system will provide a fog that locally surrounds the product with a precise humidity level,” says Corrigan. “The system should not allow humidity to billow out into the store where it will wet floors and increase energy demand on the HVAC system. It is important to note humidity systems work best in an enclosed area as ever-changing temperatures, and air flow in the store have an adverse effect on the system’s output.”

One of the reasons finer mists are better are the smaller drops that are more easily absorbed.

“When it comes to technology, the finer the mist the better,” says Hrytfay from Miotech. “The larger drops are not absorbed, as well by the produce.”

A crucial advantage of containing the moisture in or just above the produce is it avoids the nuisance of misting the customers, or even the potential liability of exposing them to wet floors.

“We have a low profile mist bar,” says Hrytfay. “It’s nozzle free and looks better. You also don’t wet the customer. Our mist is finer and friendlier. You don’t get wet, and you don’t get the floor wet.”

Wet floors are a good way to suffer lawsuits, and wet customers are a way to lose business.

The simplest way to adjust the amount of water used to mist is to change the frequency of the pulse.

“If you are misting for 10 seconds and someone is standing there trying to buy something, that would be irritating,” says Corrigan. “If it goes on for two or three seconds, that’s not a problem. We do warning systems, or a sound system that goes with it.”

Suppliers are also offering choices in the angle and number of nozzles that allow retailers to use systems tailored to the designs of their produce displays.

“The goal for any misting technology should be to keep moisture in the product,” says Corrigan. “Eighty-degree round nozzles are typically installed in the canopy of the case and can be used in an alternating fashion with fan-style nozzles that prevent over spray and are best used with narrow product displays. The 80-degree nozzle also comes in a low-flow, gentle option that outputs half the flow of a standard nozzle for energy savings. There is also a 110-degree nozzle that is best for under-shelf installations or when the product is close to the mist bar.”

Misting is an evolving technology as producers are constantly working on systems that optimize the amount of fog that is available to the produce and nowhere else.

“The system you want depends on your case

style and what you are misting,” says Prodeu’s Kleinberger. “You can have variation in nozzle spacing at six, nine or twelve inches. You can also use single or double nozzle heads. We have six engineers who work in our office. As soon as we finish with the literature for a misting system, they are already making it better.”

The right system of gentle mist that keeps leafy greens and other produce items fresher longer pays for itself well before the end of the first year.

The return on investment for misting tech-

nology is measured, not in years, but in months, as it reduces the amount of produce that must be thrown out while also guarding against weight loss from dehydration.

“On average it takes less than six months for a misting system to pay for itself, and it’s probably usually closer to three,” says Kleinberger. “The payoff comes from the lack of food waste and shrinkage. Refrigeration causes shrinkage, because it produces dehydration. Our fog mist keeps the humidity up, and stops the dehydration.” **pb**



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# Winter's Imported Sweet Onions Are Hot

A bright future is in store as productivity increases and popularity continues on an upswing.

BY JANEL LEITNER

**T**he sweet onion category continues on its upward trajectory, according to the National Onion Association based in Greeley, CO. This growing demand allows retailers to supply consumers a fresh product during winter months.

“Since we originated the wintertime sweet onion back in 1989, the category has become a staple of the produce aisle,” explains Mark Breimeister, sales director with Saven Corporation/Oso Sweet Company located in Savannah, GA. “Back in the early 1990s, we asked retailers to slot in sweet onions during the winter months. Now the product is expected to be on the shelves year-round.”

For a period of time, Keystone Fruit

Marketing located in Greencastle, PA, saw the available supply of authentic sweet onions lagging demand. “Today, a reliable steady supply of year-round authentic sweet onions is available to meet increasing demand,” says Marty Kamer, president.

Consumer demand is what drove Shuman Produce, located in Reidsville, GA, to enter the import industry nearly 20 years ago. “Retailers can capitalize on sweet onions by keeping them on shelves all year long — as research shows produce baskets containing sweet onions are roughly 40 percent larger than those that do not,” says John Shuman, president.

Retailers benefit by supplying consumers what they need. “Having sweet onions during the winter months means extra sales and profit

for the department,” explains Keith Cox, produce category manager at K-VA-T Food Stores, which has more than 130 units and is based in Abingdon, VA. “Keeping customers engaged with sweet onions during the winter months only means they will have the option to make a decision on what onion they purchase depending on the use or recipe that requires onions.”

Sweet onions are by far the most requested onion in the produce department at George’s Market at Dreshertown, an upscale independent grocer located in Dresher, PA. “They account for more than 50 percent of all onion sales in our produce department. When domestic sweet onions are not available, imported sweet onions become essential,” says

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KEYSTONE



Nancy Grace, produce manager.

“We continue to educate retailers on the demand for sweet onions during the winter months,” says Troy Bland, chief operating officer with Bland Farms, located in Glenville, GA. “This is crucial, so they dedicate shelf space to imported sweet onions.”

Los Angeles-based Progressive Produce LLC provides customers with a way to “bring the summer back” during the winter months through its Mayan Sweet Onion from Peru. “These onions stand out from the crowd with their flat, disc-like shape and sweet, mild flavors,” explains Scott Leimkuhler, director of sales. “Mayan Sweet Onions are perfect to use fresh on salads and sandwiches. Just peel, slice and enjoy.”

### A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Looking ahead to the upcoming season, the outlook is bright for the growers. “Acreage has grown for us yearly and is usually increased about 10 percent per year,” says Breimeister of Saven Corporation/Oso Sweet Company.

Sweet Onion Trading, LLC (Grant, FL) forecasts its early season in Peru is up 20 percent over last season. “Late season is too early to tell,” says Barry Rogers, sales manager with the company.

Creative marketing can also help increase production. “We have been able to increase volume — especially when we cross-promote



**“Peru provides the only premium quality sweet onion to the market this time of year and offers retailers a consistent product to most effectively capture category sales in the fall and winter.”**

— John Shuman, Shuman Produce

with other product ideas,” says Bland.

Shuman credits the weather conditions for yielding a favorable Peruvian crop this year, with product ranging in size from medium to jumbo to colossal. “U.S. imports of Peruvian sweet onions hit a record level last growing season, and Shuman Produce is poised for

another great shipping year with high-quality product,” explains Shuman.

Kamer with Keystone Fruit Marketing reports the company’s sweet onion crop in Peru is coming in nicely with adequate volume and size for its core business. “Demand and high-quality sweet onions from Peru are expected to be excellent throughout the fall and winter selling season,” he says.

### IMPORTANT IMPORTS

A good quality product coincides with the country it comes from. “That’s why we have chosen the countries we have to grow our product,” says Bland. “Sweet onions from U.S. growing regions have been in storage for a long period of time, especially in the winter months, and importing sweet onions allows us to offer fresh onions.”

Breimeister with Saven Corporation/Oso Sweet Company estimates more than 90 percent of imported product comes from Peru. “Over the years, Peru developed the infrastructure to grow very nice, consistent product,” he says.

Retailers gain significant benefits working with a reliable grower. “Following Vidalia onion season, Peru provides the only premium quality sweet onion to the market this time of year and offers retailers a consistent product to most effectively capture category sales in the fall and winter,” says Shuman.

Bland Farms exports from Peru to the U.S. from mid-September to mid-February, and



from Mexico from the beginning of February to the beginning of April. “The export of Peruvian and Mexican sweet onions into the U.S. ties in with the beginning and ending of our Vidalia season,” says Bland. “This, in turn, has our facility running year-round providing sweet onions to our retailers and consumers all months of the year.”

Shuman Produce grows sweet onions in Peru and Mexico as a part of its year-round RealSweet onion program. “Peru has a longer growing season as compared to anywhere in the U.S.; therefore, we typically harvest our onions from August to January each year,” says Shuman. “RealSweet Peruvian sweet onions are available in retail outlets from September to February.”

Along with Peru and Mexico during their seasons, Sweet Onion Trading, LLC also imports from Honduras from January to March. “Importing always has a large investment in time and resources and timing is everything,” says Rogers.

Saven Corporation/Oso Sweet Company primarily grows and imports Oso Sweet Onions from Peru and has a program set up for weekly arrivals of fresh onions from

mid-August into the first weeks of March. “We do not bring in a huge slug and store them for packing later. Instead, we grow in some alternate areas and stagger our harvest for consistently high quality,” says Breimeister.

Growers remain positive about working with more countries to import sweet onions. “Keystone Fruit Marketing has ongoing research and development projects in a variety of other countries throughout South and Central America, and even Europe and others,” reports Kamer. “Future availability of authentic sweet onions from these emerging markets is yet to be determined.”

“We tried different countries in Central and South America,” explains Bland. “We will continue to try different areas to bring retail partners the freshest sweet onions year-round.”

### KNOW YOUR ONION

Retailers always benefit from providing the consumer with a good quality product. Kamer of Keystone Fruit Marketing warns one of the biggest challenges is to meet consumer expectations. “Even if the year-round sweet onions have become a mainstay in the department, there still continues to be

**“Even if the year-round sweet onions have become a mainstay in the department, there still continues to be lots of imposters, or onions labeled ‘sweet’ but failing to meet consumer expectations.”**

— Marty Kramer, Keystone Fruit Marketing

lots of imposters, or onions labeled ‘sweet’ but failing to meet consumer expectations. These destroy consumer confidence and ultimately slow the sales and profits for everyone,” he says.

Breimeister with Saven Corporation/Oso Sweet Company agrees. “There are offerings from other sources that may pass a lab test but fail to deliver on taste and appearance, thus leading to a temptation to buy a cheaper item but in the end, these lesser products only turn off the consumer and cost repeat sales. We take pride in only putting our Oso Sweet label on truly sweet onions that deliver consistently to the consumer.”

Understanding distinct characteristics of the sweet onion adds clarity for both consumer and retailer. “We are constantly trying to educate consumers and retailers about the value of purchasing and selling a flat, true short-day variety sweet onion versus selling long-day domestic product which rarely has the same taste and appeal,” explains Breimeister. “The consumer sees the flat onion as the more mild and truly sweet product.”

Suppliers such as Progressive Produce say by importing sweet onions from Peru to all four corners of the U.S., the company can pack product fresh and deliver it to any customers within a day. “This helps ensure both quality and sticker rates to guarantee accurate rings at store level,” says Leimkuhler of Progressive Produce.

“Imported sweet onions are retailer- and consumer-friendly,” explains Grace of George’s Market. “They are lower in water content, making them cleaner with less shrink.”

To keep consumers informed about product availability, marketers remain engaged. Shuman Produce works through social media outlets to promote its year-round sweet onion availability. “Educating consumers on the differences between sweet onion options this time of year is also very important,” explains Shuman.

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Bland Farms works to educate consumers about sweet onions by pointing out they're not just for salads anymore. "They can substitute the pungent, very strong conventional onion with a sweet-smelling, sweet-tasting onion in any recipe," says Bland.

### PACKAGING AND PROMOTION

Retailers have several methods to capture shoppers' attention and make the sale. "Many consumers do not realize the similarities of Peruvian Sweet Onions and Vidalia Sweet Onions," explains Bland. "We provide promotional materials to retailers and also work with retailers on coupon programs to cross-promote Bland Farms and Vidalia brand products related to sweet onions."

Keystone Fruit Marketing offers innovative packaging including usage tips, recipes and nutrition details. "Growers, shippers and retailers continuously strive to develop state-of-the-art packaging and displays to catch the eye of the consumer, at the same time providing information on nutrition and utilizing products to boost sales," says Kamer.

"Providing recipes through retailer websites or on bin boxes is a great way to increase sales and educate the consumers," says Bland.

Shuman Produce provides all RealSweet sweet onions in a variety of packs and sizes to meet the needs of all demographics. "Our bagged products act as effective merchandising tools with high-quality graphic product imagery and great seasonal recipes," says Shuman.

Imported sweet onions offer countless opportunities for the retailer to promote due to their diversity. "Many retailers strive to take advantage of cross-merchandising by strategically placing onions and products that can be utilized with sweet onions," offers Kamer.

Shuman Produce advises stores to merchandise sweet onions alongside additional products to create an easy meal, which raises the ring at the register. "Retailers should also consider displays outside of the produce department to maximize sales during fall months when grilling and tailgating are on the top of consumer's minds," says Shuman. "RealSweet sweet onions make the perfect pairing for burgers, sausage and chicken on the grill."

"Retailers should continue to promote with secondary displays during the winter months for extra sales and profit, since sweet onions are generally available year-round, and the consumer doesn't see the gaps in supplies like in years past," explains Cox of K-VA-T Food Stores.

Product placement is crucial. "Endcaps,

standalones, value-added product offerings, multi-size strategies and consumer bagged displays offer consumers multiple buying options and ensure sales lift," says Kamer of Keystone Fruit Marketing.

Offering a bagged versus bulk option increases customer choice, which leads to more sales. "Due to increased demand for 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," offers Kamer.

Shuman Produce offers both bag and bulk product year-round. "This choice best meets the needs of consumers looking for a premium sweet onion with the flat granex shape and mild flavor profile," says Shuman.

Quality also plays an important role in winter promotion. "Retailers should promote and advertise much like they do in the spring and summer months, because the quality of imported sweet onions has been very good over the past few years and has been a value for the consumer," explains Cox of K-VA-T. **pb**

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# A Central American Bonanza

Produce imports are on the rise, as this region helps supply America's fruit and vegetable needs during the fall and winter months.

BY LISA WHITE

Since the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) was implemented on a rolling basis between the United States and six Central American and Caribbean trading partners, agricultural imports from this region have been on the rise. The agreement was instituted with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua in 2006; the Dominican Republic in 2007; and Costa Rica in 2009.

From 2006 to 2014, U.S. imports of agricultural products from these countries increased 72 percent to \$5.3 billion, according to the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. U.S. imports consist primarily of bananas and other fruits, which, along with coffee and sugar, comprise three-fourths of the total. Guatemala and Costa Rica are the largest suppliers, accounting for two-thirds of U.S. imports from the CAFTA-DR region.

In terms of total bilateral trade, the CAFTA-DR region is the sixth-largest U.S. trade partner in the world, after Canada, Mexico, the European Union, China and Japan, according to the USDA.

Central America's fresh export crops comprise myriad vegetables and a more limited assortment of fruits.

"Guatemala is by far the most diversified

country in terms of fresh vegetable production, followed by Honduras and Costa Rica," says Mauro Suazo, president of Suazo Agro International, LLC, based in Pompano Beach, FL. "Nicaragua and Panama present a more limited offering, and El Salvador basically exited the export industry except for as a well-established Persian lime exporter."

Guatemala's various microclimates, such as the highlands and lower lands with high volcanic fertile soils, provides idyllic growing conditions for snow peas, sugar snap peas, French beans, leafy vegetables, papayas, limes, melons and watermelons, say importers.

Most recently, according to reports, this country invested in leafy vegetables and pre-packs for retailers.

"Thus, value-added processing and packaging are being accomplished at origin under great sanitary conditions and that trend is expected to continue moving forward," says Suazo. "In addition, due to the new USDA and FDA regulations, much care and attention is being paid to food safety and traceability."

Honduras continues to be a major melon and watermelon player in southern Central America. This region also is experiencing a trend toward okra production of both Amer-

ican and Hindi varieties.

"The estates of Choluteca and Valle in southern Honduras present an ideal warm and sunny climate to grow okras of superior quality," says Suazo. "All okras are grown on drip irrigation and brought in after harvest to state-of-the-art pre-cooling facilities."

In the middle of Honduras in the Comayagua and La Paz Valleys, importers say a thriving greenhouse industry has been established for producing slicer, mini and seedless cucumbers; colored peppers; and other greenhouse-grown vegetables. There also are open field peppers and cucumbers being grown in considerable quantities.

"The Oriental vegetable industry is a very important source of employment in these valleys, earning foreign currency for the country, as well," says Suazo. "It has struggled this past year due to El Niño's adverse weather conditions; however, little by little the Oriental veggies industry in Honduras is recuperating to a healthy status, both from an economic and production point of view."

## PROFITABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Central American produce is ideal to promote during the fall and winter, when local fruit and vegetable availability is limited.

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**“As shopper trends change and the holiday season arrives, cooked vegetable items come to the forefront, and asparagus is highly profitable to promote and grow sales.”**

— Dan O’Connor, Ayco Farms

In terms of variety, there are many importing opportunities from the Central American region.

Two of the main items Pompano Beach, FL-based Ayco Farms imports from this area are asparagus and melons.

“In terms of asparagus, Peru (South America) is the main growing region for this item,” says Dan O’Connor, Ayco’s vice president of sales. “As shopper trends change and the holiday season arrives, cooked vegetable items come to the forefront, and asparagus is highly profitable to promote and grow sales.”

The dynamic of melons is different, as these products have a longer growing season that lasts from November through May, with Guatemala as the main growing region.

Ayco Farms is part of the Rainforest Alliance, a non-governmental organization working to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior.

“We’re taking innovation and leading the way for suitable wages and sustainable housing, and the consumer response is fantastic,” says O’Connor. “Now that we have a more educated shopper base, they’re seeking out that information.”

Central America is also the main provider for conventional and specialty bananas, plantains, pineapples, tomatoes and mangos during the fall and winter months.

Del Monte Fresh Produce, based in Coral Gables, FL, is currently producing conventional and specialty bananas, plantains, pineapples, melons, tomatoes, vegetables and mangos from various Central American countries.

“We are also selling the products in whole form and fresh-cut to retailers, wholesalers and foodservice channels,” says Dionysios Christou, the company’s vice president of marketing,

Miami-based Crystal Valley Foods has been importing specialty vegetable products from Guatemala for more than 20 years. Its focus continues to be on French beans in bulk and value-added packages; yellow beans in 8-ounce microwavable bags; snow peas and sugar snap peas in 10-pound-bulk pack cartons as well as

6- and 8-ounce microwavable bags; shucked English peas in 1-pound and 6- and 8-ounce packages; baby squash in 5-pound cartons and 8-ounce retail bags; and baby carrots in 5-pound vacuum bags, 5-pound extended shelf life bags and 8-ounce retail bags.

In addition, the company imports blackberries and Oriental vegetables seasonally from Central America and established a private label packing business of specialty vegetables in the last decade.

“We’re packing a full line of specialty vegetables for third parties for delivery at both our Miami and Los Angeles warehouses,” says Rick Durkin, director of business development at Crystal Valley Foods.

Carb Americas in Fort Lauderdale, FL, is mainly importing mangos out of South America’s Brazil and Peru, but brings these items in from Guatemala and Nicaragua at the end of February and end of March or early April, respectively.

“Mangos are growing in traction as a mainstream food item year-round,” says Danny Pollak, who handles Carb Americas’ sales.

This is not the only on trend fruit that’s regularly imported from the region. Pompano Beach, FL-based Central American Produce Inc.’s company-owned farm in Guatemala will be harvesting seedless watermelons again this year. The first shipments are expected to arrive in the United States in late December.

“Last year’s crop showed outstanding quality, and we are going to see an increase in production this season,” says Shannon Barthel, marketing director. “We grow in a remote region of the country with a unique climate and rich volcanic soil.”

Along with popular fruit varieties, Central American tropical produce, such as chayote, calabaza and yuca, are available almost all year-round in the U.S.

Chayote, often used as a vegetable in dishes, is a staple in many Latino, Asian and Pacific Rim cuisines. It’s also popular in Louisiana, where it’s referred to as *mirliton*.

“Latinos will make soups out of it, cut it in half, and broil it in the oven topped with cheese,” says Mary Ostlund, marketing director



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at Brooks Tropicals, LLC, headquartered in Homestead, FL. “Chayote is added to many recipes like a potato, such as in casseroles and soups, but it is considered much more nutritious.”

Another tropical import, calabaza, is a hybrid pumpkin/squash that adds both a sweet and hearty element to Latin American soups and stews.

“It’s high in potassium, along with vitamins A and C,” says Ostlund. “Plus, calabaza is low in calories and has half the starch of other similar vegetables like corn and potatoes.”

Brooks Tropicals sells a variety of calabaza that is Cinderella-coach shaped or roundish, which is easier to cut.

Yuca, a low-fat tropical potato, is a good source of carbohydrates, vitamin C and manganese.

“It has three personalities,” says Ostlund. “Boiled, it’s soft and sticky, while fried, it’s sweet and crunchy. Like zucchini, when it’s baked, yuca gives breads and cakes a mellow, but sweet taste.”

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Many produce trends come out of Central America. This is due to the region’s variety of microclimates that allow production of several products in addition to the traditional tropical produce.

The latest development is the implementation of tropical roots projects and other tubers.

“The most recent trend in Honduras has been toward the calabazas or pumpkin production; Arjuna, Fair Lady and Kabocha varieties are now grown in addition to the traditional Butternut, Spaghetti and Acorn squash varieties,” says Suazo. “A thriving sweet potato industry is also showing healthy growth for exports, but mainly to the U.K. and EU markets.”

Nicaragua continues to work with quality okras and tubers, but volume has been steady and no major increase in acreage is expected, according to Suazo.

Costa Rica continues to do well with tubers, mangos and golden pineapples.

“This year has been a challenging one for cran-pineapple production due to adverse weather,” says Suazo. “Summer is over, and more organized production is expected in Costa Rica with fresh pineapples.”

In addition, Costa Rican melon production continues at the same acreage as in previous years, with distribution mostly dedicated to the U.K. and EU markets.

“The United States should be a destination, but between Honduras and Guatemala, the melon market is being cornered,” says Suazo.



**Pineapples and melons are among the top produce items exported from Central America.**

In terms of new products, Ayco Farms is experimenting with proprietary varieties, such as the Orangecello melon, which is a higher sugar variety than traditional types. It is the second year the company has been offering this product.

“Many are offering brix scores of between 11 and 12 percent, but no one is speaking about consistency, because these are new and proprietary varieties,” says Ayco’s O’Connor. “This year, we have more of this fruit available, which offers a different experience than traditional cantaloupe.”

Carb Americas worked with the National Mango Board to promote the fruit and has seen success with the growing Latino population and foodies looking for a change of pace.

“Mangos are the No. 10 fruit in the United States, so there is a lot of room for growth,” says Pollak. “There also has been a lot of buzz about dragon fruit out of Nicaragua, but this is such a niche market and prices are so expensive.”

Many importers like Carb Americas are contending with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and instituted a full-time food safety staff member to navigate the new laws that are currently being implemented.

“The challenge is obtaining the highest quality product that’s on the water for seven to 10 days,” says Pollak.

Carb Americas, which offers sugar snap peas and snow peas from Guatemala year-round, has processing facilities in Guatemala and Nicaragua to eliminate waste in a sustainable program.

“This minimizes waste of product that doesn’t adhere to our export quality,” says Pollak. “We can instead process and freeze these products for sale.”

Central American Produce continues expanding its hard squash program from Honduras and Guatemala. The company also will have both Butternut and Spaghetti squash available from late December through early May.

“We also are planning an increase in our honeydew and cantaloupe program from Honduras,” says Barthel. “The weather has been good, and we’ll be shipping into South Florida every week and to Houston or Philadelphia upon request.”

Beside packing in its CAPCO Farms label, the company will also be offering its Eat Brighter! brand squash, watermelon and honeydew.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Overall, Central America is healthy, and experts say its export industries benefited from a strong dollar. Also, freight rates have, for the most part, been stable. In addition, Honduras and Guatemala reconnected with Europe via a new service operated by the European Seatrade Shipping company sailing under a different banner.

Still, Central American importers are contending with a number of issues.

For example, traditional crops, such as bananas and plantains, experienced challenges. Yet, since these are mature industries, nothing major is expected to happen.

“Central America is paying careful attention to state-of-the-art production technologies,” says Suazo. “The region continues to experience competitively priced labor, though production costs continue to rise.”

As a result, the agro exporters look for alternative crops to grow, with a trend toward creating more diversified baskets.

For example, Ayco Farms tests more than 50 varieties of Central American products annually. In particular, watermelon sales are on the rise due to new efficiencies in growing and increased customer demand.

The company is expecting a big 2016-17 melon season coming off of El Niño.

“We always look for opportunities for profitable growth and try to meet our customers’ demands with new varieties providing increased yields with long shelf life products,” says Christou. “Infrastructure in Central America has improved vastly, creating opportunity to grow more crops in diversified regions.”

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# Mexican Avocado Promotions

Aggressive marketing can move the product from a niche specialty to a major success story.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**U**nited States consumption of avocados doubled in the past 10 years and is now nearly four times higher than in the mid-1990s, according to the USDA Economic Research Service, March 2016 *Fruit and Tree Nuts Outlook* report. The report further credits the growth in per-capita availability to imports, primarily from Mexico.

In 2013, the Mexican avocado industry formed the promotion board Avocados From Mexico (AFM) with the purpose of coordinating marketing activities for the Mexican Hass Avocados Importers Association (MHAlA) and The Association of Growers and Packers of Avocados From Mexico (APEAM). Avocados From Mexico now produces more than 2 billion pounds of avocados per year for the U.S., and represents nearly 68 percent of the total U.S. foodservice market.

“If you look at the past five years, the AFM market share increased significantly — growing from 52 percent to 81 percent,” says Stephanie Bazan, market development director for Avocados From Mexico in Irving, TX. “This is growing the category. Last year alone, the category grew 20 percent in pounds.”

Marketers report success in both retail and foodservice promotions with the aggressive AFM campaigns over the years. “They have been very successful at increasing sales and consumption,” says Gary Caloroso, director of marketing (avocados and asparagus) for The Giumarra Companies in Ventura, CA. “We have greater consumer demand as a result of the marketing work conducted by the various avocado commodity boards, including AFM.”

Dan Acevedo, director of business development with GreenFruit Avocados in Newport Beach, CA, notes one cannot turn on a cooking channel or read a health



magazine without seeing avocados. “As the category continues to grow, retailers expand avocado display space. In well-developed markets, there are multiple conventional programs and an expanded organic section along with an avocado bag program,” he says.

### USAGE OPPORTUNITY

One of the major advances credited to AFM is the expansion of usage occasions for avocados. “They helped bring more attention to the avocado,” says Rich Dachman, vice president produce with Sysco Corporation in Houston. “Avocado is not just promoted around Cinco de Mayo anymore. Now there are more conversations at other times of the year.”

“One of the most effective things Avocados From Mexico has done is drive consumption on a year-round basis by touting the multiple usage occasions,” agrees Dave Lessard, vice president produce and floral for Ahold USA in Carlisle, PA. “It’s not just for game-day guacamole. Consumer education is gaining more exposure with recent marketing around how to store and how to serve.”



**“To maximize the sales impact, align retail promotions with the marketing promotions and take advantage of the various display units available.”**

— Dave Lessard, Ahold USA

AFM states its goal is to build excitement and sales of avocados year-round. “We provide fresh, innovative meal solutions, strategic partnerships and exciting promotions 365 days a year,” says Bazan. “We offer nine promotional programs annually.”

Some of the most prominent and successful marketing promotions for food-service incorporate availability of new recipes for operators, according to Sysco’s Dachman.

“These include: Avocado Toast, Avocado/Egg Bake and Avocado Smoothies,” he says.

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“It’s been important to have marketing fliers and recipes on new ways to use an avocado.”

The Ahold stores take advantage of the multiple marketing and promotional themes throughout the year. “We’ve seen the largest incremental increases around the non-holiday/non-football promos,” reports Lessard. “These include summer sandwiches, salads and back-to-school.”

### FOODSERVICE DEMAND

Increasing incorporation of avocado in foodservice can yield favorable results for operators. Giumarra’s Caloroso says foodservice outlets continue to find more ways to incorporate avocados on menus to drive profits.

“Restaurants featuring avocados in a variety of dishes have done very well — particularly when paired with a promotion.”

AFM recently commissioned a study on consumer willingness to pay more for fresh avocados at restaurants. “The study, which included more than 3,000 consumers, found an avocado add-on provided a boost of up to \$2 in sales prices across all restaurant segments,” reports Mark Garcia, director of foodservice marketing for AFM.

“Not only are customers willing to pay more for the addition of fresh avocado on sandwiches, salads, and other entrées, but two-thirds of consumers (67 percent) report restaurants

offering an avocado add-on would improve their menu item quality perceptions — attributing this to the trademark taste and health characteristics of avocados,” he says.

Garcia says there have been some exciting promotions and limited-time-offers (LTOs) with restaurants that involved Chipotle, On The Border, Johnny Rockets and Pappasito’s Cantina. “These included limited-time specials ranging from tableside guacamole to avocado add-ons,” he says. “Each of these operators reported amazing results with increased guest counts, improved sales and off-the-chart digital engagements. These promotions help drive consumption of fresh avocados year-round and engage consumers in fun new ways.”

AFM foodservice programs strive to create unique, custom tailored programs for restaurant operators.

“We’re continually working with existing and new restaurant partners on new menu items and offerings,” says Garcia. “Not only do we execute in-restaurant promotions featuring

Avocados From Mexico, but we also use these LTOs to extend the reach of both partners to a broader audience online. For example, in March we executed a promotion with Chipotle called “Guac Hunter” — an online photo hunt game where players had to spot the differences between two similar photos within a given time frame. The players who completed the survey won a free order of chips and guac at any Chipotle in the U.S. or Canada.”

### POS IS KEY

In-store materials and support is a fundamental element for increased avocado sales. “Display and POS have been key in educating consumers and driving large incremental increases year over year for the past four years,” says Ahold’s Lessard. “To maximize the sales impact, align retail promotions with the marketing promotions and take advantage of the various display units available.”

AFM continues to work on innovative ways to create in-store merchandising and promote

avocados outside of the produce section.

“We believe education at POS plays an important role in consumer purchase and consumption,” says Bazan. “By educating consumers on how to pick, store, ripen and cut avocados, our educational POS signage helps overcome barriers to purchase.”

The assortment of displays includes solutions for bulk and bagged product. “For bulk, AFM offerings include eco-rack displays and farmers market bins made of 100 percent recyclable material and easy-to-move wire racks with space for cross-merchandising of complementary items,” says Bazan. “For bagged avocados, AFM has an offering of displays for the deli area or counters and full-stand vehicles.”

However, creative promotions can only be as successful as product availability allows and marketers emphasize the need for close cooperation with suppliers.

“Every day, our company coordinates our sales and marketing support initiatives with our retail and foodservice customers,” says Giumarra Companies’ Caloroso. “We have constant communication with AFM and other avocado commodity boards regarding the timing of promotions and what we can do as a company to help support these joint marketing efforts.”

## INTO THE FUTURE

AFM looks to raise the bar in 2017, moving into a new meal category and emphasizing health and nutrition even more. Its new retail program, set to roll out in the spring, focuses on breakfast. “Total breakfast occasions, in- and away-from-home, are forecast to grow by 5 percent through 2019,” explains AFM’s Bazan.

On the foodservice front, AFM kicked off a major college campus tour this past October. “We promoted nutritious eating habits and breakfast with a food truck and exclusive Avocado Toast recipes,” says Garcia. “We also facilitated a competition among college students to create their own Avocado Toast recipe for the chance to win cash prizes.”

Caloroso expects continued increased sales for both retail and foodservice customers as promotional efforts continue, but warns of a potential pitfall.

“The bigger underlying phenomenon is how consumer demand is rising higher than the availability of supply,” he explains. “That’s great news for the future of avocados but it does offer short-term supply challenges during the year.”

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# Argentina:

## A Vital Source Of Counter-Seasonal Produce

The country fills important niches in year-round fruit and vegetable supply.

BY BOB JOHNSON

**W**hen consumers shop for blueberries in a U.S. supermarket during a brief two-month period in the heart of every fall, chances are very good they are eyeing counter-seasonal product grown and shipped from Argentina.

“Argentina has become the largest supplier of blueberries in its window,” says Fernando Skiarski, chief executive of Berries del Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina. “So availability in the October–November window plays a big role, but the markets also recognize the good flavor of our berries over those coming from Peru, South Africa and other countries that

compete for that same window.”

There are also defined times of the year when pears, garlic and other produce items reach U.S. supermarkets from Argentine shippers that have come to play a vital role in filling gaps when domestic product is not available.

### ARGENTINA'S TIME

These counter-seasonal shipments account for enough to earn Argentina a spot near the bottom of the Top 10 fresh fruit and vegetable shippers to the United States, based on findings from the government's recent U.S./Argentina Trade Facts section of the Office of United States Trade Representative (USTR's Office of Administration is responsible for all of the administrative and management services for the proper functioning of the Agency).

“U.S. imports of agricultural products from Argentina totaled \$1.5 billion in 2015, our 25th largest supplier of agricultural imports,” according to the USTR. “Leading categories

include: wine and beer, \$348 million; fruit and vegetable juices, \$165 million; other fresh fruit, \$147 million; essential oils, \$117 million; and other vegetable oils, \$112 million.”

Lemons could soon be added to the list of Argentinian imports under a proposed USDA rule ending a 15-year ban imposed, because citrus growers in California and Arizona are concerned the fruit could bring with it crop diseases and pests, including Mediterranean Fruit Fly.

The comment period on the proposed rule, which would allow lemons from northwest Argentina produced and inspected under specified protocols, ended on August 10.

For nearly half the year, lemons are already among the most plentiful and heavily promoted produce items from Argentina.

“The harvest and export of lemons is from March to August/September,” says Martina Delacroix, communications specialist for All Lemon (the seal of quality for the country's





Organization of the country's major lemon grower-shippers into a single body responsible for quality control and promotion figures to help the exports reach higher levels.

lemon exports), the certified brand created by 16 producers of Argentine lemon exports.

"Argentina, especially the province of Tucumán in the north of the country, is the largest producer of lemons in the Southern Hemisphere. Tucumán produces 1.4 million tons of lemons each season."

Organization of the country's major lemon grower-shippers into a single body responsible for quality control and promotion figures to help the exports reach higher levels.

"The average of production is almost the same every year, although there were seasons that had less amounts," says Delacroix. "Since the creation of All Lemon in 2010, Argentine lemons are better known as a quality product."

Four months begin a window when importers look to this South American country to fill the need for fresh garlic.

"The Argentine garlic season usually starts in December (depending on the weather) and ends in March," says Tony Biondo, category manager for A.J. Trucco, Inc., New York. "Our first shipment usually arrives into the U.S. at the end of December or beginning of January. Garlic can be stored for months at the right temperature."

Argentina, with more than 40,000 metric tons from 2006 through 2013, trailed only China and Mexico in garlic shipments to the U.S., according to USDA statistics.

"Argentine garlic has been an import of

ours for many years," says Biondo. "It's very good quality garlic and is needed during the winter months, because there is no fresh crop of domestic garlic during this time."

The end of the year is also the season for the relatively brief blueberry harvest in Argentina.

"Normally, the season for blueberries from Argentina is from the beginning of October to the end of November," says Skiarski from Berries del Plata. "Some years, there's some limited availability during September."

Blueberry shipments figure to continue increasing, after a brief pause caused by the weather last year.

"Volume will increase compared to last season because of last year's decline in weather conditions," says Carla Ginobili, manager of the Argentinean Blueberry Committee, Buenos Aires, Argentina. "In addition, there is a slight increase on the hectares planted and those getting into full production."

The Argentinean Blueberry Committee includes growers who ship more than 80 percent of the exports.

"The general consumption increase worldwide is good news, highlighting countries such as Germany, and, of course, conventional big consumers such as the U.K. and United States, whose consumption growth levels are surprising at more than 35 percent a year," says Ginobili.

Berries del Plata, one of the grower-ship-

pers that helped start the blueberry committee, expects to see years of double-digit growth.

"I expect the volume to start growing at a 10 percent yearly rate for the next three or four years," says Skiarski. "The volume growth is slow. During the past four years the volume was steady at around 15,000 tons. This was due to the macro economical situation in the country that made Argentinian exports non-competitive. Since the government change, some of those variables changed and the growers gained some competitiveness."

**"Argentine garlic has been an import of ours for many years. It's very good quality garlic and is needed during the winter months, because there is no fresh crop of domestic garlic during this time."**

— Tony Biondo, A.J. Trucco, Inc.

Before tree fruit is available from domestic orchards, Argentine growers ship large supplies of fresh apples, stone fruit, and, most importantly, pears.

"Our spring, from March to May, is the season for pears from Argentina," says Michael D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo Bros., based in New York. "There have been different products at different points in time, however pears have been the most effective in making headway in the U.S. market."

The well traveled trail of pears from Argentine orchards to U.S. supermarkets has become a staple for both countries.

"The United States remains a reliable market for Argentine apples and pears," according to the USDA's Fresh Deciduous Fruit Semi-annual Apples, Pears, and Table Grapes, published in May of 2016. "Pear exports are revised up 330,000 metric tons, in line with calendar year 2015 official estimates."

To a certain extent, U.S. importers are sometimes competing with their counterparts around the globe for a piece of the Argentine pear harvest.

"Exporters ship to other markets within the world market. We are not the only country receiving product from Argentina," says D'Arrigo. "The United States is actually receiving



**“The wide thermal amplitude we have in our production areas is clearly favorable for the accurate balance between acidity and sugars, which enables the good taste of the fruit.”**

— Carla Ginobili, Argentinean Blueberry Committee

less pears from Argentina each season due to the domestic growers becoming larger and producing higher quality product.”

#### **BUILDING A BRAND**

While most Argentine fruits and vegetables are marketed largely as available during a certain time slot, lemon growers are among those working to develop a brand name based on their country of origin.

“There has been a big difference in quality control,” says Delacroix. “So, in the past few years, All Lemon became a reference of Argentina’s best lemon because every detail, from the natural quality of the lemon to the very professional companies behind them, is coordinated to serve the clients and bring them what they want and need.”

These growers believe they have fruit with a distinctive mouth appeal that comes from the local growing conditions.

“One of the key features that defines Argentinian lemons is the rich juice content,” says Delacroix. “This quality is based on the unique agro-ecological conditions in which lemons grow, that are typical of the foothills

in Tucumán and other small regions in the Argentine Northwest area: fertile and loamy soils, with subtropical springs, summers and autumns, hot and extremely humid.”

The blueberry growers also worked to build their brand in the six years since forming their committee.

“The good taste of Argentinian blues is a fact,” says Ginobili. “The wide thermal amplitude we have in our production areas is clearly favorable for the accurate balance between acidity and sugars, which enables the good taste of the fruit,” she says.

“What’s more, Argentina transports more than 90 percent of all blueberries grown at this time by plane which results in a fresher and more flavorful fruit,” adds Ginobili. “The time between harvest and delivery is drastically reduced and the fruit’s sweet, plump and juicy characteristics are maintained.”

There are also fruit growers from one productive region of the country working to develop a larger supply of organics.

The data from the *USDA Fresh Deciduous Fruit Semi-annual Apples, Pears, and Table Grapes* (presented by the Foreign Agricul-

tural Service) reports: “According to private sources, 10 to 12 percent of the total production of fresh apples and pears in Alto Valle of Río Negro and Neuquén Provinces is certified as organic, and 10 percent is exported as organic. This region concentrates 59 percent of the total organic fruit harvested area in the country.”

Despite this supply of organic fruit, most Argentinian pears are sold largely based on their availability as fresh fruit.

The same is true with garlic, as the Argentine shippers do not attempt to compete with the effective promotional campaigns of their California counterparts.

“Argentine garlic is not quite as desirable as domestically grown garlic,” says Biondo. “California garlic is most popular because of all the advertising done by the California garlic growers. But the quality and taste is comparable. There usually isn’t very much new crop domestically grown during the Argentine garlic season, so it’s by far the best available.”

While there are only a few emerging Argentine brands, there are important slots for produce from the Southern Hemisphere. **pb**

# 5 Citrus-Centric Merchandising Tips



Year-round supply offers bonanza for savvy retailers.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

Long gone are the days when the citrus set consisted of one SKU each of oranges, grapefruits, lemons and limes — maybe two if you counted bagged fruit. Today, consumers' passion for seedless easy-peelers and full-of-flavor varieties, plus greater availability, has grown shelf space devoted to this category in the winter months and beyond.

It's no wonder citrus contributed a whopping 6.2 percent to Produce Department dollar sales during the 52 weeks ending Aug. 27, 2016, according to data supplied by the Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group.

"We're able to offer our customers a significant citrus set year-round due to the improved quality, greater availability and better pricing of imports, and this is what they are looking for," says Scot Olson, director of produce and floral

for the southern division of Grocery Outlet, an Emeryville, CA-based discount retailer with more than 230 independently owned and operated stores in six states. "That said, citrus is still highly seasonal for us, especially since we're a limited-assortment format; but Mandarins are a big one for us and we carry them pretty much all year."

Below are 10 ways to maximize sales of today's citrus offerings.

## 1. SUPPLY ENOUGH MANDARINS

Mandarins are the king of the citrus category at Grocery Outlet, according to Olson, representing 3 percent on an annual basis and up to 10 percent of the chain's produce sales in the peak winter season.

These sweet juicy snack fruits are equally popular on the East Coast.

"Clementines and Murcotts are huge sellers, especially the 3-pound bags," says Vic Savanello, director of produce and floral for Allegiance Retail Services, in Iselin, NJ.

Mandarins, which include Clementines, tangerines and Satsumas, are the category leader, representing 39.7 percent of citrus sales during the 52 weeks ending Aug. 27, 2016. Add tangerines to this and the two sub-cate-

gories account for 41.3 percent of citrus dollar sales, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.

Clementines imported from Spain in the fall kicked off this craze nearly two decades ago. Since then, plantings of varieties of Mandarins, such as Clementines, W. Murcotts and Tangos, in California led to a sizeable domestic November through April supply under major brand names such as Wonderful Halos by Wonderful Citrus LLC, headquartered in Delano, CA, and Cuties, marketed by Sun Pacific, in Pasadena, CA.

"Wonderful Halos are the No. 1 Mandarin brand in the U.S. market and are in more than one-third of U.S. households, reaching an 84 percent awareness level," says Adam Cooper, vice president of marketing for the Wonderful Company. He also reports that the Mandarin sub-category accounted for almost 10 percent of overall produce sales growth this past winter.

Mandarins will continue to increase in consumption in this category for many years to come, according to Bob DiPiazza, president of Sun Pacific Marketing. "We will have a larger supply of Tango and Murcott variety Mandarins as a result of new Cuties marketing agreements with two large growers."

Florida citrus breeders have been developing, and the state's growers have been fast-tracking production of a number of tangerine varieties.

"We'd definitely like to regain marketshare on the East Coast and meet demand in the Northeast during the winter season with low or no seed easy-to-peel citrus," says Peter Chaires, executive director of the Maitland, FL-based New Varieties Development & Management Corporation (NVDMC), which helps provide Florida citrus growers timely and affordable access to new citrus varieties.

Newer varieties poised to accomplish this goal include the Early Pride Tangerine, an early season, low-seeded evolution of the Fallglo; the Sugar Belle, a December-maturing fruit with Clementine and Tangelo parents; and most recently, the UF 7-6-27 or "Bingo" (U.S. PPAF), a seedless Mandarin that matures between mid-October and early November. The Early Pride and Sugar Belle are already in commercial production, while the Bingo is now being planted in small quantities, and if successful from a horticultural and marketing standpoint, will move into larger plantings.

To fill the void when domestic Mandarins aren't available, Seald Sweet International offers its Mandarin brand from the Southern Hemisphere from August through October. The Vero Beach, FL-headquartered company also offers conventional Clementines from June through August as part of its Southern Hemisphere citrus program.

"Retailers tend to panic now if they don't have soft citrus available, as these are bottom line drivers," says Paul Marier, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Quebec, Canada-headquartered Fisher Capespan LLC, which imports Mandarins and easy peelers into North America from April through October from Chile, Peru and South Africa. "Our goal

during this time of year is to cover our retail customers with early and late varieties from multiple origins."

At the opposite end of the size spectrum are two newer Mandarin varieties — Gold Nugget and Sumo.

"Gold Nugget Mandarins are one of the later maturing Mandarin varieties, and it is rated by professional taste panels as one of the best-tasting citrus varieties in the world," says Julie DeWolf, director of retail marketing for Sunkist Growers, Inc., based in Valencia, CA. "They are a bit larger than traditional Mandarins with a bumpy rind, and they are intensely sweet. We offer them in bulk, as well as variable size Giro bags, from mid-February through May."

Sumo Citrus is a cross between a Mandarin and an orange, with a bumpy, loose, easy-peel skin and seedless, juicy flesh. Its "top knot" and size give the fruit its name. Some fruit grows up to one pound in size, giving it a distinctive look.

"Last year we had 925,000 5-pound boxes and sold out in six weeks," says Roger Griess, vice president of sales and marketing, for Suntreat Packing & Shipping Co., in Lindsay, CA. "This year, we expect to have 3 million boxes available from mid-January to the end of March and to reach our initial goal of 10 to 12.5 million boxes with 16-week availability by 2020. Our partner in Australia is three to four years behind us, but I think we'll see a dramatic increase from them in the next few years with availability of Sumo Citrus from late July through the first part of September."

## 2. DIVERSIFY ORANGE OFFERINGS

"Navels are a staple, but Clementines took some of the stardom away from them in recent years," says Allegiance Retail Services' Savanello.

Oranges now rank second to Mandarins with a 26.6 percent share of category dollars during the 52 weeks ending Aug. 27, 2016, according to Nielsen Perishables Group.

"Oranges represent an average 2 percent of produce sales annually, but reach up to 8 percent in peak season and with promotions. The biggest dip is in August, September and

October. Then, since we play the value card, it's a question of pricing on imported navels versus Valencias out of California. Local citrus, and supporting local growers, is an important factor for us, too," says Grocery Outlet's Olson.

In Florida, there are substantial plantings of oranges with resistance to citrus greening disease on acreage previously out of production or economically unviable due to greening, according to NVDMC's Chaires. Two of these are OLL 8 and OLL 4, Valencia-quality, late-season oranges with exceptional juice and solids that Chaires says show promise in both processed and fresh channels, especially for customers who home juice.

West Coast growers such as Sun Pacific and Orange Cove, CA-based Fruition Sales Inc., are growing high brix heirloom navels. Sun Pacific will market its Vintage Sweet Heirloom oranges for its second season this year. Fruition started breeding high brix navels more than a decade ago with availability now from mid-November to mid-May.

"Many retailers are asking for high brix navels because they want to offer customers something that tastes better," says Eric Christensen, owner of Fruition Sales.

While navels sales are flat, says Sun Pacific's DiPiazza, "Cara Cara orange consumption has been growing nicely for a number of years."

Cara Caras are often called Pink Navels. "They are available at the end of November or beginning of December and have a delicious, sweet taste and a beautiful pink internal fruit color," says David Krause, president of Wonderful Citrus.

The brilliant flesh color of Blood oranges also makes them attractive to shoppers.

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order to carry a Blood orange throughout the season starting in mid-December. These are the Moro, which is the standard bearer, the Tarocco and the Sanguinelli, which we pick until June,” says Fruition’s Christensen.

Breeding work is underway to produce Mandarins with the deep pink flesh of a Cara Cara or bright red of a Blood orange, according to Mikeal Roose, professor of genetics and chair of the department of Botany and Plant Sciences at the University of California, in Riverside, CA. “The goal is to produce fruit with enhanced health benefits from phytonutrients like lycopene.”

### 3. LIVEN UP LEMONS & LIMES

“Lemons and limes are the two most consistent sellers in the citrus category year-round. We offer four SKUs, loose and bagged, of each,” says Grocery Outlet’s Olson.

Lemons contributed 16.6 percent of citrus dollars and limes 10.0 percent during the 52 weeks ending Aug. 27, 2016, collectively, representing more than a quarter of category dollars, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.

“Lemons and limes showed nice increases from the prior year; and with the popularity of Mexican cuisine, the versatile usage seen



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRUITION SALES

on popular cooking shows and the growth of the Hispanic demographic, lemons and limes should continue to see sustained growth,” says Sun Pacific’s DiPiazza.

The main lemon deal for Vision Import Group, based in Hackensack, NJ, is imports from Mexico from July to December. “Lemons have been grown in Mexico as a commercial crop for Coca-Cola for years, but the crop

shifted more to the fresh market with the decreased production out of California and Arizona. When Mexico is out of season, we import from Spain and Chile for year-round supply to our customers,” says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales.

On the specialty side, “we partner with Sunkist each season in a Meyer lemon promotion,” says Olson.

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**“With lemons surging in popularity, there is a great deal of development in the category.”**

—Joan Wickham, Sunkist

According to Sunkist Grocers’ DeWolf, the company offers Meyer lemons for 12 months of the year. “Thought to be a cross between a Mandarin and a lemon, Meyer lemons are a bit less tart and acidic than conventional lemons and have a smooth rind that ranges in color from bright yellow to rich, yellow-orange. They have been a favorite in the foodservice community for years, and consumers are beginning to discover them more regularly at their local grocery and club stores. Sunkist offers this variety in bulk, a 1-pound net, a newly designed pouch bag, as well as a 4-pound club size,” says DeWolf.

With lemons surging in popularity, there is a great deal of development in the category, says Joan Wickham, Sunkist’s manager of advertising and public relations. “These range



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNKIST

from seedless lemons to pink variegated, which Sunkist branded Zebra lemons because of their unique green stripes. This lemon’s green- and white-striped exterior is striking on its own and further accentuated by its eye-catching pink flesh, making Zebra lemons a beautiful garnish.”

Fruition Sales introduced its New Zealand Lemonade lemon, trademarked the Unlemon,

to retail two years ago. The company expects greater volume in the coming year. The fruit will retail in a pouch bag and in a 10-pound box.

“It’s a sub-acid piece of fruit. You can just peel it and eat it,” says Christensen.

Persian limes are imported by Vision Import Group primarily from Mexico. The company also brings limes in from Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia.



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“Limes are a core item for many people. They are a favorite in Hispanic and Asian cuisines and foodies in the United States use them more now for marinating,” says Cohen.

Wonderful Citrus added a new lime brand to its portfolio earlier this year by acquiring I. Kunik, in McAllen, TX, part of the Martinez de la Torre, Mexico-based B&S Grupo Exportador, S.A. de C.V., a major supplier of Persian limes worldwide.

“Wonderful Citrus is now the No. 1 lime supplier to the U.S. market, contributing to our strategy of becoming the one-stop citrus shop for all consumers,” says Wonderful Company’s Cooper.

Key and Kieffer limes are marketed by Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, headquartered in St. Vernon, CA.

“Key limes are smaller, rounder and more fragrant than the Persian lime, and we carry them year-round out of the United States,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations. “The Kieffer lime, available only from September through December, has an intense lime flavor and aroma with a very sour juice that is delicious in savory dishes and Thai foods.”

#### 4. GIVE GRAPEFRUIT A CHANCE

“Grapefruit overall dwindles in sales every year, although it does have its customer base. Red grapefruit, for instance, is a good item and sells at a premium,” says Allegiance Retail Services’ Savanello.

“Texas-grown grapefruit, such as the red-fleshed Rio Star and Ruby Sweet varieties, is something we’re seeing good demand and production for,” says Patrick Kelly, category manager of sourcing for Robinson Fresh, headquartered in Eden Prairie, MN.

Grapefruit represented a slim 5.4 percent of citrus dollars during the 52 weeks ending Aug. 27, 2016, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.

One reason for the decline, say industry professionals, is the potentially harmful drug-nutrient interaction between cholesterol-lowering medications called statins and compounds in grapefruit named *furanocoumarins* (FCs). FCs stop an enzyme in the intestines called CYP3A from reducing the amount of the drug that enters the blood, thus increasing the risk of toxicity. Interestingly, citrus breeders in Israel have developed two promising varieties of low-FC grapefruit, the Aliza and Coocki — crosses between Pomelo and Mandarin — that would reduce or eliminate this harmful statin-grapefruit interaction.

“I think grapefruit will make a slow and steady



**“Seasonally marketing to specific groups, such as foodies who use citrus in creative and festive drink recipes, can be effective.”**

— Ralph Towell, Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc.

comeback,” predicts Kim Flores, marketing director for Seald Sweet International. “Grapefruit is so good for you nutritionally. It supports healthy weight loss and is an amazing superfood.”

#### 5. PROMOTE CREATIVELY

Citrus, especially Mandarins and navels, are promoted often in Grocery Outlet’s bi-monthly circulars, says Olson. “There’s in-store promotion, as well as promotion on social media. For example, some of our owner-operators will promote citrus when it just comes in, or in a big beautiful display on Facebook. Others reach out to customers via email blasts, such as showing a picture of an 8-pound bag of navels at a promotional price.”

Seasonal opportunities are ripe for citrus promotion.

“Clementines are a huge item for retailers in the Northeast. Most sell 5-pound boxes at cost or less. It’s a big volume item for the holidays. Beyond this, our stores will often feature 3-pound bags in ads from Thanksgiving to Easter,” says Allegiance’s Savanello.

Seasonally marketing to specific groups, such as foodies who use citrus in creative and festive drink recipes, can be effective, says Ralph Towell, category and process manager of Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc., in Oviedo, FL. “Also, Hispanics who use citrus in traditional ways during holidays and Asians who buy items like Pumelo for Chinese New Year, are great marketing targets. Also remember

to tie in with the locally grown theme during Florida and California seasons.”

The Florida Department of Citrus provides retail marketing support for fresh Florida Citrus in the United States, according to Shelley Rossetter, public relations manager for the Bartow, FL-headquartered organization. “These programs vary but can include advertisements in retail publications, in-store point-of-sale materials, giveaways and in-store sampling.”

Melissa’s/World Variety Produce offers its “California Dreamin” promotion, where all of its winter varietal citrus, except for Uniq fruit, which is sourced in Jamaica, comes from California. The company offers a variety availability calendar that includes 31 conventional and 11 organic citrus items to make retail promotional planning easier.

“This is a good way to tie into holidays and events like Cara Cara and Blood oranges for Valentine’s Day and Kieffer limes for New Year’s beverages and the Big Game,” says Schueller.

Beyond this, says Sunkist’s DeWolf, “Some of the best ways to build awareness and promote trial are with sampling programs and high-value introductory coupons, which can be executed either on pack (and redeemed instantly) or delivered electronically through retailer coupon sites or one of the many e-coupon vendors. Coupons can also be used to cross-promote varieties, such as including a coupon on a navel bag for a discount on Meyer lemons or Blood oranges.”

This season, Wonderful Citrus will spend a record \$30 million on an integrated consumer campaign for its Halos brand that includes television advertising, billboards, print, national FSI’s in-store point-of-sale, public relations and more. “We believe the best way to promote our citrus portfolio is to drive demand both in-store and out of store with national campaigns that take an integrated 360-degree approach to marketing,” says Cooper. **pb**

# Banking On Bananas



## Popular fruit helps retailers boost storewide sales.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

**M**ore than 90 percent of U.S. households buy bananas each week. Growers, wholesalers, marketers and retailers can all share the credit. The health benefits are well known by parents, and it doesn't hurt that kids love them too.

Retailers do their part by showcasing bananas with front-end displays that draw customers into the department. Secondary displays in other departments, and at checkout, take advantage of the fruit's tremendous grab-and-go appeal.

### CUSTOMERS PREFERENCE

Produce executives familiar with their store's demographics offer customers what they want, but some preferences are ubiquitous across the industry. "Retailers have more

success selling bunches, ripened and unbagged fruit," says Jack Howell, senior vice president of sales, Fyffes North America, based in Coral Gables, FL. Howell recommends single-layered displays with bananas falling in the four and five range on the ripening chart.

Dan Dvor, manager of A&N House of Produce in Philadelphia recognizes this preference too. "We see probably a 30 to 40 percent increase in sales when we can offer our customers a yellow banana," says Dvor. "When it's number four or five on the banana chart, that's our sweet spot."

"We have a strong lunch crowd," says Moe Issa, owner of three Brooklyn Fare markets located in Brooklyn and Manhattan. "That crowd usually picks the ripe ones. We put them by the deli and people take them in the morning and bring them to work or have the banana for lunch."

"Today's retailers and club stores have more success selling ripened bananas," says Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce headquartered in Coral Gables, FL. "We also found a growing demand for fresh, on-the-go products in foodservice

and convenience channels led to a significant increase in single banana sales."

Bil Goldfield, director, corporate communications, for Dole Fresh Fruit based in Westlake Village, CA, suggests some shoppers may prefer bananas of a greener color to cook with or let ripen at home. "Offering bananas in multiple stages of ripeness allow consumers to purchase vibrant yellow bananas for immediate use and at a greener stage for later use or for recipes that call for a starchier banana," he says. "Other exotic banana varieties displayed nearby also offer opportunities for a wider audience."

Mayra Velazquez de Leon, president and chief executive of Organics Unlimited, based in San Diego, advises selling the fruit unbagged. "Traditionally, bananas are sold in hands, not bags. Retailers are still most comfortable selling them this way in order to price the product by the pound," she says.

Velazquez de Leon also sees the value in selling them individually. "There's certainly a market for selling single bananas in a grab-and-go, convenience setting and a retailer can find success in the ability to charge per banana versus per pound."

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### DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The variety of bananas consumers prefer is often determined by the composition of the population in the store's trading area. Different ethnic groups consume bananas differently. Some cultures may prefer plantains to bananas. Velazquez de Leon points out the majority of U.S. households purchase bananas on a weekly basis, regardless of ethnicity, but retailers can still drill down to find more specific demographics. Her suggestions include: "Parents looking for nutritious foods for their children; Millennials who prefer fresh, quality produce; and health-conscious individuals who understand the nutritional value of bananas."

Christou recommends a focus on ethnic cuisines. He says retailers should do this by developing targeted promotional and merchandising items to educate consumers on the uses and nutritional information of the variety.

"This includes, among others, development of eye-catching POS for displays, in-store demos, and on-pack information about the alternative uses for the product." Recipe cards suggesting the different uses of the banana variety will appeal to adventurous home cooks of any ethnic group.

"In general, we found consumers developed more sophisticated tastes, and as trends in healthy eating and interest in new ethnic foods continue to grow, the need to market exotic and specialty bananas increases as well," says Christou.

**"There's an increased trend of buying more plantains than previously. U.S. consumers are becoming more adept at using this traditionally overlooked fruit."**

— Mayra Velazquez de Leon, Organics Unlimited

### SPECIALTY VARIETIES

Sales of specialty bananas, organics in particular, are growing. "In comparison to 2015, sales and volume of organic bananas increased by 30.4 percent and 32.2 percent respectively," says Marion Tabard, director of marketing, Fyffes North America. This makes bananas one of the strongest growing organic purchases. "Retailers are doing their part as well and developed initiatives to grow the organic category to meet their customer needs."

The ongoing movement in the U.S. toward healthier food choices fuels the organic trend. Changing demographics and an increase in the number of Hispanic and Latino households leads to higher sales of specialty bananas,

such as plantains. "There's an increased trend of buying more plantains than previously," says Velazquez de Leon. "U.S. consumers are becoming more adept at using this traditionally overlooked fruit."

Exotic banana varieties are also getting a boost thanks to the interest of "foodies" looking to experiment with new ingredients and flavors. "The increase in consumer interest for other exotic banana varieties is largely the result of the macro trend of consumers being exposed to new or seasonal ingredients either at farmers markets or in restaurants," explains Dole's Goldfield. This interest extends to the sampling of new tropical fruits as well.

"As these specialty fruits and varieties become more mainstream, we are starting to fold them into our consumer-facing and retailer programs in the form of web content, public relations outreach, consumer and retailer collateral," he says.

Dvor at A&N House of Produce has seen movement with specialty varieties as well. "We started selling babies [mini bananas] a year and a half ago, and we had good response to that, also the plantains, the yellow and the green. We tried one box of reds and that got a lot of oohs and aahs."

### EYE-GRABBING DISPLAYS

Justin Heffernan, vice president of sales, retail for Fyffes North America suggests the optimal space for bananas is "12 to 20 linear feet in a prominent location within the produce department depending on store volume."

He also notes an increase in the variety of other commodities competing for space with bananas. "The number of varieties of apples exploded over the years, and items like Clementines are available practically year-round. Furthermore, if bananas are part of a full tropical display, chances are they have lost space to growing commodities like mangos and pineapples. The space has to come from somewhere."

Howell at Fyffes North America recommends displaying only the amount of bananas that will turn in seven hours or less. "Retailers should have produce employees consistently replenishing the display so it always looks full and fresh." He also recommends bananas be displayed in single layers to avoid bruising.

Bruising is bad for bananas being sold as a handfruit, but that doesn't mean it's the end of the line. Cost-conscious retailers can get creative to eliminate shrink. "Bananas are one thing where there's not much waste," say Issa at Brooklyn Fare. "We make smoothies and use some of them in our pastry shop for muffins



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and cakes, so we do recycle them. We move them very fast.”

A&N House of Produce has a way of dealing with bananas that look past their prime. “We have a designated area, we call it a dollar shelf, where all of our cosmetically challenged fruits and vegetables go,” says Dvor.

“We never put something that is internally rotten, but sometimes when it’s overripe, or has a little nick and has no food safety issues, that’s the prime target for our dollar shelf. It’s not as appealing, but for people willing to do a little

extra work, it’s a real money saver.”

### CROSS-MERCHANDISING

While attractive, bountiful displays of unblemished bananas grab attention, displays also get a boost from creative cross-merchandising. “Utilizing strong displays and cross-merchandising techniques can be helpful in promoting bananas,” says Velazquez de Leon. “Displaying bananas with other tropical fruits, at the end of the cereal aisle or at the checkout areas for grab-and-go convenience,



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can boost banana sales.”

Tabard also endorses the cereal/milk/banana partnership to increase sales. “Consumers tend to pick bananas from a secondary display located near the cereal or dairy aisle,” she says. “Studies have shown secondary displays of bananas increase sales by approximately 15 percent.”

Bananas’ popularity, especially with kids, provides retailers a great opportunity to boost the sales of other commodities. “Different cross-merchandising strategies for parents include pairing bananas with healthy products such as strawberries, other tropical fruit, cereal, etc. Smoothies are also becoming a big part of healthy lifestyles and bananas make a delicious ingredient for energy packed, kid-friendly smoothies,” says Christou at Del Monte.

### STABLE PRICING

The pricing of bananas certainly helps the fruit retain its appeal. “The stable pricing is maintained, because bananas are a year-round product that is grown in many climates around the world,” says Velazquez de Leon. “There is no high and low season that creates price fluctuation. High-quality bananas are in constant supply and are always imported from a tropical area.”

While the retailer ultimately sets prices, bananas remain consistently inexpensive with a lot of bang for the buck. “When one considers the nutritional value, convenience, and investment required to bring this product to the retail shelf, it’s easy to see that, at the current price levels, consumers are getting incredible value for their money,” says Christou. **pb**

# Key Strategies For Merchandising Peruvian Asparagus



A few seemingly innocuous mistakes can derail otherwise sound tactics.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

In less than two decades, Peruvian asparagus has become an integral part of most retail programs. “The sales it generates, especially when it’s on ad, are crucial to a retailer,” says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner’s Markets in Reading, PA. “Anytime we promote, it gives us a big boost in our sales for the week. Peruvian asparagus ensures we don’t have gaps in asparagus offerings.”

The year-round availability of Peruvian asparagus is vital to maintaining continuity of supply in North America reasons Rick Durkin, director business development at Crystal Valley Foods in Miami. “We repeatedly see weather issues delay other production areas. Peru can always be counted on for volume even outside of its ‘natural’ peak production periods. There

is room for growth since fresh asparagus is no longer viewed as a springtime seasonal item but rather a year-round, every day vegetable for consumers.”

Customers at Babbs SuperValu in Spencer, IN, operating two stores, demand a consistent asparagus supply. “Our customers have come to expect the product, so ensuring a year-round supply is crucial to maintaining sales,” says Tina Fisher, assistant produce manager.

Like most items in produce, asparagus sells well when it’s promoted. “When you look at produce items as a whole, no other item in the department shows the incremental growth asparagus shows when promoted,” says Dan O’Connor, vice president of sales and marketing with Ayco Farms in Pompano Beach, FL.

Stiles says there is still plenty of room for sales growth in Peruvian asparagus. “Proper handling and merchandising of asparagus will lead to even greater sales for any retailer,” he says. “Display location, cross-merchandising

and holiday promotions are all very effective in increasing asparagus sales.”

Avoiding a few key merchandising pitfalls ensures a store makes the most of potential sales. “Asparagus continues to grow in popularity and demand,” says Priscilla Lleras-Bush, coordinator for the Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association (PAIA) in Dallas. “Per capita consumption of asparagus in the United States is steady with many years of increase since 2005. It ranks as the No. 2 purchased product in 2015, as well as in the top 20 best sellers for fresh vegetables. It’s important for stores to ensure they’re handling, displaying and merchandising Peruvian asparagus for maximum effectiveness.”

## PITFALL 1: UNDER-DISPLAYING

Size, location and number of asparagus displays directly relate to purchase opportunity. “A well positioned display ensures consumers see it and that sales increase,” says Lleras-Bush. “Vary the type of displays to create interest.



Retailers can use stand-alone displays, pyramid or table displays — display size should double when on ad.”

O’Conner says calling out focal displays in store could potentially grow sales for that week up to 60 percent. “Avoid offering a minimal allocation and avoid home category displays,” he explains. “You’ll often see asparagus on the refrigerated wall and this is not profitable. Retailers might have two to three cases on display, but if you’re going to push and drive sales, product needs to be called out in a large focal display and incorporated into secondary displays in meat and seafood. Stores are looking at a 21 percent growth when merchandising in those locations.”

Stiles agrees retailers lose out on sales if they’re not doing secondary displays. “It’s amazing to see how much we sell in the alternate display,” he reports. “It may not be as much as we sell out of produce, but auxiliary sales are extra sales. You can get people who maybe didn’t go through produce.”



Crystal Valley Foods advises to maintain shelf life by refrigerating product as close to 34 degrees Fahrenheit as possible in back rooms and displays.

### PITFALL 2: TAKING A MINIMALIST APPROACH

Stores displaying a token amount of product communicate the wrong message to shoppers. “Product should be ample and in a display no one is going to miss,” says Stiles. “You want to communicate freshness and abundance.”

Crystal Valley’s Durkin points out large displays attract shoppers’ attention. “Endcaps are attention grabbers,” he says.

During promotional periods, the staff at Babbs works hard to build bigger displays. “We don’t have a lot of space, so we get creative and move things to make room,” says Fisher. “With bigger displays customers are more apt to pick it up.”

Marketers emphasize building can’t miss

displays exudes confidence. “Often, retailers or produce managers lack the confidence for large displays of fresh asparagus,” says O’Connor. “It’s something I built with my store teams when I worked at retail. Items called out by the produce manager in mass displays shout ‘great deal, healthy eating’ to customers.”

However, O’Connor warns stores to beware of the fragility of fresh asparagus when building displays. “It should be placed delicately into displays and not in mass displays where tips are broken,” he cautions. “This is the main shortcoming where stores often fail. Displays should be built with size, but also easily accessible to the shopper, so they don’t break the product when going through it.”

### PITFALL 3: IMPROPER REFRIGERATION AND HYDRATION

Asparagus requires precise care and handling to maintain shelf life and provide consumers with the best product. “Asparagus needs to be refrigerated and kept as close to 34 degrees Fahrenheit as possible in back rooms and displays,” says Durkin. “Unrefrigerated asparagus loses shelf life immediately.”

Equally, or even more importantly, than refrigeration is hydration. “Asparagus continues to absorb water during its life span — more so after it’s cut,” explains Christopher Ramirez, president of Altar Produce in Calexico, CA. “This is why product is usually shipped with moist pads.”



Stiles recommends displaying in water and changing the water a few times a day. "Trim the bottom of the asparagus so it absorbs water," he adds. "Proper hydration is crucial."

Fisher notices Babbs' sales seem to increase when product is displayed in water. "I've actually had customers comment on the freshness of product displayed in water," she explains. "We just ordered some new display trays to allow us to better display it standing upright in water."

Yet refrigeration can be a Catch-22, according to Ayco's O'Connor. "While it's important, it's not always mandatory," he explains. "Keeping product hydrated is the No. 1 priority. By keeping it refrigerated, you're holding growth where it is. But stores shouldn't be reluctant to pull it from refrigeration — as long as they're putting it in water or ice trays. Ice trays are actually on the rise right now as they keep it both cool and hydrated."

Redner's turns product so fast they can get away at times by displaying without refrigeration.

"It's not sitting out that long," says Stiles. "If you build a good enough display, the product will move, but we're watching it, ensuring it's fresh and it's moving."

**“Take advantage of quick ads and be reactive. Holidays such as Valentine’s Day, Easter and Thanksgiving usually hit peak volume weeks. Christmas might be one to step back a little on heavy promotion due to lower availability.”**

— Christopher Ramirez, Altar Produce

**PITFALL 4: TAKING HOLIDAYS FOR GRANTED**

Asparagus is often associated with fall and winter holidays, but retailers should not assume automatic sales. "Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter are three major holidays representing three critical promotional periods," says Durkin of Crystal Valley. "It's very important to have nice displays and ads during these times."

Stores should also consider "minor" holidays for additional promotion chances. "Stores need to look at the opportunities during all holiday periods," suggests O'Connor. "Don't take sales as a given. Holidays are a great time to provide alternatives for shoppers. Look for the shopper going after the gourmet experience whether at Christmas or Valentine's Day. For example, Valentine's Day is a high-steak holiday, and what goes better with steak than Peruvian asparagus?"

The versatility of asparagus makes for success during many different holidays at Redner's. "There's hardly a holiday you can't sell it for," says Stiles. "This includes Valentine's Day and Fourth of July."

Staying competitive during peak time periods and coordinating promotion with availability is crucial according to Altar's Ramirez. "Take advantage of quick ads and be reactive," he advises. "Holidays such as Valentine's Day, Easter and Thanksgiving usually hit peak volume weeks. Christmas might be one to step back a little on heavy promotion due to lower availability."

**PITFALL 5: NOT PAIRING IT UP**

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PRODUCE BUSINESS / NOVEMBER 2016 / 89

means lost sales — both in asparagus and in additional rings. “Cross-merchandising generates a lot of sales,” says Stiles. “When you add cheese or herbs or other items it puts more in the cart.”

O'Connor considers cross-merchandising as a final step in outlining meal options for the customer. “This is the path to a new shopper,” he says. “The whole reason convenience sales are taking off is because customers want their entire menu option completed and they rely on the retailer to provide this. By placing asparagus next to steaks or fish, you’ve just given the customer the complete solution.”

Cross-merchandising helps increase sales, according to Jeff Friedman, president of CarbAmericas in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. “Taking the guesswork out of cooking drives consumers to put more items in their basket,” he explains.

“Retailers can build displays of items pairing well with asparagus nearby, such as other vegetables used for roasting, or proteins,” adds Friedman. “This tactic can be particularly effective during peak consumption periods as consumers seek out new ideas of what to pair with other meal components for family gatherings or holiday meals.”

Cross-merchandising also stimulates impulse sales. “Certain items trigger a purchase,” says Durkin of Crystal Valley. “For example, a nice combination is a New York strip or filet mignon with asparagus.”

## PITFALL 6: LACK OF VARIETY

As consumers become more sophisticated, they seek out more options in asparagus. “Marketers now offer a variety of sizes, colors, packaging and formats,” says PAIA’s Lleras-Bush. “Offering multiple SKU sizes and colors at retail increases consumer purchase penetration and frequency of purchase.”

Variety offers stores more options for color blocking as well as adding interest to the display. “It is important to offer colors,” maintains Redner’s Stiles. “Some of the colors may not be a huge mover, so you don’t need a ton of purple or white product, but it is nice to have it as a tie-in with the green.”

Durkin agrees tri-color displays are spectacular looking. “Purple is a very limited availability item, but white is available year-around,” he says. “For white to be sold effectively, it’s ideal to have in-store demos at the time a retailer does a white feature since it’s a bit different to prepare. For example, it has to be peeled (easily done with the flat edge of a knife) prior to cooking and normally requires a nice sauce.”

Offering white or purple asparagus helps



boost category sales, according to O'Connor. “Year over year we’ve seen double-digit growth for purple, and white is about 5 percent,” he says.

Variety in sizing is another growing trend. “The primary size is standard, most commonly seen across retailers nationwide,” explains O'Connor. “However we now see stores displaying standard in the home category but also displaying extra-large to large in additional displays. The consumer is used to seeing large or extra-large in restaurants — really the only feasible option for grilling. Extra-large and large demand is up 26 percent over last year.”

Stiles reports value-added options are increasing. “Customers like picking them up,” he says. “Even cutting product and packaging it in-store is effective. It’s one of the items we keep out and get good turns on a daily basis.”

## PITFALL 7: TOO LITTLE ON THE SIGN

Stores are encouraged to make signs illustrate more than price and country-of-origin. “On our signage, we always have nutritional information,” says Stiles. “Anytime you can add a cooking suggestion it helps move product. Highlight the benefits of the product. Tell the customer what can be done with it and include all ingredients right there.”

“Stores don’t take as much advantage of POS material as they should,” agrees O'Connor. “Simple 7 by 11 cards at the display can educate the shopper on the importance of asparagus in nutrition and diet.”

Friedman explains signage is a great way to increase sales, because it helps the consumer see “why” they should purchase. “During key promotional periods, highlighting via signage the additional colors or sizes can boost sales,” he says. “Cooking and prepping suggestions, nutritional aspects, and the versatility of the product are important messages to highlight via signage in order to help the consumer.”

In today’s health-conscious marketplace, including the nutritional aspects of asparagus is invaluable. “Highlighting nutritional benefits of fresh asparagus attracts a wide variety of

PHOTOS COURTESY OF REDNER’S MARKETS



customers,” says Lleras-Bush. “Short recipes and usage suggestions also increase sales.”

Durkin suggests stores focus on key messages central to today’s consumer. “Important elements for signage include the terms fresh, natural, and nutritional value,” he says.

## PITFALL 8: INADEQUATE PLANNING

Marketers and retailers concur, the importance of proper planning for the Peru deal. “Planning sets up the optimal time to get aggressive with advertising,” explains Stiles. “Know when the supply is going to be there for you, and know when it is going to be on the downside of availability. Keeping in touch with the supplier regarding weather conditions and availability is crucial.”

Close supplier communication with long lead times is essential for success. “Retailers should work with suppliers to plan promotional periods as far in advance as possible,” suggests Durkin.

Ramirez of Altar explains the benefit of advance planning. “It is essential to be able to coordinate ads in a timely fashion and secure shelf space.”

To achieve a stable, year-round program, Friedman advises the earlier these conversations start, the better to maximize sales and mitigate shortages.

“Planning to the retailer’s specific promotional and volume needs has allowed us to succeed with Peruvian asparagus as well as other seasonal sources,” he says. “As a partnership between grower/shipper and the retailer evolves, the better we can plan for what the supply needs will equate to in acreage, and the better prepared we all will be to support the consumer’s appetite.”

O'Connor recommends retailers partner to handle fluctuations in the deal. “Whether it’s Ayco or not, you need a strong partner for the Peruvian deal,” he says. “You don’t want to be playing the market. If you are partnered with a strong player, then there should be endless options throughout the Peruvian season.” **pb**

# Spotlight On Detroit

THE CITY'S PRODUCE SCENE EXPERIENCES A RESURGENCE.

By Lisa White

Those who still have doubts about Detroit's viability need only to look at its burgeoning produce industry to see that this is a city on the upswing. Proof of the "Motor City's" potential is the movement toward a new wholesale market that would include a modern facility modeled after the Philadelphia terminal project completed in 2011.

The Eastern Market's current home combines retail vendors with 30 wholesale produce suppliers. It's open Monday through Friday from midnight to 6 a.m., with produce available June through November.

"We've been doing research on building a new regional distribution facility, due to safety and modernization needs," says Daniel Carmody, president of Eastern Market Corp. "We just wrapped up a \$70,000 consultant study exploring building a new modern facility, and we are working with others in the industry to see who's interested in making major capital investments."

According to a recent report in *Crain's Detroit Business*, part of a \$550,000 operations grant from the Troy, MI-based Kresge Foundation will support this project.



Eastern Market's wholesale market shed offers an abundance of storage.

The eight produce companies that run the 300,000-square-foot, 91-year-old Detroit Produce Terminal also are facing the same issues, according to *Crain's*. The Detroit Produce Terminal would require \$15 million to meet the new federal requirements.

Details on the Eastern Market project are still in the works.

"We're still researching financing for a new [Eastern] market, and we know the market rates the industry is paying and are looking for resources to fill that gap," says Carmody. "It's too soon to talk about a timeline for the new facility."

In the meantime, those doing business in the city contend Detroit is ideally positioned for growth.

**DETROIT MARKET PROFILE**



From left: Bob Ventimiglia, Jim Russo, Jim Boggio, Charlie Palazzolo, Jeff Abrash and Dave O'Brien of Andrews Brothers, Inc.



From left: Tom Russo, Dominic Russo, John Vitale, Johnny Russo, Matt Vitale, Rocco Russo III, Dave Holland Jr., Steve Pizzo and Tom Lucido of Rocky Produce Inc.

“We consider the greater Midwest our market, as we border five states,” says Dominic Riggio, president of Riggio’s Distribution Co. “We are shipping into eight different states and are in a good position to get to a lot of markets from where we are, including Detroit. Nationally, the city has had a bad reputation in the past 10 to 15 years, but downtown is definitely making a comeback with new restaurants, retail, clubs and a Whole Foods Market.”

**THE WHOLESALE CLIMATE**

As it has in the rest of the country, the local produce movement continues to expand and flourish in Detroit.

“Overall, local produce is generating interest in the wholesale market more so than in the past few years,” says Carmody.

LaGrasso Brothers Inc. has taken local growing to a new level by repurposing shipping containers to grow specialty lettuce for

customers in greater Detroit and Michigan. Though the program is less than a year old, it has been well received.

“We decided to bring on the freight farm because chefs are looking for locally grown product 365 days a year, not just in summer,” says Joseph LaGrasso, manager at the company. “We’re able to capture this business with repurposed shipping containers.”

This is the first time LaGrasso Brothers,



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From left: Phil and Dominic Riggio of Riggio Distribution Company

a 102-year-old produce distributor, ventured into the growing side of the business.

“We’ve never grown anything, so it is a big deal for us,” says LaGrasso. “The process of getting it up and running has been very seamless.”

LaGrasso Brothers’ lettuce blend, which includes different colors and taste profiles, is designed for chefs to complement dishes.

Other Detroit-based produce companies also expanded offerings to better capitalize on local fruit and vegetables.

About two years ago, Riggio Distribution Company launched a new line called Midwest Grown.

“In past years, homegrown produce was sold by the pound or in bulk; but more recently, suppliers stepped it up, enhanced food safety programs, and we’re now able to package produce under this label,” says Dominic Riggio. “We also continue to work with local growers to package homegrown produce.”

Midwest Grown is geared for retail sales, although Riggio’s local produce also is sold to foodservice customers under a different brand name.

“We’re seeing a lot of homegrown or local, including corn, tomatoes, beans, etc., depending on the season; it’s pretty prevalent,” says Riggio. “For retail, we’re able to capture more business, as the bigger growers become more compliant with food safety regulations and documentation to step up their game.”

This allowed Riggio Distribution to package more of these items for retail.

Rocky Produce Inc. has taken advantage of Michigan’s homegrown season by making strong connections and relationships with area

farms.

“We are working with more local farms, and there are many relationships we had for many years, though new relationships come up,” says Dominic Russo, sales manager for Rocky Produce. “We will seek out farmers to work with and they, in turn, seek us out. If their ideals and values match with ours, it’s a win-win situation.”

In addition to local product, organic produce also continues to be a strong market in both the Detroit region and the Midwest,

as in the rest of the country.

In response to this, Riggio launched two new organic salad dressing flavors (Italian and Balsamic) this past summer.

“A small portion of our business has included a healthy line of shelf-stable dressings over the past six years, which we promote on our website,” says Riggio.

Along with the trend in local and organic products, major suppliers are creating new packaging and different ways to offer fresh-cut products, which expanded opportunities for

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Detroit produce companies.

“On the fresh-cut side, we’re seeing a lot of kits with non-produce mixed with produce, such as proteins and dressings,” says Riggio.

Another more recent development — the federal regulations that have allotted schools more money to spend on fresh produce — has had a positive impact on Detroit wholesalers similar to the rest of the country.

“We definitely have not reached our ceiling as a company,” says Riggio. “There is still a lot of opportunity, but we’re being careful with

our growth, going after the good business, watching our money and receivables, as well as building a good foundation from the work of past generations.”

Demographic shifts have impacted Detroit’s produce industry, mainly from a packaging perspective.

Russo notes various packaging and pack styles were created and are more attractive to marketing directly to the sought-after Millennial demographic.

“Although Baby Boomers are purchasing



From left: Chris, Drew and Jake Billmeyer of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons Inc.

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the most product, followed by Generation Xers, the Millennial population is growing and moving forward,” says Russo. “Whatever the media is pushing tends to take hold; such as leafy vegetables (kale and Brussels sprouts), in addition to superfoods high in vitamins and antioxidants.”

The Detroit renaissance has included big investors opening art galleries to attract more people to the city, which has been a boom for the produce industry.

“One thing leads to another, and then other businesses can be supported by the additional traffic in the city,” says Nate Stone, chief operating officer at Ben B. Schwartz & Sons Inc. “But what has contributed to the steady growth of our company for more than a decade doesn’t come from inside the city, although that may be part of it.”

The company is now delivering produce to five states, running more trucks and operating more equipment than ever before. Ben B. also increased its floor space.

Although the company has a great shipper base, it seeks to connect with more logistical companies that can provide reliable service and help the company keep product quality consistent.

In terms of strong sellers, Detroit’s R.A.M. Produce Distributor’s biggest commodity is tomatoes, which have seen retail and food-service sales remain steady in recently years.

“Lots of specialty tomatoes are selling, like the Sunset label and Wild Wonders,” says Jim Bommarito, R.A.M.’s sales manager, who attributes this to increased demand. “These are



From left: Michael Badalament and Nick Pizzo of R.A.M.

not cheap products.”

The company also continues to sell a large amount of Zima tomatoes, an orange grape tomato that debuted in 2011.

The Detroit tomato business continues to include more people going for different items, with traditional types becoming stagnant.

“There are only a few big Michigan growers, but many smaller companies,” says Bommarito.

R.A.M. stays with the larger more established companies when doing business, and also imports tomatoes from Mexico. Florida, California and Canadian greenhouses are other reliable sources during the winter months, in addition to Michigan’s hydroponic-grown tomatoes.

“Hydroponic produce is becoming popular in the Midwest, and the supply is typically pretty good,” says Bommarito. “These locally grown items are more costly and labor is a real issue, plus there are not many local farmers using this growing method, so there can be a product shortage on occasion.”

R.A.M., which has a big Arab clientele, has seen more movement with gray squash as well as Romaine lettuce.

The area farmers markets have had an impact on wholesale business, but only during the summer months.

“Even chains and independents slow down during summer, when farmers markets are in operation,” says Bommarito. “But we’re selling more local product than ever before.”

Andrews Brothers Inc. cultivated a strong and diverse customer base of both independent retailers and foodservice purveyors.

“We continue to be optimistic about Detroit’s produce business,” says Jeffrey Abrash, president. “The fact that we have a diverse customer network is a reason for optimism.”

Produce availability from all corners of the globe is something companies like LoPiccolo Bros. Produce can continue to capitalize on, as well as cut fruit programs in schools.

The company was one of several Michigan distributors that was part of a state pilot program to expand cut fruit programs in

schools.

“It has been a win-win for the community and the kids,” says Jack LoPiccolo, president.

One of the biggest challenges for LoPiccolo Bros. is retaining drivers to handle its foodservice business.

“We could improve our business by 20 to 25 percent if we could find drivers,” says LoPiccolo. “Still, business is pretty steady, with local hipsters coming to downtown Detroit and seeking out exotic produce like Chanterelle mushrooms.”

pb

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# Andiamo

THE 20-YEAR-OLD DETROIT CHAIN OF NINE ITALIAN-THEMED RESTAURANTS AIMS TO IMPRESS.

By Lisa White

**D**espite Detroit being a major city, there have been challenges in regards to its restaurant industry. Much of the restrictions center around delays in openings, which are reportedly often due to long lead times for planning approvals, permitting, licensing and inspections from the city and county government. Unfortunately, these have been known to make or break a business, especially in foodservice where timing is everything.

Last August, the Detroit Restaurant Association was established by local restaurant owners and advocates to help deal with these challenges.

According to *Eater Detroit* (the self-proclaimed go-to resource for food, drink and restaurant obsessives), unlike the Michigan Restaurant Association, the Detroit Restaurant Association will focus on issues that the organizers believe are unique to the city.

One of the Association's top priorities, according to *Eater Detroit*, will be putting pressure on city government to improve the licensing and permitting processes, as well as disseminating information to restaurateurs and would-be restaurateurs about how to navigate the city's many departments. The association also plans to develop resources for restaurants, such as conducting ServeSafe (the food safety training program leads the way in providing current and comprehensive educational materials to the restaurant industry) and TIPS (Training for Intervention ProcedureS is the global leader in education and training for the responsible service, sale and consumption of alcohol) classes, as well as provide outreach and networking through membership events.

There continues to be a bevy of restaurants in the city, from vegetarian to ethnic to high-end to fast casual.

Andiamo, a 20-year-old Detroit chain of nine Italian-themed restaurants, relies on the Detroit Produce Terminal for the majority of



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDIAMO

its product.

According to Chef Brad Schmidt, the chain, which also has a site in Las Vegas, is known for its Old World recipes passed down from its founder and chief executive, Joseph Vicari.

"Half of each menu is a classic core of offerings, while the other half are specials from each location's chef," says Schmidt.

The dishes feature large handmade pasta and tomato sauce prepared from scratch in-house from imported tomatoes. All soups, stocks and sauces are made on site.

"Produce is used in almost all of our dishes, whether vegetables or starches," says Schmidt. "We'll often take squash or zucchini and create spaghetti, which has become popular."

Locally sourced produce is used as often as possible at this farm-to-table chain.

"The farm-to-table movement is huge, and I don't know how we got away from it in the past," says Schmidt. "It's the right way to do things, which is why we source the majority of our produce locally."

Michigan produce is featured on the menu as much as possible, including mushrooms, heirloom tomatoes, squash and pumpkin in the fall, and root vegetables in the winter.

Schmidt contends there are many benefits in sourcing locally, including lower prices and no transportation costs.

"It also helps support the local economy, and we try to give back to the farmers in the area," he says. "Also, local produce tastes better, because it's fresher."

Consequently, the chain tries to steer clear of California and imported produce, even in the winter. The menu adapts to include potatoes,

beets, kohlrabi and other items that can be sourced within the state or surrounding region.

At press time, Andiamo's Michigan locations were making the most of the state's heirloom tomatoes, creating tomato and bruschetta relishes on Caprese salad.

"With great produce items like heirloom tomatoes or candied beets, the vegetables speak for themselves, so we don't have to go way outside of the box when creating dishes," says Schmidt.

The repertoire for restaurants like Andiamo has expanded, with consumers becoming more familiar with obscure produce items.

"For example, 10 years ago, no one knew what kale was and now it's on every menu," says Schmidt. "Information travels faster, and people are seeking more produce and greens in their diets due to our health-conscious society."

Andiamo also was one of the first restaurants to compost its vegetable scraps, which are put in biodegradable bags and sent to a composting center. The compost is then sent back and used to fertilize General Motors' garden, which harvests eggplant, beans and other produce for the restaurant. **pb**

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# Produce Station

THIS RETAILER FOLLOWS A MANTRA FOR TASTY FRUITS AND VEGGIES.

By Lisa White

**W**ith Detroit's ongoing revitalization, its reputation as a food dessert has begun to wane.

About a year ago, in an effort to get the community into local supermarkets, the Detroit Economic Growth Corp. (DEGC) organized the Grocery Crawl in southwest Detroit.

According to *Crain's Detroit Business*, the event, said to be the first of its kind in the city, was part of the \$5.3 million Green Grocer Project (GGP) funded in part by The Kresge Foundation and managed by the DEGC, which aims to improve the city's grocery economy.

The Green Grocer Project also provided matching grants to 16 Detroit grocers to improve the appearance of stores. GGP contributed \$500,000 toward the \$5.3 million, which was spent on the facade improvements at the stores, according to *Crain's Detroit Business*. Participating stores applied for 50/50 matching grants up to \$50,000 and almost all of the stores exceeded the dollar for dollar limit. Improvements included seasonal landscaping, repaved parking lots and signs.

The area's biggest supermarket chains are Meijer, Kroger and Spartan, but there are a number of independent retailers that are strong players.

One produce-centric independent retailer making waves in the Michigan supermarket scene is Produce Station, located 45 minutes outside the city in Ann Arbor. The business opened in 1986.

Despite the name, this store is comprised of numerous departments, including an extensive produce section, which expands outside in the warmer months; a prepared foods department that also offers large-scale catering; groceries; and beer and wine.

Produce, grocery, beer, wine, flowers and plants represent 50 percent of the business, with prepared foods and catering comprising the other half.

"With our produce section, the goal is to supply the best-tasting products we can,"



Produce Station's 2,000 square feet of floor allows for showing off the quality of its produce.

says Dennis Pontius, Produce Station's general manager. "Depending on the time of the year, these items may be from the Detroit Produce Terminal, but also can be sourced from anywhere in the state or Midwest."

For example, at press time, the store just brought in squash from Indiana, and was offering apples, peaches, nectarines, blueberries and cherries from Michigan farms.

A remote and seasonal plant and flower business expands into Produce Station's parking lot from April through September.

Prepared foods is a significant portion of the retailer's business. It has a dedicated kitchen where meals, including salads, sandwiches and other dishes, are prepared from scratch.

Produce deemed to be not suitable for retail sale is designated for the foodservice program. And although the store offers specials on its menu, these items are typically not driven by produce or produce quality.

"Some dishes are produce-centric, as this is an integrated part of the business," says Pontius. "Fruit and vegetable orders for retail and foodservice are made jointly."

Much of the specials center around seasonal produce, such as apple buckle and blueberry buckle in fall. In this regard, it's the local produce that helps drive the menu.

Although Produce Station is an intimate store of about 2,000 square feet of sales space

— not including the 5,000-square-foot kitchen — Pontius describes the produce section as sprawling.

"In the warmer months, we have much of our offerings outside set up around our building, similar to a farmers market setup," he says, adding that the square footage is as much as 10,000.

Most recently, this included a 24-foot truck filled with 25 bins of pumpkins and squash, as well as 15 types of heirloom apple varieties.

Organics is not a big market for Produce Station, which is known for the freshness and quality of its product.

"Local is a really big factor, except in winter, when it's virtually non-existent," says Pontius. "This is when root vegetables take over."

The store is staffed with eight personnel that are dedicated to the produce section and eight others that are engaged in these products some of the time.

pb

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# Holiday Baking Can Sell More Dried Fruit And Nuts



Between Thanksgiving and New Year's, shift the retail marketing focus to maximize profits.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

As consumers grow more health-conscious, they're inclined to reach for nuts and dried fruit instead of candy and chips for snacking.

"Up to 70 percent of all dried fruits now are used for snacking," says Joe Tamble, vice president of retail sales execution for Kingsburg, CA-based Sun-Maid, a cooperative owned by family farmers. This shift creates a real opportunity for produce departments that merchandise these products.

With Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and other celebrations coming up fast, produce executives should not forget about a prominent group looking for dried fruit and nuts this time of year — holiday bakers.

"As we prepare for the holidays, many of us are thinking about friends and family get-togethers, gifts for teachers, and delicious treats to have on the counter for our family to enjoy," says Jamie McGarity, brand marketing assistant for Severn, NC-based Hampton Farms. That means shoppers are more likely to purchase

nuts and dried fruit for family recipes or dishes they find online. Here are some new, tried-and-true tips for ensuring your department can meet the needs of cooks and candy makers.

## MOST POPULAR

Joseph Bunting, director of produce for Lubbock, TX-based United Supermarkets, a chain with stores throughout Texas and New Mexico, says almonds, walnuts and Texas pecans are particularly popular around the holidays.

Debbie Miner, produce manager for Highland Park Market, a Manchester, CT-based chain with five stores, says holiday shoppers come to the produce department looking for packages of mixed nuts, almonds, walnuts and

hazelnuts. She only adds these items to her inventory in the late fall and early winter.

Peanut sales are generally on the rise, according to Lauren Highfill Williams, marketing and communications manager for the National Peanut Board, a research, marketing and promotion organization based in Atlanta.

"United States Department of Agriculture figures show per capita peanut consumption topped 7 pounds in 2014," she says. "Consumers are recognizing the unique flavor and health benefits that peanuts and other nuts provide. Peanuts are healthy, provide seven grams of protein per serving and have the heart check from the American Heart Association."

"Before, one of the main peanut products you would think of during the holidays was peanut brittle," says McGarity. "Now you see many products and recipes that give you ideas of what you can make using peanuts and peanut butter. Although many holiday baking recipes we see are similar to classic favorites, consumers are always looking for new things to try with the resources they have at their fingertips ... we are confident many people are using peanuts in holiday baking."

In the dried fruit category, Bunting says dried cranberries do very well around the holidays, as do blueberries. Miner says cranberries and apricots are her best holiday sellers.

"Dates are very popular during the holidays for both baking and appetizers," says

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## dried fruits & nuts ► holiday baking

Stephanie Harralson, senior product manager for Sunsweet Growers Inc., a grower-owned cooperative that's based in Yuba City, CA. "Prunes have been showing strong growth." Sales are currently up 9 percent over last year according to data from data analytics firm IRI.

Raisins, golden raisins, currants and figs are also good holiday items.

Consumers looking to try something different in their holiday baked goods can check out Sunsweet's Pacific Tropicals line. It includes Philippine mango and green mango, Philippine pineapple as well as Thai coconut chips.

### EASY TO FIND

"We always merchandise nuts and dried fruit together," says Bunting. "We try to offer a big impact display with nuts and dried fruit tied into it. That creates a destination center. We do that as a convenience for our guests. They can find everything they're looking for right there. They don't have to search for it in the store."

Miner places dried fruit and nuts in bins at the front of the produce department; on a large wooden rack she keeps for seasonal items, or on displays near the store entrance. "If it's a seasonal thing you want to catch people's attention, so put them front and center," she says. "Location is the number one thing."

Harralson says dried fruit and nuts do best when placed at the entrance to produce, or in transition areas between produce and grocery. "Avoid placing dried fruit on bottom shelves where it's difficult to find or see," she says.

"Dried fruit is very impulse-driven," says Tamble with Sun-Maid. Because of that, he encourages retailers to use pallet or shipper displays. The latter, he says, "has a very small footprint and is designed to move products through quickly." Sunsweet also offers in-store displays for pitted and chopped dates.

"For walnuts, secondary displays beyond the baking aisle are a great reminder to use walnuts for more than holiday baking needs," says Jennifer Olmstead, marketing director, domestic public relations for the California Walnut Board and Commission, which is located in Folsom, CA. If displays remain into the New Year, when people are thinking about healthy snacking, it can promote sales even after presents have been unwrapped and champagne bottles uncorked.

### MARKETING HELPS

There's no better way to promote dried fruit than to help consumers save money when they buy it. Sun-Maid is currently promoting



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA WALNUT BOARD

**"We try to offer a big impact display with nuts and dried fruit tied into it. That creates a destination center. We do that as a convenience for our guests."**

— Joseph Bunting, United Supermarkets

a holiday campaign called "Bake It for Santa." One of the centerpieces of the campaign is an FSI coupon that's good for 55 cents off one 20-ounce canister or 12-ounce box of raisins, 15-ounce box of golden raisins or any size container of Zante currants. The company is also running ads, sharing social media posts about cooking with dried fruit, and doing product placement on food-related television shows and websites.

Recipes are key to promoting nuts and dried fruit, says United Supermarkets' Bunting. "People are always looking for something different." If stores can give them another usage idea, they're more likely to increase purchases.

Those cooking suggestions can be for more traditional recipes or new ideas. "Freshly ground peanut butter can be used in holiday peanut butter cookies, cakes and quick breads and more," says Highfill Williams with the National Peanut Board.

"Chopped peanuts provide a crunchy and salty balance as a topping for a classic peanut butter pie. We also saw an exciting new take on the traditional pecan pie that uses peanuts instead, and introduces a modern salted caramel flavor profile."

"Since most consumers are looking for quick recipes with minimal ingredients, posting a quick how-to video using products that are featured in the store can create interest prior to a customer's visit," says McGarity with Hampton Farms.

"Better yet, sampling the finished product in-store with recipe handouts and coupons is sure to be a hit. Also, featuring a display for candy apples ... that contains all the items needed to make them at home — such as apples, caramel, granulated peanuts and wax paper — is a great way to boost sales in multiple categories."

Use existing in-store resources to promote recipes and cooking ideas to the maximum level. "The California Walnut Board regularly works with registered dietitians and provides support materials — primarily in the form of recipes and nutrition information — that they can share with consumers," says Olmstead.

Dietitians may be particularly helpful when it comes to suggesting post-holiday cooking ideas. "Prunes are also part of the healthy New Year tradition, which should not be overlooked by retailers," says Sunsweet's Harralson. "Consumers increase their purchases of healthy snacks right after the New Year as they start thinking of new goals."

Sunsweet plans to promote a social media program called "I Eat Right Because" between January and March. The campaign will share healthy lifestyle tips from dietitians and fitness advisors via Facebook. The company also offers educational brochures on the health benefits of prunes for retailers. New in-store shippers will include tearpads with recipes and advice for healthy living.

Since nuts and dried fruit are already in the produce department at this time of year, think about how you can cross-merchandise with non-baking items. "During the holidays, we suggest merchandising walnuts near the bagged salads as well as some of the whole foods they pair well with, such as apples, pears, winter squash, yams and green beans," says Olmstead.

Remind consumers that walnuts and other nuts are delicious toasted, candied or spiced.

Flavored nuts are a traditional present this time of year, but dried fruit can also be incorporated into gift products. "More consumers are including it in homemade gifts such as their own healthy granola bars, granola and trail mix," says Harralson. "Dried fruit mixed in with other ingredients is popular to give in a Mason jar with instructions for breads or cookies."

Bunting shares another tip for increasing holiday nut and dried fruit sales. "Make sure you're looking at sales from last year and keeping the popular items in stock day in and day out," he stresses. "These are high-profit sales with low labor costs. You don't want to miss any of these sales."

pb



# Post-PMA Observations: Interpretation Versus Reality

BY DON HARRIS

**T**he weekly meeting following the PMA convention usually results in a question from upper management about what was seen at the show — especially any new items or trends. This is a normal occurrence, and reasoning centers on management's concerns about keeping up with competitors.

While these concerns are valid, they sometimes miss the point or the true meaning of observations obtained during the PMA convention. Upper management is often nervous about this information, because once again, "they just don't get it!"

I've been attending PMA conventions since the mid-80s, and I found this observation to be correct: the conversations and the observations on the show floor and around the convention provide the most insight on what's happening in the industry.

There is often an underlying vibe of activity and direction that goes unnoticed to many attendees who are only concerned with their private agendas and purpose for attending.

The PMA convention is unique in the fact that it goes far beyond displaying new products and capabilities of the vendors. It demonstrates, sometimes vaguely, the true direction of the industry. While networking with your peers and having access to customers are key attractions and benefits of the convention, experienced produce attendees find there is much more than this available to learn by observation at the convention. By observing and absorbing the environment within the hall many intuitive insights are available.

The truly enlightened retailer not only observes new products and services, but also "feels" the underlying pulse of the industry. In the case of the most recent convention, the casual observer would note it was an extremely busy show floor and there was a considerable amount of frenetic activity between buyers and sellers.

However, the more experienced observer would take in two elements of note: first, the tremendous amount of international presence as well as state pavilions promoting produce; second, the lack of large volume displays of fresh produce.

The first observation is the obvious one because the size of PMA's Fresh Summit has grown to such a scope to be nearly overwhelming in its size and complexity — thus reflecting the state of the industry.

The appearance and expansion of the international and state pavilions bears witness to the efforts of these entities to provide information to the industry about the services and products they

provide. This reflects the growing interest of the consumer in local products and the interest in new forms of cooking using more exotic and imported ingredients. This is indeed an important aspect all retailers should be aware of and take this information to formulate strategies in their organizations to capitalize on these areas.

In terms of the lack of displays of fresh produce, the implications are far more ominous. Over the past few conventions, the amount of fresh produce on display has been declining to the point that at this year show, there was far less sensory input from fresh produce. That is to say, you could not smell the enticing aroma of fresh produce in the hall.

This reflects the industry's movement toward pre-processed, packaged delivery of produce to the consumer in order to make the consumption of produce more convenient. This is where the direction of the industry is concerning as it seems to be taking the direction toward a more "consumer products" type of approach. In this manner, the industry seems to be losing its focus on what enabled it to reach the success that it currently enjoys.

In contrast to the relative lack of fresh produce at PMA, one characteristic shared by the most successful retailers is the continued promotion of large store displays highlighting fresh produce in bulk form. The message delivered to the consumer of an abundant supply of high quality, healthful fruits and vegetables is still the most powerful promotional strategy available to the industry. The successful retailers capitalize on this display by feeding the consumers' desires for freshness,

quality and nutrition benefits. This simply cannot be conveyed by processed, packaged produce.

While I might be accused of being old-fashioned, it seems the industry is edging closer to abandoning the very concept that allowed it to become foremost in the consumer mind. The industry can continue to grow, prosper and utilize new trends in local and international produce, but it should remain true to the customers' perception of high-quality abundance, fresh-from-the-farm produce to feed their families and provide the nutrition we all need. **pb**

*Don Harris is a 41-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He worked in every aspect of the industry, from "field-to-fork" in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting and is director of produce for the Chicago-based food charity organization, Feeding America. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.*

**The conversations and the observations on the show floor and around the convention provide the most insight on what's happening in the industry.**



# Giving Thanks

BY ALAN SIGER

For our wholesale business, Thanksgiving was not a major contributor to our bottomline. It was never much of a fruit holiday, and the upturn in vegetable sales didn't compensate for increased overtime expenses. On top of that, the week following Thanksgiving is traditionally one of the slowest weeks of the year due to full bellies and leftover laden refrigerators. Simply put, we were happy when December arrived and brought the Christmas and New Year's holiday business.

Apart from business, Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday of the year. No gift-giving to worry about, no end of year pressures, no wondering about whether to wish someone a Happy Hanukkah, Joyful Kwanza, or Merry Christmas. To me, Thanksgiving is a time to sit back with family and friends and reflect on how lucky I've been, and how much I have to be thankful for.

As a kid, Thanksgiving was never very special to me. It was a nice long weekend off from school, a big turkey for dinner with relatives, whom I saw on a regular basis, and some extra football on the television. It wasn't until I was out of high school that the Thanksgiving holiday became one of my favorite times of year.

In June of 1970, I met Pat, the woman who would become my wife less than three years later. We fell in love while working at a summer camp in North Georgia; the following Thanksgiving, I was invited to her home to meet her family. I drove from Pittsburgh to Tennessee, and arrived at her family's home a few minutes before Pat and her mother got in from the airport.

Upon my early arrival, I was quickly introduced to southern hospitality. Pat's then 12-year-old sister, who was home alone, offered me a cocktail, which I readily accepted as we waited for the rest of her family to arrive.

That weekend was a special one. I, a bearded, long-haired Yankee, found commonality through a love of football with Pat's father, a Tennessee-born and -bred businessman with a heart of gold. Underneath all that hair, I think her father saw a normal guy — despite my bellbottom jeans and liberal politics.

That 1970 Thanksgiving started a tradition for Pat and me that continues today. Over the years, Pat and I celebrated Thanksgiving with extended family in St. Louis, Kansas City, Nashville, and of course Pittsburgh. Thanksgiving also marks a sad time for our family. In 1985, my mother-in-law had been terminally ill for several months; upon our arrival in Nashville on Thanksgiving Day, she hugged our boys, held our five-month old daughter for the last time, fell asleep, and passed away two days later. Even now as I type, my eyes well

up thinking of her.

Throughout college and as young professionals, our children lived all across our great country. No matter how busy their schedules, they did everything possible to be home for Thanksgiving; the fourth Thursday in November is the day that was always circled on the calendar.

Now that our children are grown and have families of their own, it's not always possible to have everyone together for Thanksgiving. Traveling with infants and toddlers is not easy, and our children and their spouses have two families with whom to celebrate. Because of our growing family, it makes it even more special when the stars align, and we have everyone together at the Thanksgiving table. This year is one of those years, and I'm looking forward to a special holiday. I hope that all of you have a wonderful Thanksgiving and take some time to reflect on your blessings.

As I've gotten older, I realize that there is so much to be thankful for every day, not just on Thanksgiving; Here's a list of some of the things I am thankful for:

- I am thankful for my family: Their love and support make every day a blessing.
- I am thankful for my good health and that of my family.
- I am thankful for my friends, old and new, from whom I've learned so much.
- I am thankful to live in the United States, and for the right to enjoy its freedoms.
- I am thankful for our military and first responders who keep us safe.
- I am thankful for those who worked with me to build a great company.
- I am thankful for my opportunity to be a part of a great industry.
- I am thankful for the wisdom and perspective that comes with age.
- I am thankful for my sense of humor that helped to get me through tough times.
- I am thankful for Jack Daniels, which helped me get through tough times when my sense of humor did not.

**pb**

**Simply put, we were happy when December arrived and brought the Christmas and New Year's holiday business.**

*Alan Siger is chairman of Siger Group LLC, offering consulting services in business strategy, logistics, and operations to the produce industry. Prior to selling Consumers Produce in 2014, Siger spent more than four decades growing Consumers into a major regional distributor. Active in issues affecting the produce industry throughout his career, Siger is a former president of the United Fresh Produce Association.*

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# Generation Z Habits — Something To Smile About

BY NIC JOOSTE

**W**arren Buffett once said: “In the business world, the rearview mirror is always clearer than the windshield.”

For some time, I have been intrigued by the phenomenon of the elusive Generation Z (Gen Z) — the cohorts following the Millennials (Gen Y) — a group of consumers born and raised in the social media craze. A new research project conducted by my company in Holland was aimed at clearing some spots on our corporate windshield so we could look into the future of fresh produce marketing.

Gen Z constitutes a whole new generation that creates a global cultural commonality with a combined buying power in the USA of \$43 billion, and an influence on an additional \$600 billion of family spending, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Gen Z spends more money on (good) food than all other preceding generations. And yet, the fresh produce industry ignores this potential goldmine of consumers. Or maybe we simply don’t know what to do with them.

Modern technology has radically changed the rules of the marketing game. In this new world, fresh and healthy fruit has to compete with, for instance, rapper Snoop Dogg aggressively selling fruit-flavored energy drinks laced with chemicals on YouTube videos, as well as the “now you see it, now you don’t” messages on Snapchat. In the face of this seemingly insurmountable and unfair competition, how do we effectively connect to and market our “boring” fresh produce to Gen Z?

Our research project aimed to understand Gen Z’s sensibilities and sensitivities and tap into their hearts. First order of business was bringing in graduate intern Mathieu Hirdes, 21, who has worked in the produce industry since he was 15 years old, to set up focus groups as well as gather data and analyses to uncover the inside scoop on this omnipresent consumer demographic.

Hirdes found that according to an empirical study in web use, it takes Gen Z’s 8 seconds to decide if something is good or bad. To put it in perspective, the attention span of a goldfish is 9 seconds. For us as a company with sustainability firmly entrenched in our DNA, this was a disconcerting phenomenon.

At face value it seems this generation does not take anything seriously. However, Hirdes found Gen Z is far more attuned to the plight of world sustainability and creating a better future than the Millennials. Great news for us!

Delving deeper into how Gen Z thinks about fresh produce by orchestrating surveys and focus groups was not easy, yet the outcome was extremely enlightening. Inquiring into the produce purchase decisions of study participants, Hirdes found that “Ego” is higher than “Eco.” Gen Zs won’t just buy a product because it’s sustainable; they want to know the ways in which it will complement their lifestyle, add value to their emotions or embrace their convictions (e.g., vegetarianism).

Regarding buying patterns, it was found that approximately 34 percent of Gen Z buys their own fresh produce. A substantial 78 percent, however, said they are able to exert influence on their parents’ buying patterns, based on their own convictions and beliefs. The financial reach of Gen Z is greater than we think.

Another research conclusion is that Gen Z is not primarily brand-driven; they are immensely intrigued by the behavior of the companies behind the brands. A “good” brand owner can count on the support of and collaboration with Gen Z, but then it has to play the marketing game according to their rules.

Gen Z told us that if we want them as customers, our advertising spots must be short and appealing, and preferably with some humor. When we showed them our first attempts, they said we will fail because we were “trying too hard to be cool.” According to them, they prefer we be “boring and authentic” rather than “forced cool and not believable.”

Our biggest challenge in advertising was to limit our words and maximize our visuals, otherwise we will be deleted from Gen Z’s horizon before our 8 seconds are over. We had to find ways to capture their interest and make them laugh, yet back it up with real substance. We had to stop thinking advertising, and start thinking entertainment.

As a company, we found Gen Z consumers may be young, but are certainly not fools. They expect our products to help them build a lifestyle, or satisfy their conscience, or add value to their convictions.

Consequently, the main response from Gen Z in terms of our marketing communication was: “Stop trying to sell us stuff, and start telling us your story.” In this regard, we found communication in generalities with Gen Z is futile. We needed to speak their language. However, we failed dismally when we tried to speak “Gen Z.”

Hirdes’ solution was to involve and engage a group of Gen Z’ers, and get them to create corporate communication on our behalf. As a result, they created a jaw-dropping array of concepts that appeal to their generation — from website to in-store advertising, from branded clothing to 8-second promotional movies. Straight from the horse’s mouth.

This hugely interesting, emerging generation of consumers needs to be addressed, embraced and respected in a completely different manner. A serious message with a smile will start the ball rolling, but there is much more. Gen Z knows everything, sees everything and has an opinion about everything.

If the fresh produce industry wants to go out and play with these kids, it will have to climb out of its box of arrogance and discard its “know-it-all” attitude. Immerse yourself in their world, and enjoy the rollercoaster.

**pb**

*Nic Jooste is director of Marketing & Corporate Social Responsibility for Cool Fresh International, based in The Netherlands*



# The Sense and Sensibilities of Southern Cooking



BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER

In late May, I spent two days with the James Beard Award-winning southern chef and cookbook author Scott Peacock. I was taking a two-week “Food Writing from the Farm” course at Sterling College in upstate Vermont where Peacock was one of eight guest faculty members.

Chef Peacock was supposed to be focusing his lessons for us on how to make food writing a full-time profession, but instead his obsessive-compulsive personality led him to make five batches of buttermilk biscuits for us over two days.

“I’ve never made two batches that are the same,” he lamented as he used his hands to work leaf lard into yet another bowl of flour. “You have more control using your hands,” he told us. “A pastry fork creates particles that are too homogenous. You want some larger pieces of fat in your biscuit dough, so the biscuits come out flaky and light.”

While I was fascinated by his desire to show us “perfect” buttermilk biscuits, I was also irritated that our valuable classroom time was spent focusing on a single recipe. And oh, did I mention he had a recipe? That he followed to a tee every single time. Yet two batches never turn out the same, I mused.

His obsession with perfection may be one of the reasons he won a James Beard Award for Best Chef in America in 2007, the same year his Atlanta restaurant Watershed also won the Best Restaurant — Southeast award. He wants to give his guests the very best food experience. He not only insisted on making us “perfect” biscuits, but he also wanted the freshest butter and freshly made strawberry preserves to enjoy with our biscuits, which by the way, were so amazing. Tender, flaky perfection with the salty and sweet complements of butter and strawberry preserves ... if only I had one to enjoy right now.

Chef Peacock has now moved on from restaurant life. He lives on a farm in his native Alabama where he’s growing heirloom wheat, tending to various animals, and doing video interviews with local citizens, mostly in their 80s and 90s, about the food culture of Alabama. Chef Peacock’s work is adding to our knowledge of how regional food cultures develop and endure.

Southern folks must laugh at those of us in California who are obsessed with fresh, local, seasonal cuisine. Fresh, local, seasonal is at the heart of Southern cooking. But this is true of much of the U.S. Before refrigeration and our vast rail and highway systems,

everyone in the U.S. relied on local, seasonal food, some of it fresh and some of it preserved.

I wish more restaurants in the U.S. would focus on the sensibilities of Southern cooking. While many people think of foods, like ribs or fried chicken, Southerners were the originators of “make half your plate fruits and vegetables.” Animal protein played a small supporting role in a meal compared to the produce. Today, restaurants that focus on Southern cuisine tend to pile your plate with meat, and use produce as a garnish.

A review of Chef Peacock’s *The Gift of Southern Cooking*, a classic cookbook he co-authored with the late Edna Lewis, shows every menu contains abundant amounts of seasonal produce. Their “Rich Harvest Dinner” menu features Silken Turnip Soup, Baked Pork Chops with Cranberries, Braised Cabbage, Cardamom-Scented Whipped Sweet Potatoes, a Simple Leaf Salad of Fall Greens, and Pineapple Upside Down Cake. Note that every menu item featured produce. (And note that I may have found my Thanksgiving menu!)

So what if more restaurants and catering companies put more produce on the menu and more effort into the flavor and appeal of all produce-centric menu items? What if more chefs and diners took Southern cuisine more seriously as a model for healthy eating? What if more Americans appreciated the fact that abundant use of fruits and vegetables, cooked thoughtfully, can enhance health as well as enjoyment of our food?

So, thinking back to my experience with Chef Peacock, while I was irritated that I didn’t get what was promised, I got much more than anticipated. I

received an appreciation for how striving for perfection with food can lead to incredible outcomes, things like national awards, best-selling cookbooks, and biscuits that make people swoon. **pb**

**What if more Americans appreciated the fact that abundant use of fruits and vegetables, cooked thoughtfully, can enhance health as well as enjoyment of our food?**

*Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND is a farmer’s daughter from North Dakota, award-winning dietitian, culinary nutrition expert, and founder and president of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting, Inc. Learn more about her business at [www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com](http://www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com). Follow her insights on food and flavor issues on Twitter @AmyMyrdalMiller.*

# PRODUCE VIRTUOSO

The produce industry is often comprised of rich history, passionate people, and an addiction for the business. It could be said that these traits provide the fuel to overcome obstacles and the thirst for growth.

The great international conflict of World War I began in 1914. This historic year also marked the beginning of Sid Wainer & Son, one of the premier produce and specialty foods companies on the East Coast.

Henry Wainer established his business in the regional produce market on the cobblestone streets of New Bedford, MA, where this photo was taken in 1915.

“Every produce company on the street had access to different farm products they represented,” says Allie Wainer, executive vice president and fourth generation Wainer. “It was an old-fashioned community where people went to corner merchants to buy what they ate, and the merchants knew everyone in the

neighborhoods.”

Allie says the high standard of product selection remains the company’s mainstay. “Everything we sell is hand-picked from



the world’s finest farms. In 1914, it was what was farmed within our region and accessible within a day. Now, we source product throughout the U.S. and internationally.”

The importer/distributor of specialty produce supplies more than 30,000 restaurants, hotels, gourmet shops, retailers and caterers around the world.

Because of today’s modern, savvy consumers, Allie says the business’ greatest shifting points are regarding “the consumers’ knowledge of what’s

happening in the food industry across the world regarding food safety, modern transportation, proper maintenance of the cold chain, as well as technology and the information that makes ingredients for chefs available throughout the world.”

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The screenshot shows the PerishableNews.com website interface. At the top, there is a search bar and a 'Sign Up' button. Below the header, a 'Streaming Ticker' displays 'Produce Highlights' with the text 'Local, Organic Top Consumers' Desired Qualities In \$280M Fruit-Producing Plant Market'. The main content area features a 'Top Story' titled 'Ocean Mist Farms Introduces Season & Steam Artichokes' by Ocean Mist Farms, dated Tuesday, April 3, 2016 at 9:09AM EDT. The article text describes the company's expansion of its award-winning Season & Steam line of fresh convenient vegetables. To the right of the article is a product image for 'Season & Steam' artichokes. Below the article is a 'Easy Navigation' menu with buttons for Bakery, Dairy, Deli, Floral, Meat & Poultry, Produce, Seafood, and Retail & Foodservice. Further down, there are several promotional banners for 'Global Food Safety Services', 'Del Monte', 'MANN'S FAMILY FAVORITES', and 'UNITED FRESH PRODUCE INNOVATION STARTS HERE'. A 'Stories Just In' section features an article titled 'Indianapolis Fruit Company Promotes Fresh Labels & Packaging' by Indianapolis Fruit Company, Inc., dated Tuesday, April 3, 2016 at 9:09AM EDT. A 'Multiple Article Sources' callout points to the article text. A 'Reader Legend' box is also visible, listing 'Original Story', 'Selling Story', 'Third Party Story', and 'Public Relations'. The website footer includes a 'Sign Up' button and a 'Log Out' button.

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