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Food Bloggers And Their Influence On Produce Consumers

Produce executives are figuring out fast the influential sphere of bloggers and how to best use their expertise to get the word out about their products.



INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT BANANA DISCOUNT POLICY
WAL-MART PRICING REPORT: DALLAS • SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES
APPLES • WHOLESALER PARTNERSHIPS • SALAD TRENDS • SALAD TIE-INS
PECANS • WEST MEXICO • IMPORTED BERRIES • MANGOS ON THE MENU
FLORIDA FALL PRODUCE • CALIFORNIA CITRUS • RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES
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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



Jim Gatter
Sales Representative
Sunny Valley International Inc.
Glassboro, NJ

Jim Gatter has been with Sunny Valley, a fresh produce sales and marketing company for 23 years. "It's the relationships with my customers that have kept me here," says Gatter matter-of-factly. "We all enjoy the industry and what we do."

So just what does Gatter do exactly? As a sales representative for Sunny Valley, which imports fresh fruit from South America and Spain and handles domestic Jersey-grown crops in the summer, Gatter assists in selling product to supermarket chain

stores, terminal market operators, wholesalers and foodservice clients. "Our real focus is on supermarket chains. Our domestic crops, which include a lot of Jersey-grown blueberries and peaches — go as far west as Texas and as far south as Florida, while our imports, such as blueberries from Argentina and Chile, mainly stay east of the Mississippi," says Gatter.

Gatter is an avid reader of PRODUCE BUSINESS, and has been reading it "since the beginning," he says. "I use it to find new clients, and it has worked for me all these years. I find it very helpful."

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

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QUESTIONS FOR THE OCTOBER ISSUE

- 1) According to Red Blossom, how much more do consumers spend when strawberries are in their cart? _____
- 2) What product is used in Royal Rose's "Salad for Adults"? _____
- 3) Name three brands marketed by Trinity Fruit Sales. _____
- 4) On what products can Green Giant Fresh's Box Tops for Education be found? _____
- 5) What is Thermal Technologies' booth number at this month's PMA Fresh Summit? _____
- 6) What is the contact number for Dave Nelson at Bard Valley Medjool Dates? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
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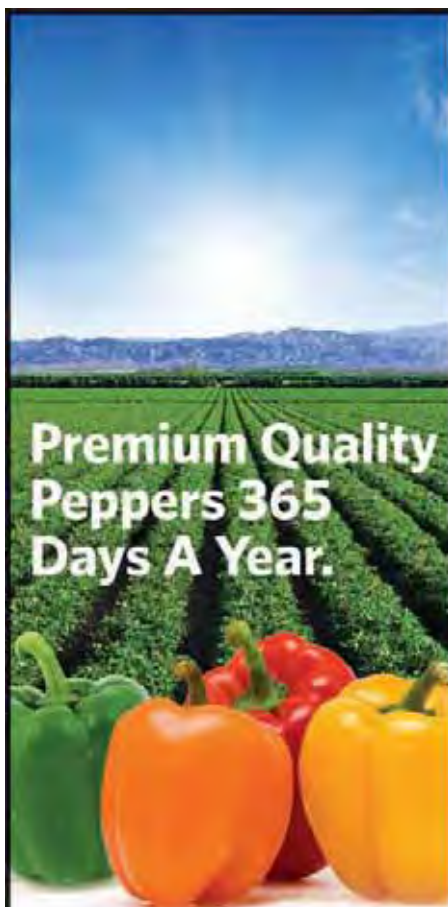
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November 6 - 9, 2011

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

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Email: hollie@nationalpotatocouncil.com • **Website:** www.nationalpotatocouncil.com

January 18 - 20, 2012

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Conference Management: Florida Nursery Growers & Landscape Association, Orlando, FL

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Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

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THE DEFICIT-REDUCTION PACKAGE AND THE 2012 FARM BILL

By Robert Guenther,
Senior Vice President of Public Policy,
United Fresh Produce Association

It's difficult, if not impossible, to flip on a television, turn a radio dial, or visit a news website today without hearing talk of the budget impasse in Washington, D.C. It has seemingly permeated every aspect of daily life, and it can be easy to get caught up in the emotion of the big-picture debate over federal spending. And it can be easier still to overlook the ramifications that the budget discussions have on the success and solvency of federal programs that benefit the produce industry. Late last month, President Barack Obama introduced his deficit-reduction package, setting in motion another tug-of-war on Capitol Hill over the nation's financial health.

As we move forward, the United Fresh government relations team is pleased to provide the following synopsis of major elements of the debt reduction package, and what effects it may have on the agricultural sector.

Deficit Reduction Package

In the days before adjourning for their August recess, members of the Senate sent the President a bill that would increase the debt ceiling while addressing the country's ongoing budgetary problems. President Obama signed the bill into law, initially increasing the debt ceiling while simultaneously cutting current spending levels over the next 10 years. Following the enactment, Congress began the process of addressing further cuts and incremental increases in the debt ceiling, which will be fleshed out over the remainder of the year.

Included in the deficit reduction package are the following elements:

- Approximately \$1.2 trillion of deficit reduction through the establishment of 10-year discretionary caps. Total discretionary spending in Fiscal Year 2012 and 2013 is now limited to \$1.043 trillion and \$1.047 trillion, respectively.

- Two stages of increases to the debt ceiling. The President may request a \$900 billion increase now, of which \$400 billion is immediately available. This \$900 billion is subject to a resolution of disapproval in both the House

and Senate. Once the debt comes within \$100 billion of the debt ceiling, the President may ask for at least an additional \$1.2 trillion, which could rise to \$1.5 trillion if a Balanced Budget Amendment is sent to the States or the Joint Committee process described below enacts more than \$1.5 trillion in savings.

- The creation of a bipartisan congressional super-committee for deficit reduction will be tasked with developing legislation to achieve at least \$1.5 trillion in future deficit reduction.

- Finally, both the House and Senate will vote on a balanced budget constitutional amendment before the end of the year.

This sets up a unique budgetary process including part reconciliation, part trade promotion authority, and part Gramm-Rudman that will play out over the next several months.

All fine and good, but why should you care? Well, as we will talk about below, this may have serious consequences with regard to the Farm Bill.

Farm Bill

With a process now in place for deficit-reduction negotiations, the Farm Bill and the House and Senate Agriculture Committees are faced with some difficult questions and several options of how to proceed with the development of the next Farm Bill.

Out of the gate, the first question is how much will get cut from ag programs. While the deficit deal does not provide a target number to authorizing committees that they will need to cut to reach \$1.5 trillion in spending cuts, it does provide the opportunity for the super-committee to provide each of the authorizing committees with suggested cuts that would get them to the magical \$1.5 trillion number.

The super-committee, however, is under no obligation to accept these recommendations, nor does it have to provide the authorizing committees any guidance. Based on our discussions with senior staff of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, it is our view that the super-committee will provide them a range of spending cuts to be made. At this point, rumors

put that number between \$11 and \$33 billion.

That being said, the next question is what will the authorizing committee do in this fiscally constraining environment? Because of the necessity to write a Farm Bill, there will certainly be difficult choices that need to be made. First and foremost, what to cut?

Most see the agriculture committees pressured into reforming Title I (subsidies) and Title II (conservation) programs, which represent the easiest places to efficiently make the cuts they will be required to consider. During the floor debates on the deficit reduction package, House and Senate members levied blanket attacks on farm subsidies as a source of budget excess, but an important note here is that most see nutrition funding in a separate bucket and not associated with agriculture programs, therefore off the table for these types of cuts.

Finally, we're searching for a foothold on how the committees will proceed with writing the rest of the 2012 Farm Bill once the two previous questions are answered. To that end, we see the following scenarios:

- The committees write the entire Farm Bill now and drop it into the deficit-reduction package

- The committees do the cuts and reforms to Titles I and II now, then come back early next year to rewrite the remaining 12 titles in a more traditional Farm Bill manner

- The committees reform Titles I and II, and extend current programs until after the 2012 elections

- The committees offer no cuts to the super-committee, arguing that agriculture has done its fair share of reform with the truncated programs that are set to expire in 2012, estimated at \$18 billion in savings over 10 years

Based on our discussions with the committee members, these will be the questions and strategies that the committees will be contemplating as they approach the 2012 Farm Bill. What options they decide will dictate our focus as an organization, and most importantly, the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance's efforts in the 2012 Farm Bill discussions.

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A LOOK TO THE FUTURE IN BUSINESS AND LIFE

PRODUCE BUSINESS was launched at the PMA convention in San Francisco in 1985. So you hold our 26th anniversary issue in your hands. This year, as with each year since that long-ago launch, we set aside one page to report to you, our readers, on what we are doing and to say thank you for all your support. This is that page.

We have achieved much in the year that has passed. PRODUCE BUSINESS has continued to grow as has its sister online publication, *Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit*. Our newest online addition, *PerishableNews.com*, is now regularly the first in bringing news to tens of thousands of industry members and provides a portal for those same executives to keep current on other perishable categories.

Most notably, last year, shortly after the PMA convention, we launched The New York Produce Show and Conference with our friends at the Eastern Produce Council. It was a wildly successful event featuring a trade show, conference, chef demos, spouse program, university interchange program, media program and a "consumer influencer" outreach effort. We are coming up on the 2nd edition of the event to be held in Manhattan, Nov 7-9, 2011, and we are thrilled to report that with all the economic problems in the world today, the event will have grown by 50 percent over last year. That is the industry saying it values what we have worked so hard to create, and we are so very grateful for that vote of confidence.

More than financials, we are appreciative of the opportunity to deepen our interaction with, and our contribution to, the trade. The workshops, the seminars, the speakers, the networking — none of that can be duplicated elsewhere. That is why we urge industry executives to attend PMA, United, CPMA, WGA, NEPC, SEPC, FPFC, foreign events and, yes, to make time to be in New York for The New York Produce Show and Conference.

For all this accomplishment, this has also been a year of enormous challenge. Not long after PMA and The New York Show last year,

my father, Michael Prevor, was diagnosed with inoperable pancreatic cancer. It is hard to express what a devastating blow it was to learn such a thing. The five-year survival rate is only 6 percent, and most people die within a year. The doctors gave my father three months without treatment, six to nine with. We are now just past the nine-month mark.

As those who have been touched by cancer soon realize, life extension is itself often problematic. Between the cancer itself, the chemotherapy treatment and treatment for dozens of ailments that come along with it — everything from infections to blood clots — one starts to question whether one wants to live longer.

For all this accomplishment, this has also been a year of enormous challenge.

It is important for the family to listen carefully to the ill family member in these circumstances.

I'm a dutiful son, but not a doctor, much less an oncologist or medical researcher. I knew I didn't have the competence to cure my father's cancer. In the course of studying the matter, though, I learned that it was common for therapies to take 17 years to get into mainstream use. When I was told that, I understood my mission clearly. I could use my skills as an analyst, researcher and writer to identify what therapies are out there now that may be the winners and come into common use by 2028. Then I could find the right people and persuade them to help my father. In other words, I would fight to get for my father the medical care of 2028, today.

After a worldwide search, I identified an immunotherapy that had been tried on some chronic leukemia patients as being the most likely to succeed and become the standard of



care. The therapy, altered for pancreatic cancer, called for the use of a gene therapy to alter T-Cells to attack mesothelin, which pancreatic and ovarian tumors typically overexpress. To accelerate the application of this therapy to solid tumors in the hope of benefiting my father and many others who suffer from such cancers, we established the Prevor Family Fund For Immunotherapy Cancer Research at the Abramson Cancer Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

My family made an initial donation of one million dollars to jumpstart the research. We hope others will go to the website we've set up — www.theprevorfamilyfund.org — and contribute to the furtherance of this work.

My father toiled all his professional life in the produce trade as an importer, exporter and wholesaler. Growing up on the Hunts Point Market in a family business, I know that the very idea of clean separation between home and work is not a realistic understanding of business and the world.

I cannot be certain if this therapy will help my father or anyone else. But it is my best judgment that it is the future. Ever since I sat down to write my "Special Note" for that launch issue 26 years ago, I have always tried to look to the future. I can only hope that the practice has paid off.

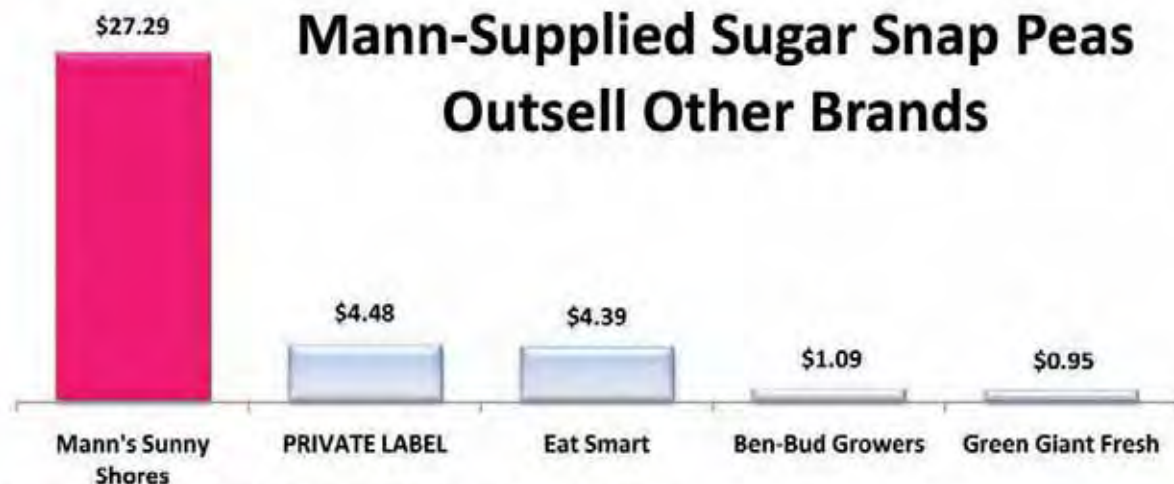
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* Perishables Group Data Total US 52 Weeks ending 7/23/11. Dollars in millions. Excludes Walmart, Target, HEB, Trader Joe's

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TRANSITIONS

WEST PAK AVOCADO TEMECULA, CA

Matt Smith has been hired as the company's new Midwest sales representative. A 2009 business degree graduate of The University of Arizona, he trained with West Pak's sales and operations teams at its headquarters in Temecula, CA, before moving to Chicago to begin working from the company's new sales office located within its regional distribution and ripening facility.



MOR USA GREENBROOK, NJ

Robin Sporn is the newest addition to the sales team. Sporn has built up a successful following in the produce industry lending her skills and talents to Agrexco USA for 23-plus years. She has a background in agriculture from Michigan State University and has worked over the years to carefully cultivate many Israeli produce programs from her initial start with flowers to fresh herbs, mangos and most recently organic peppers and tomatoes.



SEALD-SWEET INTERNATIONAL VERO BEACH, FL

David Brocksmith joins the company as account executive. Brocksmith brings over 20 years of experience in the produce industry. During his career, he has developed Florida citrus programs with key accounts. His tenured experience in the fresh citrus sectors of the produce industry brings new talent to the growing company.



THE OPPENHEIMER GROUP COQUITLAM, BRITISH CANADA, CANADA

The Oppenheimer Group announces the promotion of **Rachel Pagano**, sales representative in Oppenheimer's Seattle office, to the role of organics category manager. Pagano joined Oppenheimer in 2005 and was promoted to a sales representative role two years later. She has dedicated her energies to this area of Oppenheimer's business since her career began, establishing herself as the company's top organic sales person.



Industry veteran, **Rick Eastes**, joined Seald Sweet International's team as general manager of its West Coast sales and marketing operations in Dinuba, CA. Eastes brings substantial experience and qualifications to the company with specialized focus in the global arena. Although his involvement will be primarily dedicated to growing Seald Sweet's California-based production, he will also focus on further developing sales and marketing programs based on year-round product availability through domestic and imported supplies.



Brett Libke has recently joined the team as the new sales representative in the company's Newark, DE office. Libke comes to Oppenheimer following 15 years with C.H. Robinson Worldwide, working in various sales and management roles over the years. He has experience in the produce supply chain and logistics industries and plans on focusing his seasoned sales approach on helping Oppenheimer bring product to market.



AMHPAC JASLICO, MEXICO

The Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC) named **Mr. Carlos Cueto Rodriguez** president during the recent 4th Annual Technical Business Convention and General Ordinary Assembly. He was previously vice president of the Directive Board.



Jason Fung has been appointed as manager of Oppenheimer's marketing department. Fund joined the company in 2008 as a category analyst for its greenhouse and citrus business. He recently completed his master's degree at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver. In February, 2010, he became the leader of the company's business analysis team. Oversight of creative services and marketing communications were recently added to Fung's scope.



REDLINE SOLUTIONS SANTA CLARA, CA

RedLine Solutions is pleased to announce that **Gary Fleming** has joined the company as vice president of strategic services. Previously, Fleming served as the lead architect and spokesperson for PTI as the vice president of industry technology and standards for PMA. Most recently, he has been consulting with leading grower/shippers, retailers and foodservice companies to develop strategies for traceability compliance.



Steve Roosdahl was promoted to the role of director of supply chain management. Roosdahl joined the company in 1996 as a senior programmer analyst, moving into the roles of systems development manager and applications development manager a decade later. In 2009, he became the company's first corporate supply chain manager before assuming his new position. Roosdahl is the current co-chair of the industry's PTI implementation work group and also participates on the PTI master data work group.



KEEPSAKE PLANTS LEAMINGTON, ONTARIO, CANADA

Keepsake Plants, a division of Aris Horticulture, has hired **Rob vanStaalduinen** as its new managing director. He brings over 20 years of sales and management experience in the floral and greenhouse industry to his new position, including several years as general manager of Great Lakes Floral in St Catharines, Ontario. Prior to that, he was with Ontario Flower Growers, last serving as president.



RENAISSANCE FOOD GROUP RANCHO CORDOVA, CA

Renaissance Food Group recently hired **Dennis Schwakopf** as vice president of innovation, managing all product innovation for the company. Schwakopf previously worked in new product development for Taylor Farms and Tyson Foods. His focus at Renaissance Food Group will be developing innovative, healthy eating solutions and managing sustainable packaging options.



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European flavors

For your healthy lifestyle!



A message from Europe

Since 2008, the European Flavors program has been present at the top trade shows in the produce industry, organized in-store promotions and developed an entire campaign highlighting and promoting the qualities found in fruits and vegetables from Europe in the U.S. The program's success has exceeded our expectations.

We are happy to announce the renewal of the program with commitment from the European Union, the Italian Ministry of Agricultural Affairs and support from the Centro Servizi Ortofrutticoli.

The program will continue to promote the extraordinary quality of both fresh and processed produce grown in compliance with strict European directives -safeguarding the environment, health and safety of the consumers.

Together with you, we can look forward to continued growth and success in North America.

Please visit our booth #5259 at the PMA Fresh Summit in Atlanta.

www.europeanflavors.eu

NEW PRODUCTS

DOLE'S FRESHPACK HELPS BANANAS LAST LONGER

Responding to decades of research showing that discarding spoiled fruit remains the biggest complaint by millions of banana lovers, Westlake Village, CA-based Dole Fresh Fruit is introducing a new chemical-free system for controlling the banana-ripening process and keeping bananas fresh up to six days longer. The new patented system, called FreshPack, features a two-pouch banana bag with micro-perforations that significantly slows the ripening process.



DOLE'S "HAND-PICKED SELECTIONS" ARE ONE CUT AWAY FROM SALAD ENJOYMENT

A unique line of specialty lettuces in dual-chamber clamshells from Monterey, CA-based Dole Fresh Vegetables gives fresh lettuce lovers a "One Cut, One Bite" head lettuce experience. These new-to-market varieties – available with two complimentary heads of lettuce in each container -- allow users to prepare multicolored, baby-leaf salads with just one easy cut to the lettuce core.



APIO INTRODUCES NEW FLAVOR PROFILE TO SALAD KIT LINE

Apio Inc., of Guadalupe, CA, has added a new Chipotle Salad Kit to its fresh-cut vegetable-based salad line. The latest addition capitalizes on the restaurant-based trend toward using more bold pepper flavors and the Chipotle flavor profile, in particular. The company's three Eat Smart salad kits feature shredded broccoli-based blends highlighted with items like carrots and cabbage. All have a 16-day shelf life from the date of manufacturing.



CRUNCH PAK INTRODUCES SEASONAL APPLE-TIZER TRAYS FOR FALL

Cashmere, WA-based Crunch Pak is launching seasonal Apple-tizer trays for fall. The Apple-tizer trays feature a Halloween theme label and come in two combinations of fresh-cut fruit and dip with a suggested retail price of \$11.99 to \$12.99.



NEW CHERRY TOMATO PACKAGING

San Antonio, TX-based NatureSweet Ltd. has been collaborating with Azusa, CA-based Direct Pack Inc. to transform its cherry tomato packaging while keeping the company's commitment to provide the best tasting cherry tomatoes year-round. The new package offers enhanced product visibility, better protection, improved merchandising, an extended shelf life, and is more sustainable than the previous red mesh bag, qualifying for a #1 recycling symbol.



COTTON CANDY GRAPES ARRIVE IN THE UK

Cotton Candy is newly available from Grapery, in Bakersfield, CA, with Mack Multiples bringing it exclusively to the UK. At the heart of Cotton Candy is a Lambrusca variety, offering a distinctive but extremely sweet flavor experience, and drawing from much of the current understanding about breeding grapes for wine. Along with the first Cotton Candy shipment, Grapery has some tantalizing samples of other innovations in the pipeline that it is looking to increase to commercial production levels, including Witches Fingers.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

FRESH CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS TAKE A SPIN ON PIZZA

The Irvine-based California Avocado Commission believes featuring fresh California avocado as a topping turns a standard pizza into a special occasion. No longer relegated just to salads and sandwiches, California avocados have claimed signature status on menus ranging from pizza chains such as the California Club Pizza at California Pizza Kitchen to independent pizzerias like the Grecian Avocado Pizza at the Euro Pizza Café. For pizza toppings, the California Avocado Commission recommends using "breakers," or those avocados that are just beginning to soften.



CUSTOMIZE BURGERS WITH CHRISTOPHER RANCH GARLIC PRODUCTS

According to a recent Technomic survey, burger lovers want to be able to customize the condiments and toppings on their burgers, and Gilroy, CA-based Christopher Ranch helps operators cater to this need by providing ready-to-use toppings, such as lightly seasoned, Fresh Roasted Garlic, Fresh Peeled Garlic, Fresh Peeled Shallots and Specialty Onions that are ready to customize into signature spreads and condiments.



KINGSBURG ORCHARDS RELAUNCHES WEBSITE

After successfully launching www.Dino101.com over the past year and a half, Kingsburg, CA-based Kingsburg Orchards' marketing team has turned its focus onto its other social media outlets. The first step in this remodeling process was a complete renovation of its main Web site: www.KingsburgOrchards.com. The new site launched July 31, but further additions to the site will continue to be unveiled throughout the fall.



AMERICA TRADES PRODUCE 2012

Following the success of America Trades Produce 2011, organizers are planning a vibrant educational and networking program that will get at the heart of issues that affect the importation of Mexican fruits and vegetables. America Trades Produce 2012 will be held March 21-23, 2012, at the Tubac Golf Resort in Southern Arizona. The next installment will also feature a tour of the local port of entry, and a dynamic range of guest speakers from both government and industry.



SUPERFRESH GROWERS' QR CODES ON CHERRY PACKAGING

Yakima, WA-based Domex Superfresh Growers introduced 2-lb. cherry bags and clamshells this season with QR codes printed on each package. The codes on Superfresh Growers cherry packages lead consumers to the Superfresh Growers mobile Web site where they can access information about different varieties, nutrition facts and answers to frequently asked questions, among many other pieces of information.



SHANLEY FARMS FINGER LIMES NOW IN SEASON

Visalia, CA-based Shanley Farms has begun harvesting its 2011 crop of finger limes. The season is expected to run through January, 2012, with the peak of season expected to be during the month of October. Shanley Farms Finger Limes are sold to select retailers, foodservice distributors and wholesalers nationwide.



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MUST BE

21+



SALADS FOR ADULTS

INCLUDE RADICCHIO IN YOUR SALAD

EAT RESPONSIBLY



MUST BE 21+

ROYAL ROSE RADICCHIO

RECIPE ON BACK

TEQUILA SALAD - by Chef Cy Yontz



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MUST BE 21+ SALADS FOR ADULTS

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EAT RESPONSIBLY

Bold and assertive suits you and your grown-up tastes, so don't settle for a boring salad. Demand a sophisticated salad designed for your adult palate - that includes radicchio.



- Banded Radicchio with QR code, Recipe, and UPC
- Tear-Off Recipe Pads for Retail Carton Displays
- Mobile Friendly Website for In-Store Promotionals
- Professionally Developed Recipes connect Produce Shoppers to other Grocery Departments



www.radicchio.com



ANNOUNCEMENTS

MANGO MANIA DISPLAY CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

The winners of the first Mango Mania Display Contest have been announced by the Orlando, FL-based National Mango Board (NMB). Participating stores competed for \$10,000 in prizes, and reported a collective 1095 percent increase in mango volume compared to the same period in 2010. The contest was open to retailers with up to 50 stores. For a list of winners, visit www.mango.org/contest.



SUBWAY PARTNERS WITH CALIFORNIA TOMATO FARMERS

SUBWAY, in Fresno, CA, has teamed up with California Tomato Farmers (CTF), a cooperative of family-owned, sustainable tomato farming operations, to promote California tomatoes in-store and online. During the summer months, SUBWAY uses and other produce items from California for much of the United States and Canada. The three-month long promotion includes in-store signage that highlights the California-grown origin of the store's tomatoes and offers examples to customers on ways in which CTF "Live Green."



SUN WORLD EXPANDS SOUTH AFRICAN GRAPE MARKETERS

Sun World International LLC, in Bakersfield, CA, has announced two leading South African producer-exporters (Suiderland/New Vision) have formed a joint venture to market grape varieties developed by Sun World. The newly licensed joint venture complements four existing South African marketers in exporting a wide range of seedless grape varieties developed by Sun World. The grapes to be marketed include white, red and black seedless varieties sold under private trademarks and brands such as Midnight Beauty, Scarlotta Seedless and Sable Seedless.



WASHINGTON STATE POTATO GROWERS VOTE TO CONTINUE MARKETING ORDER

The USDA announced that Washington state potato growers voted to continue their federal marketing order program. Eighty percent of growers who voted — representing 52 percent of the participating volume — voted in favor of continuing the marketing order, which authorizes the establishment of minimum grade, size, quality, maturity, pack, container and labeling requirements for Washington state fresh-market potatoes. A referendum is required once every six years to decide if the marketing order will continue.



ZESPRI® KIWIFRUIT PARTNERS WITH CHILDREN'S CHARITIES ON FACEBOOK

ZESPRI® Kiwifruit recently announced its partnership with six children's charities to drive ZESPRI's childhood obesity campaign. Kiwifruit for Kids centers on a uniquely designed Facebook application that allows people around the U.S. to contribute to the cause. ZESPRI created the Kiwifruit for Kids Facebook campaign to help combat the childhood obesity epidemic. Kiwifruit for Kids allows Facebook users to earn online points for the region of their choice.



SAFEWAY'S BURNHAM ON BOARD OF UNITED FRESH

United Fresh Produce Association Chairman of the Board, Reggie Griffin of The Kroger Co., has appointed **Steve Burnham**, senior vice president of produce, floral and bakery for Safeway Inc., to the United Fresh Board of Directors. Burnham replaces Geoff White of Safeway, who recently took a new position within the company. Burnham joined Safeway in 1989, and was promoted to senior vice president of produce earlier this year.



VIDALIA ONION COMMITTEE CINCHES TRIPLE CROWN OF NATIONAL MARKETING AWARDS

The Vidalia Onion Committee's 2010 "Ogres & Onions" campaign won the first place PRO Award for "Best Tie-in Promotion" from *Promo Magazine*. In April, the campaign earned the group and promoter Langston Communications Inc., two first place REG-GIE awards from Promotion Marketing Association for "age-specific" and "national consumer under \$1-million." In June, "Ogres & Onions" received a PRSA Bronze Anvil for non-profit media relations tactics.



SNACKS ON THE GO FROM MANN PACKING

Salinas, CA-Mann Packing Co. Inc. will feature the company's relaunched Snacks on the Go! product portfolio at the upcoming PMA Fresh Summit in Atlanta. Mann's Snacks On The Go! is a full line of fresh-cut vegetable and fruit packaged in multiple combinations for snacking convenience. Mann has expanded the line with additional healthy snack offerings and new price points.



CHERYL BURKE DANCES FOR DOLE SALADS

Monterey, CA-based Dole Fresh Vegetables has teamed up with professional dancer and choreographer Cheryl Burke. Burke becomes the third and final celebrity artist enlisted for the company's "Find Your Inspiration" campaign, designed to help consumers maximize the culinary possibilities of Dole's 38 salad blends and all-natural kits. "Find Your Inspiration" features non-food designers, artists and performers applying their distinctive area of creative expertise to salad making.



BRASSICA SPROUT GROUP AND INLINE PLASTICS TEAM UP FOR SPROUTS

Brassica Sprout Group, of Baltimore, MD, has selected Inline Plastics Corp.'s tamper-resistant, tamper-evident Safe-T-Fresh Vented Clamshell Container for BroccoSprouts and LifeForce Foods Sprouts. The container's tighter perimeter seal design provides increased shelf-life, freshness and better protection of its products. Strategically positioned vents on the sides of the container insure that water or moisture from misting will not leak into the container and cause wilting.



DEARDORFF FAMILY FARMS LEED-ING THE WAY

Oxnard, CA-based Deardorff Family Farms is nearing completion on a new LEED-certified facility that will serve as its headquarters. The facility will be 115,000 square feet of cooling, processing, packing and office space. The scheduled completion date is the first quarter of 2012. The new facility also has a strong focus on food safety and security and is being built with wash down surfaces, high-tech security devices, integrated floor drain systems and a vertical docking system.



FEEL THE HEAT OF AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO

Avocados From Mexico announces a special guest appearance by celebrity chef and author, Roberto Santibañez, at its PMA Fresh Summit booth this year. The first 100 people in line during his appearance will receive a free copy of his book, "Truly Mexican."



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THE NEW
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THE IDAHO POTATO FIELD FORCE

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IDAHO

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TO GO BALL ON QTR.
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T.O.L.

STARRING LARRY "COACH" WHITESIDE

KENT "TANK" BEESLEY

KEN "TOO TALL" TUBMAN

AND BILL "CRAZY LEGS" SAVILONIS!

OKAY, HERE'S
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IDAHO POTATOES DURING
FOOTBALL SEASON TO
BLITZ TO BETTER
SALES!

GOT IT,
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OUR RAPID
RESPONSE WILL
MAKE SURE CATEGORY
MANAGERS NEVER
GET SACKED FOR
A LOSS!

OUR POWERFUL
CATEGORY ANALYSIS
WILL CRUSH THE
COMPETITION!

AND OUR
FAR-REACHING
PROMOTIONS WILL
HELP STORES
SCORE BIG
PROFITS!

SOUNDS
LIKE A WINNING
STRATEGY TO
ME!

TEAM UP WITH YOUR IDAHO POTATO FEARLESS FIELD
REP FOR GREAT POTATO SALES ALL SEASON LONG.
AND STAY TUNED FOR OUR NEXT EXCITING EPISODE!

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER GENERATION PARTNERS WITH RACHAEL RAY

Portland, OR-based Alliance for a Healthier Generation has created a new initiative with Rachael Ray to create healthy school meals recipes, which are available free to every school in the U.S. Made for schools, these recipes are created specifically for easy preparation in a school setting. The recipes meet the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's school nutrition guidelines, which meet or exceed USDA guidelines and have been tested at real school kitchens with real kids.



FFVA HONORS INDUSTRY VETERAN FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

The Maitland-based Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association honored Tony DiMare, vice president of the DiMare Company and a veteran in the tomato industry, with its Distinguished Service Award during FFVA's 68th annual convention. DiMare has worked in his family's company since 1983 and now oversees its operations in Ruskin and Homestead, FL; and Johns Island, S.C. A member of FFVA's Board of Directors since 1996, DiMare served on the executive committee from 1996 to 2008 and as Chairman from 2004 to 2006.



SIX L'S PACKING REBRANDS, CHANGES NAME TO LIPMAN

Along with a brand overhaul and the new tagline, "Refreshingly Dependable," Immokalee, FL-based Six L's has changed its name to Lipman. The renaming applies to all divisions of the company: research and development, farming, processing, repacking, and procurement. As a result, subsidiaries, including Custom Pak and RediPlants, will now operate under the Lipman name. Lipman's "access to the acre" philosophy enables customers to communicate with and receive information directly from farmers. It also allows for increased traceability throughout the distribution process -- starting with research.



MONTEREY MUSHROOMS CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Watsonville, CA-based Monterey Mushrooms celebrated 40 years of service in the mushroom industry. Over the years, Monterey has introduced Clean 'N Ready pre-washed mushrooms, Mushrooms in zip-lock poly-bags, and most recently, collaborated with the USDA for the development of Vitamin D Mushrooms. Now, Monterey is introducing a revolutionary innovation in product packaging: the sustainable, biodegradable and recyclable Fiber Mushroom tray/till, which will be on display at this month's PMA Fresh Summit.



PEAR BUREAU NORTHWEST NAMES PEAR RETAILER OF THE YEAR

Portland, OR-based Pear Bureau Northwest (PBN) has named Demoulas Market Basket Pear Retailer of the Year in its inaugural season of honoring a retailer for its outstanding performance in the pear category. Market Basket is being recognized with this award because of its successful implementation of pear merchandising tactics that resulted in a 20 percent average annual increase in pear sales over the past two years. PBN also awarded members of the retailer's staff with registration, travel and lodging for this month's PMA Fresh Summit.



BARD VALLEY MEDJOOL GROWERS UNVEIL NEW NATURAL DELIGHTS PACKAGING

The Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers Association, of Bard Valley, CA, announces that the Natural Delights identity will adorn all Medjool organic and non-organic dates grown in the Bard Valley in the Southwest, including tubs, boxes and processed rolls. The new identity initiative will be supported by a national comprehensive marketing campaign encompassing digital advertising, in-store promotion, social media and PR.



RAPID RISE OF UNCLE VINNY'S SHOWS QUALITY AND MARKETING

Bronx, NY-based River Produce has become a leading supplier of fresh foods to the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut region less than five years after launching its Uncle Vinny's brand. The company sells to more than 40 supermarkets in the Tri-state region including national chains. Several top grocers have set aside branded shelf space for retail sales of Uncle Vinny's popular products, doubling sales since 2008.



JERSEY FRESH FARM PRODUCE GOES TO SCHOOLS

On the final day of the first-ever Jersey Fresh Farm to School Week, New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher (pictured) and Rutgers Food Innovation Center officials unveiled several recipes developed through a \$51,000 grant to create new food items derived from New Jersey agricultural products for use in the National School Lunch Program. Items included whole grain Jersey blueberry muffins, Jersey eggplant rollatini with Jersey Tomato primavera sauce and Jersey blueberry and cranberry yogurt parfaits.



SIMONIAN FRUIT BEGINS SHIPPING EARLY WONDERFUL POMEGRANATES

Fowler, CA-based Simonian Fruit Company announces the first Pomegranates of the 2011 season are now available. Production is expected to continue through March, 2012 and the fruit is available in a variety of pack styles and bins to fit their customers' store needs. Point-of-sale materials are available upon request.



DOLE FOOD COMPANY 2011 NAMED INTERNATIONAL SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

BAMA Gruppen AS, the leading fresh fruit and vegetables importer and distributor in Norway, named Westlake Village, CA-based Dole Food Co. Inc. its international supplier of the year in a ceremony celebrating BAMA's 125th anniversary held in Oslo, Norway. BAMA's Supplier of the Year award is given to the company that best demonstrates excellence in product quality, market orientation and development, ethical and environmental practices, food safety, as well as service quality and reliability.



PERI & SONS FARMS ALIGNS WITH NATIONAL ONION LABS

Yerington, NV-based Peri & Sons has entered a three-year commitment with National Onion Labs for the certification of its domestic sweet onion, Sweetie Sweet. Growing and marketing since 2003, Sweetie Sweet Onions are tightly regulated and available as certified organic and pesticide-residue free. All fields are mapped and samples are collected right before harvest and then sent to NOL, where they are tested for the four characteristics consumers taste; heat, flavor strength, after-taste and sweetness.



CALIFORNIA GIANT WELCOMES ARGENTINEAN BLUEBERRIES

Watsonville, CA-based California Giant is seeing a new blueberry season emerging in South America. Growers in Argentina expect a strong blueberry crop beginning in early October, with a peak in the first three weeks of November. This will transition directly into Chilean blueberry season, scheduled to begin in November. South American volume is expected to increase for California Giant by more than 50 percent over last year.



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Born to Boost Business With Proven Quality and Taste

Consumers demand fresh, safe produce. In fact, they're willing to pay more for produce that comes fresh from a local farm. Jersey Fresh looks and tastes just picked because it is just picked.

Consumer confidence is important. Our Jersey Fresh farmers must meet the high-quality standards of the Jersey Fresh grading program. It's more than an advertising logo. It's a comprehensive program of assuring the highest quality product is coming from our local growers.

Jersey Fresh appeals to consumers because of its guaranteed quality, flavor and freshness. And that's important to today's health-conscious consumer, resulting in easier, quicker repeat sales and a healthier bottom line for you.

Jersey Fresh. It makes your business grow.



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Secretary of Agriculture: Douglas H. Fisher
New Jersey Department of Agriculture 609-292-8853

iPRODUCE — LESSONS THE INDUSTRY CAN LEARN FROM STEVE JOBS

By James Prevor

President & Editor-in-Chief



The death of Steve Jobs requires no memorial here. Along with Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, Jobs altered the everyday lives of countless millions of people, and his life and death have been chronicled everywhere. In truth, Steve Jobs doesn't need many memorials. Each iPhone, iPad, iPod or MacIntosh computer... each Pixar movie and every single iTunes account stands as testimony to the enormity of his contribution to the world.

Nobody else can be Steve Jobs or live his life. We can, however, attempt to draw lessons from his life that can help in the businesses we have and the lives we lead. A lifetime of observation in the produce trade leads to these thoughts:

Avoid Incrementalism

One of the great challenges of business is that we tend to spend enormous amounts of time, energy and money to achieve small, incremental improvements. This is true on an industry policy level at our trade associations and true on a company-by-company level in product development and other areas.

Steve Jobs grew his company not just by incrementally improving his product but by dramatically doing new things. Many people and corporate boards would have dismissed his proposals for the iTunes store or the iPod saying that Apple was a computer company. Many would have rejected proposals for the iPhone, pointing out that Apple was not a telecommunications company. They would have pointed out that these projects were outside Apple's core competency.

Over-Reliance On Market Research

One of the causes of incrementalism in product development is over-reliance on market research, such as focus groups. There is nothing wrong with doing such research, but we fool ourselves into thinking that this type of research will be the source of the great products of the future.

Think of the dynamic. Imagine a focus group or survey prior to the invention of the airplane. The subject: The problems of transatlantic travel. What could come out of it? Perhaps people will propose faster boats or more comfortable cabins. Surely nobody will say, "We need giant birds made of aluminum that will fly hundreds of us across the ocean in a few hours." They would be candidates for the funny farm and thrown out of the group.

The real advances are products that people don't even know they need. One doesn't get that from a focus group.

Marketing Is Primary, Not Secondary

It was Steve Wozniak, not Steve Jobs, who was the technical genius. Yet what Jobs did created infinitely more value. When he got out there each year and turned his annual new product presentations into media events, he gave Apple the cool image of producing insanely great products.

It is hard for those in the produce industry, often rooted in farming that is so tied to the tangible earth, to see that brand creation is the source

of much wealth. Think of it this way: What is more valuable? The name Campbell's Soup and the recipes to make the soup — in other words, the intellectual property — or all the factories that produce the soup and all the trucks that deliver it? It is the name Campbell's Soup and the recipes, because what travels with those assets are a call on shelf space at every supermarket in America. The factories and trucks can be replaced, not so the brand.

Insist On Excellence

Steve Jobs was famously hard on his people, unforgiving of failure and demanding of excellence. He often made people break down in tears. Yet, all the best people wanted to work for him.

The world is demanding and getting more so, and we do a great disservice to people by making them think mediocrity is acceptable. Mediocrity may not be a mortal sin, but it is most certainly not a competitive edge.

Freedom To Fail

It is, of course, the successes that are remembered long after the failures are forgotten, but Jobs had many failures, most notably a computer called LISA, which was a precursor to the Mac, and his own NeXT computer company, which failed as a hardware company, but employed the software that Apple eventually adopted.

One of the hardest things to do in a company is to find someone authorized to lose money. Yet, nobody bats 100 percent, so the only way to get a lot of hits is to have a lot of misses.

In America, failure is not a dirty word; it is the only route to success.

Believe In Oneself

As a teenager, Jobs called up the CEO of Hewlett-Packard and persuaded him to give Jobs free computer chips. Think of the gumption and self-confidence that showed.

The most perfect commercial in the history of the world was shown on the Superbowl broadcast back in 1984 to introduce the Macintosh, which was presented as the alternative to an Orwellian nightmare in which the world, controlled by a dark and evil force — quite conveniently seen as IBM, the Mac's big competitor in those days.

Today, it is lauded as a work of art and commercial genius that positioned the Mac perfectly and garnered hundreds of millions in free publicity for Apple.

What people forget is that Apple's board of directors hated the commercial. Jobs went ahead anyway, denying the older and supposedly wiser board any say in the matter.

The reason there is doubt about Apple's future is because it seems likely that the next guy will bend to the group-think of the board and then the spirit and creativity will be gone.

Despite Herculean efforts and almost a decade to prepare, Apple is likely to have great troubles with its founder and muse gone. The company may go on, it may even become larger and more profitable, yet it is most unlikely to be more creative or contribute better ideas to the world. Improving the world is a task that, always, belongs to the living.



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JIM PREVOR'S

PERISHABLE PUNDIT

Memo To Supermarket CEOs: Don't Kill The Goose That Lays The Golden Egg... Overpricing All Produce Items To Support Cheap Banana Prices Is A Disaster Waiting To Happen

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 09.22.2011

The produce industry is facing a serious threat at the hands of top supermarket executives. CEOs are demanding that produce directors and VPs lower banana prices as a signal of overall price competitiveness for the store, but then expect the same directors and VPs to make up the margin on other produce items. This is resulting in other items being overpriced, thus hurting volumes and new product innovation.

advertising a high-volume item with increased sales or profits on low-volume items. Yet, with the growth of Wal-Mart, deep discounters such as Aldi and Save-a-Lot and the general intensity of competition, top supermarket executives see banana prices as a key signal to consumers regarding the price competitiveness of the overall banner.

They may be right. We've made the same point many times, including when

— would like to see higher produce sales. One important factor that stands in the way of produce reaching its sales potential is that top supermarket executives — in their quest to one-up the competition — are demanding that their produce executives both give away bananas at ridiculously low prices and, somehow, make up the margin within the department. This means that the rest of the items in produce are priced too high, as they have to make up this margin. This weighs disproportionately on new and innovative products and burdens all the rest of the department.

Other categories have been severely damaged by this dynamic. Competition in "wet salads" in the deli, for example, led to intense pressure to sell potato salad, macaroni salad and coleslaw with no margin or negative margins. Since these three items are the big volume-drivers in the department, this created the pressure for very high mark-ups on specialty salads that account for just a small portion of the category.

Whether in wet salads or produce, this dynamic always leads to a reduction in innovation as new low-volume products often are forced to struggle with excessively high-margin requirements. It also serves to distort sales in the department as high prices for everything from berries to tomatoes to potatoes depress sales. It also opens the door for competitors from Walgreen's to farmers' markets to not be so out of line on prices on these non-banana items.

Supermarket CEOs should act to make sure that their overall store promotional needs are paid for by the overall store promotional budget, and that in the desire to be cheap on bananas, the stores don't kill the rest of the department.

Of course, it should be noted that there is a paucity of data supporting the notion that giving away produce is an effective means of enhancing a store's price image. A cheap price on Coke or Tide clearly tells consumers they are getting a bargain. A cheap price on bananas might raise the issue of whether the bananas are not really the best.

Supermarket CEOs should act to make sure that their overall store promotional needs are paid for by the overall store promotional budget, and that in the desire to be cheap on bananas, the stores don't kill the rest of the department.

Bananas are by far the No. 1 selling produce item, and it is not uncommon for bananas to account for 1 percent of total store sales. Other categories, such as berries or tomatoes, may often rank higher than bananas in produce, but that is because these categories include many different items. For example, the berry category includes strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and sometimes organic versions of these items, plus some specialty berries. These often have many SKUs representing many different package sizes.

Though some firms sell red bananas and others specialty and organic bananas, they are typically such minor items that the standard Cavendish bananas stand as a one-item category.

There was a time in which bananas were also the profit powerhouse of the department, producing generous gross margins to go along with high sales. Although produce directors would, of course, sometimes put bananas on ad, they were mindful that it was difficult to make up margin lost by

a recent visit to Wal-Mart Express led us to an Aldi undercutting Wal-Mart prices on bananas.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with a retailer deciding it wishes to offer low prices on particular items. Even utilizing bananas as a loss leader is not immoral. However, if the purpose of offering low price on a particular item is not to maximize produce department profitability but, rather, to attract consumers to the whole store, then the store has to subsidize the loss of margin on bananas out of a whole store marketing budget.

Now some CEOs think banana companies can be ordered to accept lower prices, and typically, businesses try to accommodate the needs of their customers. Yet, rest assured, though one can get contractual changes, in the end, those changes have to be paid for, and the retailer will wind up paying on some product, at some time, in some way.

Everyone — from the First Lady to the retail produce executives and their superiors



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JIM PREVOR'S

PERISHABLE PUNDIT

Pundit's Mailbag: Who Should Pay When Bananas Are The Focus Of A Store's Promotional Effort?

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 09.27.2011

Our piece, *Memo to Supermarket CEOs, Don't Kill The Goose That Lays The Golden Egg... Overpricing All Produce Items To Support Cheap Banana Prices Is A Disaster Waiting To Happen*, brought several replies including this:

Supermarkets have been doing this forever.

Who do you think suffers when the produce department needs to make up for the higher shrink on the organic

If a CEO decided to run a million-dollar TV campaign saying, "Our store has the lowest prices," everyone would think him out of his mind if he tells the senior produce executives to bill the cost of that ad to the produce department.

items? The supermarkets raise the prices on the conventionally grown.

This has been a never-ending battle. Retailers always tell us growers that grocery works on 1-2 percent margins so they have to make it up in produce and shampoo.

Never ending story.

— Tom O'Brien
President
C&D Fruit and Vegetable
Bradenton, Florida

Tom is generous in sharing his views on industry issues, and we've been pleased to feature his comments in a number of other Mailbags we have posted.

In this case, we actually think our point is a subtle one. We don't have any particular objection to retail CEOs wanting to use particular items as flags to identify a low price image to consumers. In some stores, that flag may be chopped meat; in others, bread; and sometimes it may be bananas.

Our suggestion is related to how this promotional investment should be paid for. If a CEO decided to run a million-dollar TV campaign saying, "Our store has

the lowest prices," everyone would think him out of his mind if he tells the senior produce executives to bill the cost of that ad to the produce department.

Yet if the CEO decides that instead of taking a million-dollar TV buy, he wants to take a million-dollar hit on banana margins, then if he doesn't change departmental margin requirements or subsidize the promotion in some way, he is, in fact, charging the produce department for the cost of that overall store promotion.

Now, in the end, this is a choice the CEO gets to make. We received another letter speaking to that point:

Regardless of the industry, CEO's have a business macro view and department heads a micro view.

Never knew a department head that didn't question a different approach, but it is up to them to support their position, and then if they fail to change the CEO's mind, do their best to make the requested application work.

It's like the head football coach overriding one of the offensive or defensive coordinators. Some ideas work and some don't, but communications is a key. After all, it's a team effort.

— David Diver

Former Vice President of Produce
Hannaford Brothers

Dave is 100 percent correct. The CEO has to make the choice. We were making the argument that the choice should not be to arbitrarily burden the department that happens to feature the item being promoted.

There are many ways to handle this. In some stores, the burden of being the big draw rotates, and produce may get the job just in the summer. That may work out fairly.

But if the decision is to take, year-round, the biggest volume item in the produce department and make no money on it so as to persuade consumers to shop the overall store, we will stick to our guns and say that this is not a cost that should be borne by increasing margins on other produce items.

It is an overall store marketing expense and should be handled as such. CEOs should want to handle it that way because spreading the marketing cost across the store will result in less distortion of sales than if the whole cost is put on fresh produce items.

Many thanks to Tom and Dave for their thoughtful notes.

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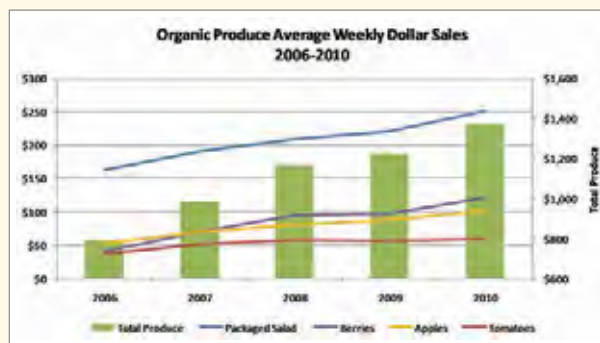
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Organic Produce Gaining Shelf Space, Sales

BY STEVE LUTZ AND KELLI BECKEL, PERISHABLES GROUP

Sales of organic fruits and vegetables in supermarkets have grown steadily since 2006, even through the midst of a recession. Despite higher price points than conventional counterparts, organic produce is proving its staying power within consumers' baskets.



Source: Perishables Group FreshFacts® Powered by Nielsen

The Perishables Group recently examined sales trends for the top organic categories in the produce department. Between 2006 and 2010, supermarket dollar sales of organic produce increased 73.3 percent, which is even small in comparison to some individual categories. For example, organic berries increased sales by nearly 200 percent during the five-year time period, compared to the category's overall growth (including organic and conventional) of 30 percent.

The positive trend continued in the 52 weeks ending July 30, 2011, as 13 of 19 organic vegetable categories increased sales compared to the prior year. Fruit displayed the same upward pattern, with 12 of 14 organic fruits increasing sales.

While a growing base of loyal consumers is supporting organic fruit and vegetables' growth, the increase is also fueled by more organic items on store shelves. Even as store shelves are increasingly crowded, retailers increased the number of unique organic produce items on shelves during the latest 52 weeks. The most notable increase was in organic value-added produce, where there were 40.4 percent more unique items on shelves in the 52 weeks ending July 30, 2011, compared to the prior year.

Organics: The Success Story Of Packaged Salads

As the highest selling organic produce item, packaged salad sales are critical to understanding organic trends throughout the entire department. Since the recession hit, the packaged salad category struggled as consumers switched to lower-priced bulk lettuce and salad ingredients. However, organic packaged salad is the apparent success story in the category. The number of households that purchased packaged salad increased 1.6 percent in the 52 weeks ending June 25, 2011. During the same period, household penetration for the category

overall and for every other packaged salad variety declined, with the exception of broad leaf spinach salad.

Aiding the success of organic packaged salad was the fact that its price remained steady in the past year, up just 0.6 percent, while its primary competitors, garden salads and blends, increased prices more substantially. Organic salad still carries a higher price point than its conventional counterparts, but consumers are willing to pay the premium because many consider organic as an indication of quality.

Product	Household Penetration	Change vs Year Ago	Trips per Buyer	Change vs Year Ago
Packaged Salad	71.3%	-1.9	7	-3.3%
Salad Blends	44.5%	-2.1	4	-0.8%
Premium Garden Salad	34.8%	-2.6	3	-5.0%
Regular Garden Salad	27.8%	-2.6	3	-0.4%
Organic Salad	18.5%	1.6	4	4.6%

Source: Perishables Group FreshFacts® Shopper Insights powered by Spire

Based on the performance declines in garden salads and blends, it can be implied that packaged salad consumers are switching their purchases from garden and blend salads to organic salads.

Given its positive momentum, organic packaged salad can be positioned to grow sales for the category by continuing to drive innovation and keeping prices steady within organic salads.

How Can Retailers Capitalize On The Growth Of Organics?

Based on consumer surveys conducted by the Perishables Group, organic buyers in conventional supermarkets are different from buyers in natural food stores. While heavy organic food users frequent supermarkets, they clearly prefer to regularly shop the natural foods channel. Conversely, lighter organic users — driven more by convenience and price — are much less likely to deviate from established shopping patterns or seek out organic foods beyond their normal conventional supermarket shopping trip.

The high potential organic customer in a conventional supermarket is a crossover-shopper, comparing organic and conventional prices, quality and product differences. These individuals are less committed to "organic only," so they are more sensitive to product and price comparisons between organic and conventional items. As a result, these target consumers are more likely to purchase when the organic product choices are convenient, accessible and easily comparable with the conventional items they regularly purchase.

When it comes to organic potential, all supermarkets are not created equal. Based on Spectra demographic profiles and performance, the organic opportunity for supermarkets lies with the stores located in affluent, suburban neighborhoods with older shoppers.

Once high-opportunity stores are identified, how do retailers get the shelf space to expand organic products in already crowded produce departments? Within high potential stores, replacing selected conventional items with substitute organic products (versus just adding an organic SKU) offers a stronger opportunity to maximize organic product visibility and shelf turns while minimizing shrink. This focused substitution strategy for key organic items allows the supermarket to reduce SKU count, improve shelf visibility and significantly enhance the store image as a provider of high quality organic and natural foods.



The Perishables Group is an independent consulting firm focused on innovation and creating value for clients in the fresh food industry. Find them online at www.perishablesgroup.com

Organics Among Marketing's Sweet Spots

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

This study by The Perishables Group is genuinely helpful to those looking to maximize produce sales. We are fortunate to have many retailers share their category numbers with us, and one of the standouts is that the numbers often look bad at first glance, with, for example, berries and packaged salads in decline. This, however, is often only true because many retailers maintain a separate organic category. If one restructures numbers, putting, say, organic berries back into the berry category, many of these categories are doing quite fine.

Steve Lutz and Kelli Beckel provide good guidance to the trade by pointing out that increased sales of organics in mainstream supermarkets may not tell us much about consumers deciding to "buy organic." The best way to understand these purchases of organic is to see organic as a kind of "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," in which consumers impute all kinds of characteristics of quality that may or may not actually correspond with organic.

They are also sharp to point to the growth of organic as being driven by two industry trends: The addition of organic product lines and the substitution of organic for conventional on certain product lines.

The imputation of qualities to organic — safety, flavor, freshness, etc. — that may not actually be there is similar to the dynamic one sees with Kosher foods where many who are not religious, or not Jewish, and thus not concerned with the religious aspects of Kosher, see the Kosher seal as a more generalized sign of quality. Smart marketers have long played on this, as when Empire Kosher poultry hired Pearl Bailey to do commercials saying that her mother taught her to only buy a Kosher chicken.

The decision to utilize only an organic SKU is often smart for a retailer as those consumers who insist upon organic will only buy organic, whereas most shoppers will buy either conventional or organic. On

low volume items, movement can't justify two SKUs, so in many stores it makes sense to carry only organic.

For the industry, though, it is worth noting that this only also serves to distort the organic numbers in the same way that the decision to make all Coke products Kosher distorts the size of the Kosher market. We are now selling lot of organics to consumers who don't care much about organics.

A switch of product sales to organic is usually a plus all through the supply chain. Growers make a higher margin, typically, because restraints on organic growing — notably a three-year transition before a field can be sold as organic — constrain supply. Retailers typically draw margin off the price point so they make more money on this more expensive item.

There is, however, a cautionary note for the trade in this story. An increase in dollar sales of organic product may make up for a decrease in dollar sales for conventional, yet still result in a decline in volume of produce being sold.

Also astute is the point that organic is a bifurcated market. There are consumers who simply won't buy anything that is not organic. However, these consumers are not typically shopping at mainstream supermarkets. This means there are two totally different approaches required in the decision to buy and merchandise organics. Quite obviously, if one is operating a natural foods store focused on organics, the imperative is to have a supply of organics. Price may impact volume but, in general, these consumers will pay what they must to get organically grown produce.

In a conventional supermarket, consumers make choices. In a more affluent community, they have options to pay more to buy organic. If the differential is not too great, they often decide to do so. The conventional supermarket industry bifurcates again on this issue as shopping venues serving more modest incomes don't have the discretionary income to opt for organic.

Some find it incongruous that organic

demand has grown through the recession. There are many explanations: one is that there is a backlog of unsatisfied demand on organics because of the difficulty of increasing organic production. Another is that the industry has focused on products that higher income buyers will purchase, and many of these are organic. A third thought is that during tough times, many families cancel or defer major purchases, say a big vacation or a new car or a home expansion. This means that their disposable income, defined as that available to purchase food, actually could increase in tough times. So people can splurge in small indulgences such as organic raspberries.

This is about organics, but all these variables apply to many things in the department.

The big message of this study, though, is that produce marketing has gotten more challenging. This is about organics, but all these variables apply to many things in the department. This study is saying that producers need to target for the sweet spots in the market, and retailers need to target to maximize sales and profits from the consumers they serve. This really is not your father's produce industry anymore.

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCE BUSINESS COVERAGE

Produce From Farm To Fork

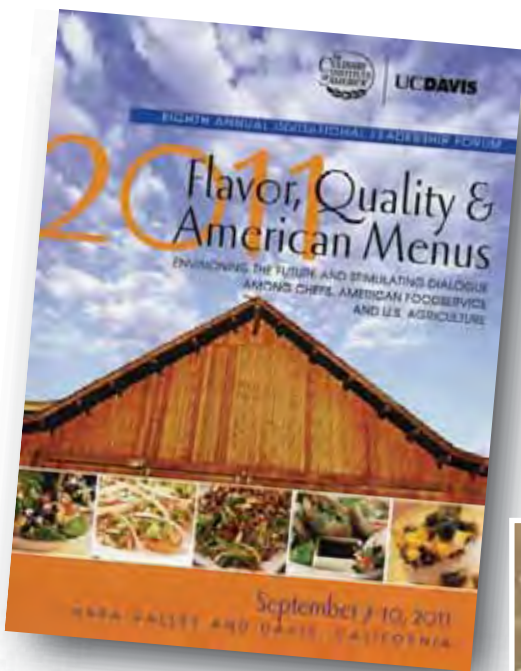
Foodservice executives and chefs connect produce production with menus at Flavor, Quality and American Menus Invitational Leadership Forum.

BY KEN WHITACRE

On September 7-10, PRODUCE BUSINESS was invited to attend the 8th Annual Flavor, Quality and American Menus Invitational Leadership Forum, hosted by the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena, CA. Created in conjunction with the University of California, Davis, this retreat provided venues for “networking, information- and idea-sharing and advancing both American agriculture and the food and beverage industries that depend on it.”

Many of the nation’s most influential chefs and foodservice-industry leaders met with leaders in U.S. agriculture and the produce industry to build bridges and stimulate new thinking about the future of U.S. agriculture. Attendees were immersed in learning about culinary trends, demographic shifts, ag policy, sustainability and many other issues affecting today’s foodservice industry. Among the highlights of the event:

- 1) Interactive tastings of produce created in unique ways by the CIA students and faculty.
- 2) Sessions on American hotspots of flavor in cities such as Austin, Chicago, Los Angeles, Portland and Seattle. Chefs from each of these areas demonstrated their latest menu items.
- 3) Tour of UC Davis’s Wolfskill Experimental Orchards, home to extensive plantings of tree fruits, nuts and other fruit varieties and the Farm on Putah Creek, a working farm and home of the Center for Land-Based Learning – both located near Winters, CA.
- 4) Presentations by produce sponsors, many of which brought in their own chefs to discuss different ways to present produce on menus.
- 5) A full day of creative interaction and cooking by the chefs and ag leaders to meet the challenge of the USDA’s MyPlate initiative. (Most of the photos depicted on these pages were taken during the MyPlate challenge.)




8TH ANNUAL FLAVOR, QUALITY AND AMERICAN MENUS INVITATIONAL LEADERSHIP FORUM



8TH ANNUAL FLAVOR, QUALITY AND AMERICAN MENUS INVITATIONAL LEADERSHIP FORUM





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to over 200 trucks, shipping a full line of mixed vegetables throughout North America!

Nery's best memories are of "Pa Pa George" Boskovich bringing in coffee and donuts to the field early mornings, or hamburgers at night back when Nery and his crew were working long hours. "Things like that made me feel like I work with the family...instead of just for them," said Nery. As long as I can be of service to Boskovich, I'll be here."



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Food Bloggers And Their Influence On Produce Consumers

Produce executives are figuring out fast the influential sphere of bloggers and how to best use their expertise to get the word out about their products.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

In the mid-90s, we were amazed at the success of television cooking shows and their influence on consumers. Little could we have envisioned anything dwarfing the potential influence of food shows. However, we're at just such a juncture today as food blogging is poised to become a significant influencer for consumers of produce.

"Food bloggers are a huge asset to the produce industry for many reasons," says Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission (CAC). "They provide exposure for brands, retailers and foodservice operators as a trusted third-party voice, and they serve as an authentic and independent voice for commodities. Key bloggers have a tremendous following among consumers and can reach them very quickly."

"This is a huge opportunity, especially for the produce industry," agrees Wendy McManus, marketing director for the National Mango Board (NMB) in Orlando, FL. "Many food bloggers focus on fresh ingredients, healthier eating and the impor-

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tance of cooking at home using real food. This is an ideal fit for the produce industry."

Food blogging provides an effective and personal way for the produce industry to reach consumers. "Bloggers provide an incredibly compelling opportunity to connect with consumers," says Lorna D. Christie, chief operating officer for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in Newark, DE. "Social media is a relationship-builder, and this gives us a way we've never

had before to connect to the consumer."

"Food, nutrition and family blogs are an excellent way for us to communicate with consumers who speak the same language as we do," adds Chris Mayhew, marketing director for Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc., headquartered in Monterey, CA. "The more we engage with key food bloggers, the more we develop brand champions and ambassadors who tell our story to their millions of readers on our behalf."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

The California Avocado Commission recruits a number of different bloggers to include its products in their recipes.

"I see blogs as having a greater influence in the future especially for produce," states Matt Landi, produce director for New Leaf Community Markets in Santa Cruz, CA, with six stores. "In an industry where things change so quickly, we need to be able to actively promote through this type of real-time communication. Other departments have greater leeway to plan ahead of time what they want to promote. This medium gives us a marketing tool that fits into our short timing."

The challenge is to jump on the blogging wagon and blaze ahead. "It's a brave new world, and it's better to figure out how to be a part of it rather than let the world pass by," says Samantha Cabaluna, director of

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“It’s great to have the blogger tell the story instead of it always coming from us. The third-party testimonial makes it more credible. We’ve always enjoyed educating the consumer and this is yet another way to accomplish it.”

— Robert Schueller, Melissa’s/World Variety Produce Inc.

communications for Earthbound Farm, located in San Juan Bautista, CA.

“The produce industry needs to find a way to reach out more through blogs,” concurs Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets in Parsippany, NJ, with 24 Kings and six Balducci’s stores. “Specific companies are targeting their customers, but as a whole, we need to do a better job reaching our future consumers.”

“This is a newer concept with respect to

promoting products,” acknowledges Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce Inc., in Vernon, CA. “It can be a very effective tool, as opposed to traditional advertising.”

Who Are They?

There is no set definition of a food blogger, and the plethora of blogs on the web attest to the diverse nature of this medium. “Food blogging is an expression of the ever-increasing interest in food in this

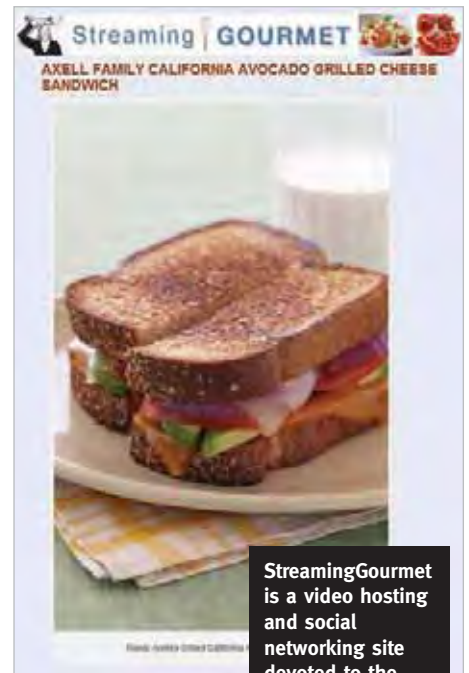


PHOTO COURTESY OF STREAMINGGOURMET

StreamingGourmet is a video hosting and social networking site devoted to the culinary world.

country,” explains Cabaluna. “There are widely read blogs and blogs that are really local in nature with smaller followings. They all have their own role to play.”

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“Consumers trust food bloggers more than commercial or print advertisement. More and more people are turning to food blogs as a means of gathering information.”

— Tessa Arias, *Handle The Heat*

“Each blogger has his or her own approach and identity,” says Catherine M. Merritt, founder and editor of *The Chicago Foodie* blog in Chicago, IL. “I approach my site as a social and conversational narrative. I don’t pretend to be a hard-hitting journalist. I’m writing about my own experiences, recipes and thoughts, and I try to engage with my community through my posts.”

“There are many bloggers out there talking about food,” says Kneeland. “The more popular ones are of a specific orientation like family issues or *SeriousEats*.”

In general, the food blogs divide up

into a few major categories. PMA’s Christie explains, “Currently, the most popular ones are the Classic Chef, the Mommy Bloggers and the Individual Consumer. Mommy Bloggers have a very powerful influence on retail purchases. As a category, they have a tendency to be very pro-locally grown and organic.”

“Recipe Bloggers focus on posting recipes and inspire people to try and buy fresh produce,” explains Hazel Kelly, client promotions manager for Frieda’s Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. “The Mommy Bloggers write about good deals and family-friendly cooking.”

“The Classic Chef tends to focus on

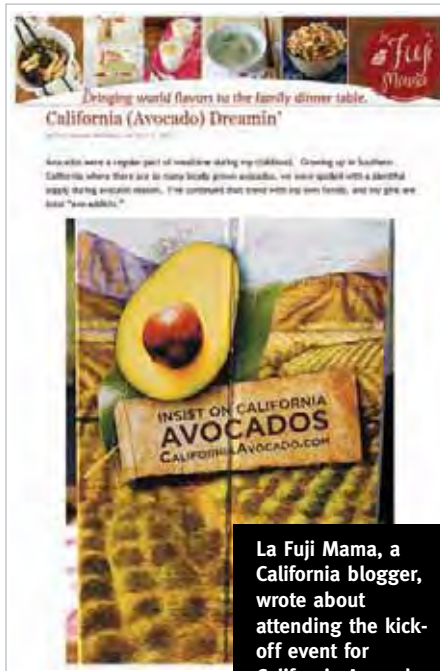


PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

La Fuji Mama, a California blogger, wrote about attending the kick-off event for California Avocado Week.

locally grown and organic, and reports on major trends in the foodservice sector,” Christie adds. “The Individual Consumer is more of a review or critique and often

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reports on the latest 'hot' restaurant."

Food bloggers defy the boundaries of traditional media, experiencing a more direct relationship with their readers and using more rapid delivery technology. "These food bloggers are passionate about the culinary world and inspire their followers

to have a stronger emotional engagement," says the CAC's DeLyster. "Bloggers are citizen journalists that don't have to wait for a news cycle before posting content. They can draft their story and place it immediately."

"Although they generally reach a smaller audience, food bloggers can make a deep

impact on their readers," acknowledges NMB's McManus. "The relationship between a food blogger and his or her readers becomes like a friendship. The readers feel like they know the blogger, so a recommendation of a product or recipe is more impactful."

> The New York Produce Show Hits The Blogosphere

What I Learned At This Year's NYC Produce Show

This week I was invited to attend a media tour at the NYC Produce Show and Conference, and learned about everything from tomato vending machines, avocados that don't turn brown, and yes, even my new favorite slogan (lesson #5) "Veggies for Breakfast!" — so check out my "What I Learned at the NY Produce Show" list...

Produce Show? "What's that?" I said. I honestly had no clue what to expect, but anything that involves lots of fruits and veggies: count me in!

VEGGIE HEAVEN

Veggies. Fruit. Produce as far as the eye can see! New products, trends and marketing promos. But as much as I loved the abundance of produce on display, my favorite part of the day was chatting with the representatives of the companies whose goods I buy and eat everyday.

I kept thinking, wow these folks must love me — I'm vegan! Vegans are their biggest customers!

Everyone was there! Name a produce company and they were there! Melissa's, Calavo, Bolthouse Farms, Nasoya, Del Monte, Sunkist, Dole, Chiquita and more. I was kinda starstruck — er —vegiestruck? I wandered around the floor going up to booths with glossy eyes, mumbling how much I love their produce or products. I felt like a *Twilight* fan telling Robert Pattinson how much I love him. Only instead of vampires, I was raving about produce.

And now, my "What I learned at the NY Produce Show" List:

1) Don't Fear The Rambutan! Funny, I always feared the Rambutan with its spiky pink skin. But I learned that a Rambutan is easy to peel

— easier to peel than it is to pronounce. Easier than peeling an orange! The skin is soft and pliable. The tender, slick fruit inside tastes rosy-sweet/tart — like a lychee. Thanks Melissa's Produce for letting me take one home! Such a pretty fruit.

2) Veggie Vending! Vending machines for tomatoes are possible! And pretty cool. Sunset brand machine.

3) People Hate Brown Food! I spotted lots of foods that don't turn brown when they oxidize (avocados, apples).

4) Mache (mosh) Is Posh! The trendy green Mache is not pronounced "ma-shay" but rather simply, "mosh." Also, Mache is high in naturally occurring Omega-3s! A 3-oz. serving contains 12 percent RDA of Omega-3 fatty acid. Mache is also a healthy source of potassium, folic acid, iron, zinc, lutein and vitamins A & C...all from the Epic Roots brand you've probably seen in stores.

5) Eat Veggies for Breakfast! The latest trend in the produce world is getting people to use ordinary fruits and veggies for out-of-the-ordinary uses and meals, like using veggies for breakfast. It's all about changing your mindset and stereotypes about certain foods. Did you know that a baked potato with the skin on has just as much potassium as a banana? Hmm, breakfast mashed potatoes anyone? I kid.

Seriously, I love this idea. I've long been a fan of eating salads for breakfast. I especially love creamy chilled salads in the morning with lots of chopped nuts/seeds on top. My vegan Seedy Tahini cole slaw made a yummy breakfast bowl as I recall. It's OK to crave greens in the morning and oatmeal and

fruit at night! Eat outside the box.

6) Fortified Tofu — genius! Nasoya now carries a new product called TofuPlus, which is fortified tofu. There is also something called Sprouted Tofu. They also carry

Fortune Cookies as part of their line!

7) Colors Gone Wild! Colorful Harvest brand produces all varieties of unique colorful veggies like purple cauliflower, red corn, purple artichokes, rainbow carrots and more. Also, did you know that when it comes to food allergies, just because you are allergic to say, orange carrots, you may not be allergic to white carrots.

Color pigments in foods can have a major impact on allergies! I discovered once that I was slightly allergic to purple kale, but not regular kale.

8) Lemongrass Flavor From A Tube! Gourmet Garden herbs and spices (a company that originated in Australia) has cool tube-based herb and spice blends. Everything from basil to garlic paste to Italian herbs and more. My favorite was the lemon-



grass flavor. I gave it a taste and it was salty, moist and full of flavor, and so much easier than buying a stalk of lemongrass.

9) Stringless Snap Peas! Mann's (a 70 percent woman-owned company) Snap Peas come in a cool "stringless" form — peas without the thick vein. Kinda neat for the vein-phobes out there who don't like the

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHY PATALSKY

What Influence Do They Have?

While food blogs' direct influence on produce sales is difficult to pinpoint, they do play a significant role. "Since blogging is just one piece of the marketing mix, it is difficult to isolate and measure its impact on sales," states DeLyser. "However, they are a valuable component of our marketing program. There is benefit from the excitement and

chewiness of traditional snap peas. Another Mann's fun fact: Mann's created and owns the registered trademark for Broccolini — the veggie with thin broccoli-like stalks.

10) I Like The Perishable Pundit. Produce Show founder, Jim Prevor, has a blog called The Perishable Pundit, in which he discusses his latest finds and discoveries in the world of produce — including events, health studies, brands and more.

11) Tweeting Veggies Is In! Yes, even the produce industry is social media savvy! Many companies told me to check them out on Facebook and Twitter.

12) Consumers Are La Just kidding, sort of...there was a huge emphasis on packaged goods that were pre-washed, ready-to-eat and the bags were even microwave-friendly. I'm not a fan of microwaving veggies though, because they won't taste as good as when you roast, boil, saute, braise or grill them.

13) Selling To Kids Lots of kid-themed products including dipper combos (hummus with crackers, apples with peanut butter) There was



even one in the shape of a Mickey Mouse head.

14) Avocados That Don't Brown! Chiquita was showing off its Peruvian Avocado that does not turn brown when sliced open! Really, it sat out for hours and was still bright green. It has something to do with increasing the amount of moisture in the avocado. Chiquita also has packaged apple bites (great for kids) that don't brown.

15) People Are Generous If you ask the Calavo avocado guys nicely, they will give you a bag of avocados. And the Foxy guy was glad to give me a box of strawberries to take home. I like free fruit samples!

16) Organic Is Still In "Local" is Growing. Organic produce is still in demand. And the organic trend is, in essence, what re-

enthusiasm bloggers have for California avocados and the recipes they pass on. They build awareness through their communication, often motivating their readers to try new recipes and purchase ingredients."

"It's difficult — if not impossible — to draw a direct line from positive blog coverage to purchases in store," agrees McManus of the NMB. "However, lack of

ignited the "local" farm-to-table trend in restaurants because chefs 'organic' status wasn't as unique anymore. Restaurants have turned to using the locally sourced philosophy to differentiate themselves.

17) We Want A Vegan Salad it! Fresh Express has a cool new product with Artisan Lettuces that are so sweet and flavorful you can "eat them without dressing." I noticed they also have a new Strawberry Fields Salad Kit. I then asked them if they were experimenting with any vegan soy-based protein salad kits. He said no. But don't you think that would be a great idea?! So many chicken salad kits — why not try a tempeh/seitan or baked tofu salad kit! Fresh Express: what do you think? Reminder: Veg is in.

18) Consumers Love Strawberries! In the Salinas Valley, strawberries continue to triumph. Strawberry fields have taken over a large percentage of the farming crops where there used to be artichokes, greens and Brussels sprouts.

19) Kids Like Characters Companies like Walter P. Rawl (family-owned since 1925) are using entertainment outlets like TV programming (*T W*) to market their veggies to kids. They call it Sports Candy! Remember how Popeye made spinach big? Same thing.

20) Produce It's a Family Thing Many of the companies are long-time family-owned businesses passed down for generations. I like that.

21) Mini Is In! Mini-sized produce varieties are not only adorable, but also quite trendy (if you can find them in stores). From

knowledge and low awareness are two key barriers to purchases of mangos. We see food bloggers often teaching their readers how to select, ripen and cut mangos. Our assessment is that food bloggers are contributing to the increased mango sales we are experiencing at retail and foodservice."

"In the store, we'll hear sporadic reports

mini pineapples to mini baby cauliflowers. Fun and cute.

22) Produce Growers are Proud! The reps at the booths were proud and excited to talk all about their products. I felt right at home with all these people so excited about fruits and veggies!



23) Trend Salad Toppings

Dry mixes of pre-blended mixtures of seeds, nuts, dried fruit, spices and more.

24) Chefs Are ing Chefs offer creative ideas to the produce industry. Chefs (and bloggers!) can help consumers see that a grapefruit can be eaten in different ways than simply as a breakfast dish. A number of companies are working with chefs to create featured recipes using their produce (example: Walter P. Rawl is working with Paula Deen). There were chefs at the show doing live demos.

25) Trend Black Garlic The live cooking demo at Christopher Ranch's station featured black garlic, and it smelled fantastic!

26) Fo Lettuce The produce brand "Foxy" was not named after a fox, but actually named after the 70s hip slang term "foxy," as in, "Hey groovy babe, you're foxy!"

27) Don't Leave The Show With Your Name Tag n When I arrived home, I realized I had trekked all the way home (walking/subway) wearing my giant conference name badge. Whoops. Hello New York City subway riders, "My name is Kathy! And I'm from *Th h h* blog." :)

Hope you all learned a few new things from my list! Now, go out there and try a Rambutan...

(Excerpted from Kathy Patalsky's blog, www.lunchboxbunch.com, 1/11/2010)

“A strong network of connected food bloggers has the ability to get information to millions of consumers quickly. For example, my post on strawberry cherries reached nearly 10,000 readers.”

— Tessa Arias, Handle The Heat

from people saying they read something on this or that blog,” reports Kings’ Kneeland. “I suspect it will get stronger as social media becomes even more mainstream, especially with increased Smart phone use.”

The combination of the size of bloggers’ influence spheres and the rapid dissemination of their information is powerful. “Tens of thousands of food blogs are read by millions of people every month,” says Elise Bauer, publisher of *SimplyRecipes.com* and *FoodBlogAlliance.com*. “Millions of people are inspired to cook what they are reading about on blogs. *Simply Recipes* alone

reaches over 5 million unique visitors a month. The top food blogs combined easily reach over 20 million unique visitors a month. That’s a lot of impact.”

Bil Goldfield, communications manager for Dole Fresh Fruit Co., in Westlake Village, CA, acknowledges, “Many of the bloggers we work with have significant followings in the hundreds of thousands. These bloggers may have started as a hobby, but over time, they evolved into full-time, nationally recognized experts on health, nutrition, seasonal recipes, family meals and the like. A recommendation by a top blogger — even if only



PHOTO COURTESY OF KITCHEN CONFIDANTE

Kitchen Confidante spotlighted Cumin Glazed Ribs with California Avocado Pineapple Salsa, a recipe by Chefs Milliken & Feniger.

in recipe form — tends to carry a lot more weight than other media influencers.”

Bloggers have the ability to affect very specific products. “A strong network of

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> Meet The Bloggers

Food blogs are customized, personal sites and each has its own orientation and audience. “Bloggers are a great gateway in connecting consumers to brands in all spectrums,” says Catherine M. Merritt, with The Chicago Foodie blog in Chicago, IL. “Blogs are hyper-localized and specialized allowing produce associations to connect with core audiences. It’s no longer trying to cast a huge net, but rather, honing in on more targeted

consumers and sharing the story with them so they can share it with others.”
 Merritt’s blog gets about 10,000 visits per month and has been singled out as a favorite by a number of bloggers in the industry. “I know my readers trust me and come to me with questions,” says Amy Sherman, creator of the blog, in San Francisco, CA. “They’re often

looking for guidance on ingredients, cooking techniques and inspiration.”

Sherman has worked with Earthbound Farms, Driscoll’s, espri and Melissa’s to help introduce readers to different kinds of produce and recipes. She develops recipes for commodity boards like the California Avocado Commission, Pacific Northwest Canned Pears and others. “Reader response has been very positive,” Sherman says. “The produce industry has a great opportunity to reach consumers through blogs that already have a strong following.”

And she has around 2,000 subscribers and 150,000 to 200,000 visits a month. “I have an influence on what my readers cook, bake, eat and buy,” asserts Tessa Arias, blogging from Phoenix, AZ. “Consumers trust food bloggers more than commercial or print advertisement. More and more people are turning to food blogs as a means of gathering information.”

Her blog is mainly a recipe blog with a focus on telling the story about the ingredients. It’s a smaller, targeted blog with around 100 Twitter followers. “It’s fascinating to me how food blogs are bringing people back to cooking and tying in with whole food, organic and other movements,” says Christine Pittman, writer of the blog, in Oviedo, FL. “My blog is about juggling the factors of life with providing healthy food.”

And she has approximately 50 RSS and email subscribers, over 1,200 Facebook fans, and nearly 1,000 Twitter followers. “My readers are actively trying to pursue a healthier lifestyle and my focus is about how to do so with diet and nutrition while still enjoying our food,” says Andrew Wilder, out of Santa Monica, CA. “I strive to provide new, creative ideas for my readers, as well as present interesting arguments and opinions on healthful eating, food politics and other food-related issues.”

The culinary site has 10,000 readers and covers a wide range of recipes and food information. “I inform and engage, share and educate,” says Stephanie Stiavetti in Oakland, CA. “More than anything, my readers come to me for recipes they can trust.” **pb**

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“Bloggers not only blog about the food, but also about the people who grow the food. As you approach bloggers, don’t forget your story. The story the consumer is looking for is identical to the one we have.”

— Lorna Christie, Produce Marketing Association

connected food bloggers has the ability to get information to millions of consumers quickly,” recognizes Stephanie Stiavetti, food writer with *The Culinary Life* blog in Oakland, CA. “For example, my post on strawberry cherries reached nearly 10,000 readers.”

“Often we’ll have customers come in and ask about something they’ve seen on a blog, just like they do with magazines,” reports New Leaf’s Landi. “Blogging allows the information to move faster and can influence how fast a trend can spread. It’s a little more interactive because people are picking and choosing the information they want through

the blog they follow.”

Engaging Bloggers

Several forward-looking produce companies have jumped headfirst into the blogging world. The National Mango Board started outreach to food bloggers on a small scale in 2006 and now regularly includes bloggers in media outreach. It has hosted recipe contests specifically for bloggers, and has attended events catering to food bloggers. “The results have been good and getting stronger each year as we learn more about how to successfully work with food blog-

gers,” says McManus.

This year at the BlogHer Food Conference, the NMB presented a unique on-site activity. McManus explains, “We set up a professional video set with a backdrop, professional lights, audio and two cameras. Bloggers were invited into the booth to film their own ‘How to cut a mango’ video. The Top Ten videos were selected by the NMB, and they competed in an online contest with the public voting to choose the winner.”

Dole has been engaging with bloggers for several years but started implementing integrated programs last year. In November 2010, Dole hosted the first Dole Health and Wellness Summit, a company-wide event designed to give top-tier food, health and nutrition bloggers a first-ever inside look into the world of Dole. Goldfield explains, “The two-day event featured brand presentations, a new-products showcase, a nutritional panel discussion, hands-on cooking demonstrations and tours of Dole’s headquarters, including the company’s famous health-centric cafeteria.”

“The inaugural event resulted in dozens of positive posts and trip reports seen by

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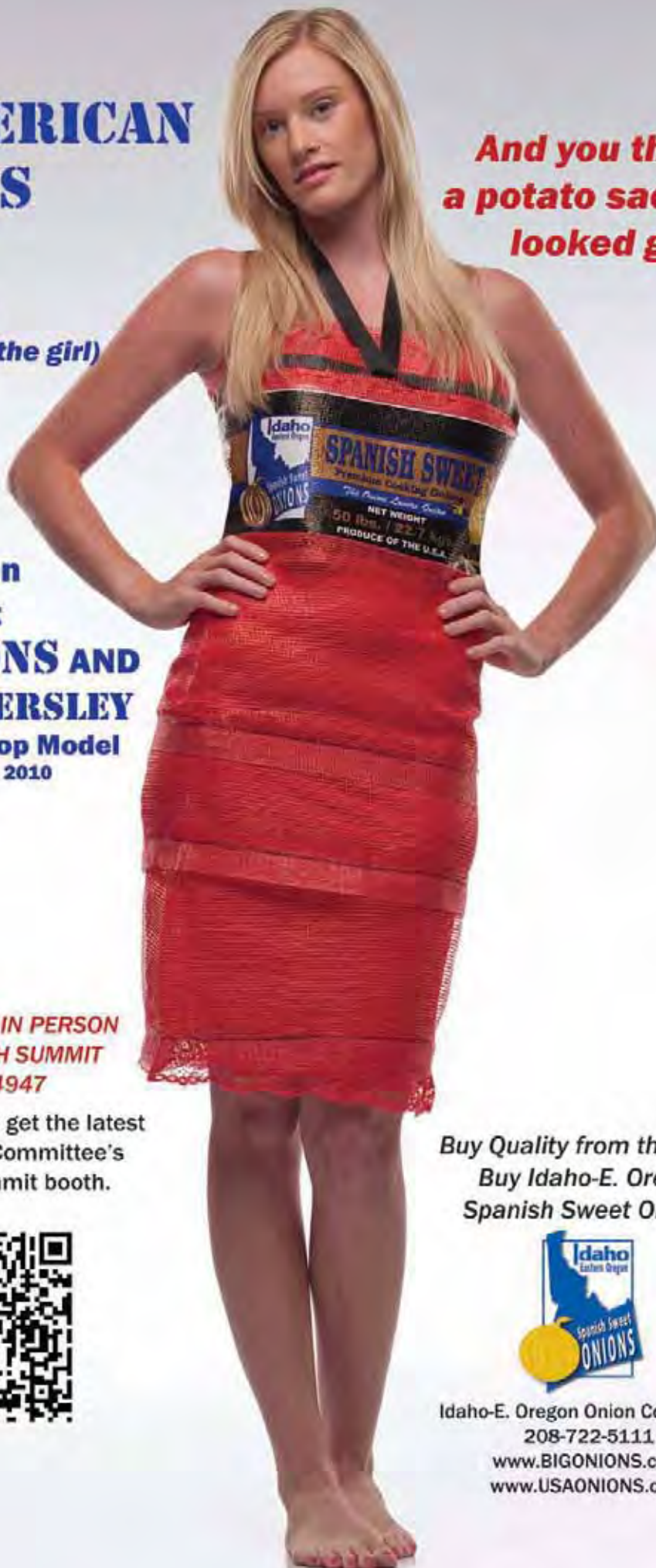
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millions of consumers,” reports Goldfield. “More importantly, it solidified the image of Dole as leader in nutritional education and inspired, healthful living and set the stage for a number of other future blogger- and social media-focused events.”

Earlier this year, Dole Fresh Vegetables hosted the Dole Salad Summit in Monterey, CA, to dive deeper into the world of salad and fresh vegetables with some of the nation’s most followed food and family bloggers. “It was our first salad-specific blogger

and social media event,” says Mayhew. “Beyond new product samplings and Dole Salads-inspired lunches and dinners at area restaurants, the two-day event was highlighted by a farmer-led tour of the Dole Salads growing fields and processing plant and a Salad University class.”

Dole also engaged bloggers in smaller events targeting specific cities or seasons. Goldfield explains, “This year’s Go Bananas After Dark tour featured two-hour blogger dinners in Minneapolis, Salt Lake City and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES

Bloggers who attended the Dole Salad Summit were treated to a Salad University class and tours of lettuce fields and Dole’s processing plant.

Jacksonville and gave us the opportunity to demo recipes, discuss product benefits and engage in two-way conversations. Retailers in each city also participated.”

Melissa’s focuses on educating bloggers, who in turn, educate readers. “It’s great to have the blogger tell the story instead of it always coming from us,” says Schueller. “The third-party testimonial makes it more credible. We’ve always enjoyed educating the consumer and this is yet another way to accomplish it.”

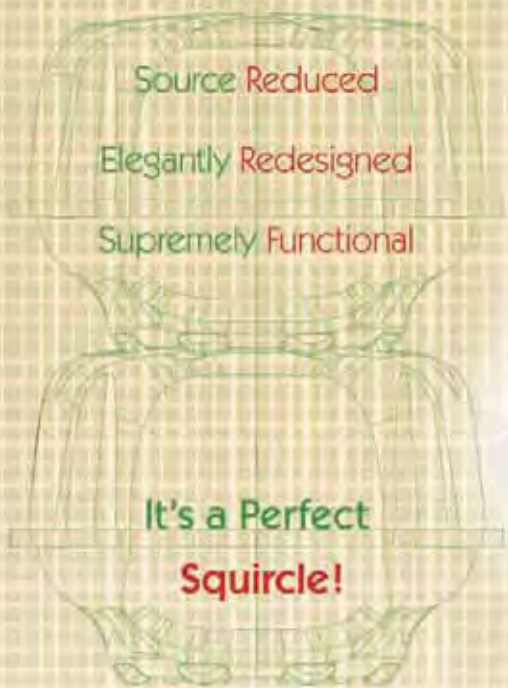
Recently, Bristol Farms in Carson, CA, referenced a Melissa’s product in its store blog. Schueller details, “We’ve been roasting Hatch chiles in select stores for about five years to help educate consumers about this unique product. Bristol Farms blogged about this year’s demo on its store blog to spread

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PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA
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Bloggers from the White On Rice Couple posted a documentary on California avocados, along with some beautiful pictures of the groves.

the word to their customers.”

Kings has worked with some food bloggers in its Short Hills store's Experience Food Cooking Studio. New Leaf has a Facebook page on which they maintain a blog session. “We blog about what's on ad or if we're doing a tasting,” explains Landi. “It's a way for us to get out real-time information. We have to get into the world of our customers. The information in that medium must be specific and personal; customers expect it.”

The Down Side

While food blogs have many positives, companies must also be prepared for poten-

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tial downsides. "Any media opportunity has negative potential," cautions the NMB's McManus. "We can't control the message. If bloggers want to rant about what they perceive as a negative attribute of your company or your product, they have a readily available audience."

"Social media is a powerful tool, but at the end of the day it's a marketing tool," says PMA's Christie. "All the rules of marketing still apply, but the consequences of a wrong decision are magnified thou-

sands of times — just like the consequences of a good decision."

Working with a food blogger requires the same strict standards and quality control as any other media client. "If you contact a food blogger, make sure it's good product and a good recipe, or the opportunity could turn against you," warns Christie. "It's not unlike any other type of marketing sales contact. For example, if you send a sample to a buyer and it's not good, he won't buy it. The difference here is that

these consequences go viral — around the world in seconds."

"Bloggers are very honest, and if you engage them you have to expect they'll be entirely candid in their experiences, product reviews and observations," adds Dole's Goldfield. "The secret is in being transparent and authentic in your relationship with them from the start. It is critical to keep those communications going both ways so the blogger is open to hearing our position on any given issue and trusting our input as genuine."

The importance of monitoring your blog presence can't be emphasized enough. "You can make sure your blogger engagement is positive, or you can take your eye off the ball and it can hurt your business," explains Christie. "Through effective monitoring — even if something goes wrong — your immediate response can correct, and even benefit, your image. There are many cases of companies that, when something went wrong, reaped the benefits of a quick, proactive, honest response."

"We do a regular search of the blogosphere," acknowledges Earthbound's Cabaluna. "This gives us the opportunity to address any concerns quickly."

Good monitoring of food blogs has the additional perk of providing consumer insight. "It's advantageous to monitor what bloggers say because they could clue you into the next consumer trend," suggests Christie.

What Bloggers Want

Overall, food bloggers are excited about produce and the potential to glean information from our industry. "Produce companies are the experts when it comes to produce," says Amy Sherman, the blogger behind *Cooking with Amy*, in San Francisco, CA. "Their insight about how to buy, store and prepare produce is invaluable."

"My readers are constantly looking for new ways to use common items," says Merritt of *The Chicago Foodie*. "I worked with the NMB on a video showing ways to cut a mango. By showing how easy it is to cut one, I got a ton of feedback from appreciative readers. Produce companies who can help people innovate or simplify will be well received."

"While there is a growing understanding that cooking from scratch is a wonderful tool for health and well-being, many people do not have cooking skills," points out Andrew Wilder, with the blog *Eating Rules*, in Santa

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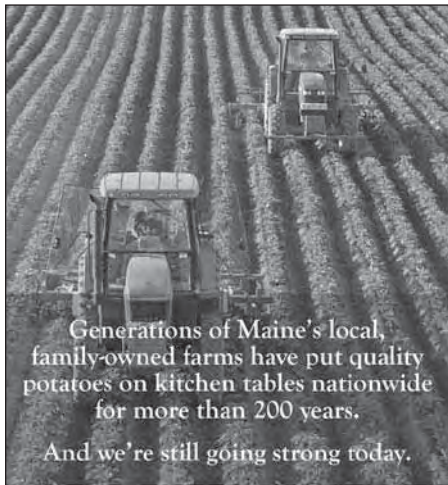
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Monica, CA. "If produce companies start helping people find new, interesting produce and give easy, delicious ways to prepare it, they'll see a tremendous response."

Background information like seasonality or where a product is grown is also requested. "It would be useful to know where something was grown, what chemicals were used in its cultivation, and where it is sold," says *The Culinary Life's* Stivetti. "Also helpful is information on flavor profiles, and, it's always fun to get product to give away to readers."

Tessa Arias of *Handle the Heat* blog in Phoenix, AZ, adds, "My readers are interested in where the produce came from, what the best qualities are and any nutritional benefits."

Especially attractive are stories bringing the human element into food. "As an industry, we often forget how important the story of who we are is to today's consumers," advises PMA's Christie. "Bloggers not only blog about the food, but also about the people who grow the food. As you approach bloggers, don't forget your story. The story the consumer is looking for is iden-

tical to the one we have."

Christine Pittman, blogger behind *Cook the Story*, located in Oviedo, FL, adds, "Personal details are key. A background story about the company makes it more interesting and approachable for consumers, who especially want information about family farms or growers. Funny little historic quirks or anecdotes can help make the blog post more interesting."

At the close of Dole's Salad Summit in April, blogger participants were asked to share their reaction via video. "They gave us some very enthusiastic reviews," shares Mayhew. "They told us that instead of a big company, Dole seemed more like a collection of local family farmers wanting to grow the very best product. Several of the bloggers were so inspired by their visit inside Dole, they posted the video on their own sites."

Greater outreach to bloggers by retailers would be mutually beneficial, but is not yet common. "Supermarkets, in general, seem to ignore bloggers, though there are a few isolated exceptions," reports Sherman. "Stores could benefit by reaching out to bloggers."

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Considerations For

1. Identify Your Goal

Before contacting a blogger, it's essential to know your goal and how they fit into it. "Engage with bloggers whose audience aligns with your target consumer," recommends an DeLyster, vice president of marketing for the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission (CAC).

"Know what you want to achieve," agrees, "Know that they're the right blogger. Know they're open to this opportunity."

2. Be Familiar With The Blogs

Before contacting any blogger, read their blog first to become familiar with it and the blogger. "Pay attention to bloggers of interest to you and talk to them about what they show interest in," suggests Samantha Cabaluna, director of communications for Earthbound Farm, located in San Juan Bautista, CA. "Think about ways you can share information with them that would be of interest to their readers. It helps to read not just their blog posts, but the community's comments to the posts as well."

"Take the time to get to know what types of things the blogger likes to write about," says Hazel Kelly, client promotions manager for Frieda's Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. "Some bloggers will only do restaurant reviews, so a product review may not be appropriate for them. Many bloggers actually have a formalized PR/review process, so look around their site before contacting them. Some bloggers expect compensation for a review, others just want samples."

3. Customize Your Communication

Most bloggers prefer to be contacted via e-mail, but that doesn't mean they still don't want a customized communication. "Find out what the blogger writes about and make your pitch relevant," suggests Catherine M. Merritt, founder and editor of The Hicahoodie blog in Chicago, IL. "Don't send a cookie-cutter pitch letter to my blog and 50 other sites. If I get a personalized pitch that matches up with what the content of my site is, I'm much more receptive."

"There's nothing more off-putting

For Working With Bloggers

than receiving an email from someone who has obviously not read your blog,” cautions Tessa Arias of *andle he ea* blog in Phoenix, AZ. “Detailing what your company is all about is also crucial in an introductory email. Make a case for why the blogger should work with your particular company.”

A friendly, personal message is a must. Andrew Wilder with *in* in Santa Monica, CA, explains, “Bulk emails are irritating and offensive. Read through sites and understand what they’re about. Do your best to determine if it’s a good fit for both of us before emailing.”

4. Ensure You’re In Sync With The Blogger

Ensuring your company and product fit with the blog content and orientation is crucial. “Check the credentials of the blogger,” recommends Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce Inc., in Vernon, CA. “Check their blog to make sure it’s not controversial, discriminatory or promoting or advertising anything that your company wouldn’t support. Ask the blogger what their interest is. Do they want something new and exciting or something in season? Find out what they’re looking for instead of just sending them what you want.”

“Be aware of the ethical issues food bloggers are facing today,” adds Wendy McManus, marketing director for the National Mango Board (NMB) in Orlando, FL. “Step lightly and communicate openly about what you have to offer. You have to build the relationship over time. Make yourself a resource to the food bloggers and they will generally show their appreciation by blogging about your product.”

5. Treat Them Like Media Professionals

Bloggers are busy professionals just like any other media representative. Chris Mayhew, marketing director for Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc., headquartered in Monterey, CA, says, “Treat bloggers with the same respect you would any other member of the media, and remember ... their ultimate responsi-

bility is to their readers.”

“Food Bloggers are dedicated to their craft, their audiences and their community,” explains Wilder. “It takes a tremendous amount of time, skill, and energy to be a food blogger companies must start treating bloggers as professionals rather than hobbyists. Companies should realize how food blogging has become more like traditional advertising mediums and not simply a cheap way to reach audiences.”

6. Be Assured They Like Produce

Most food bloggers sincerely love produce. “We want our readers to eat healthy, and that means getting them to eat more produce,” says Stephanie Stiavetti with *The Culinary Life*, in Oakland, CA.

Wilder adds, “I’m always in favor of whole foods, like produce, and I believe my readers are as well.”

“Most food bloggers are scratch cooks who love good food and great ingredients,” says Elise Bauer with *ily eci es and oodBlo lliance*. “They tend to promote in-season, local produce, because this is what they are buying and using.”

7. Reciprocate

Look for ways you can collaborate with the blogger’s site. “Bloggers appreciate when you help promote them via your own blog, Facebook and Twitter,” advises McManus. “If a blogger writes a positive post about your product, promote the post and their blog using all of your social media channels. This type of support is greatly appreciated.”

“A food blogger working in collaboration with a local store would be advantageous for all,” agrees Pittman. “Having personal

contacts is very important and a direct blog link in the local community would really help promote on all sides.” **pb**

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In Dallas, Wal-Mart Gets Squeezed Between Low Price Alternative Formats And High Service Conventional Stores

Aldi and Sprouts nip at Wal-Mart's low price leader reputation, while Target comes within striking distance.

BY JIM PREVOR



In this the 22nd iteration of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report, we return to Dallas, TX, which we last visited back in October of 2003, and we find that much has changed and much has not.

Back in 2003, Wal-Mart was the undisputed King of the price point. Indeed, the only retailer in town that beat the Wal-Mart Supercenter in offering low produce prices was its own sister banner, Wal-Mart's Neighborhood Market concept. That was really a bit of randomness thrown in the mix, however, as Wal-Mart's policy at that point in time — since abandoned — was that Supercenters and Neighborhood Markets should price identically.

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**WAL-MART SUPERCENTER VS 6 CHAINS
PRICE COMPARISON – DALLAS, TX
Prices Available To The General Public**

Produce Item Supercenter	Sold As	Wal-Mart	Albertsons	% Over Wal-Mart	Central Market	% Over Wal-Mart	Kroger	% Over Wal-Mart	Sprouts	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples - Granny smith	Lb	1.47	1.99	35.37%	1.59	8.16%	1.69	14.97%	1.39	-5.44%
Apples - Red Delicious	Lb	1.37	1.99	45.26%	1.49	8.76%	1.69	23.36%	1.49	8.76%
Avocados	Each	0.98	1.39	41.84%	2.49	154.08%	0.99	1.02%	1.50	53.06%
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	0.52	0.54	3.85%	0.54	3.85%	0.49	-5.77%	0.49	-5.77%
Beans - Green	Lb	1.44	1.69	17.36%	1.79	24.31%	1.00	-30.56%	0.99	-31.25%
Beets	Each	1.89	2.50	32.28%	1.99	5.29%	2.29	21.16%	2.89	52.91%
Broccoli Crowns	Lb	1.84	1.99	8.15%	1.99	8.15%	2.04	10.87%	1.49	-19.02%
Brussel Sprouts	Lb	2.67	3.99	49.44%	3.49	30.71%	2.99	11.99%	2.89	8.24%
Cabbage - Green	Lb	0.54	0.69	27.78%	0.69	27.78%	0.57	5.56%	0.49	-9.26%
Cabbage - Red	Lb	0.77	0.89	15.58%	0.79	2.60%	0.99	28.57%	0.59	-23.38%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	1.58	1.00	-36.71%	2.29	44.94%	2.50	58.23%	1.50	-5.06%
Carrots - Organic	Lb	0.82	2.69	228.05%	1.29	57.32%	2.19	167.07%	1.29	57.32%
Cauliflower	Each	2.78	2.99	7.55%	2.99	7.55%	2.99	7.55%	1.50	-46.04%
Celery	Each	1.38	1.49	7.97%	1.99	44.20%	1.47	6.52%	0.99	-28.26%
Cherries	Lb	2.98	3.99	33.89%	4.99	67.45%	3.99	33.89%	2.49	-16.44%
Coleslaw 1# Bag	Bag	1.58	2.29	44.94%	1.79	13.29%	1.69	6.96%	1.49	-5.70%
Corn - Yellow	Each	0.33	0.50	51.52%	0.59	78.79%	0.40	21.21%	0.50	51.52%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	0.68	0.69	1.47%	0.89	30.88%	0.78	14.71%	0.77	13.24%
Eggplant	Lb	1.78	1.99	11.80%	1.79	0.56%	2.49	39.89%	1.49	-16.29%
Grapefruit - Red	Each	0.64	0.99	54.69%	0.65	1.56%	0.69	7.81%	0.79	23.44%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	1.98	1.79	-9.60%	2.49	25.76%	2.16	9.09%	1.50	-24.24%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	1.98	1.99	0.51%	2.49	25.76%	2.16	9.09%	1.50	-24.24%
Green Onions	Bunch	1.12	0.89	-20.54%	0.69	-38.39%	0.62	-44.64%	0.49	-56.25%
Honeydew - Whole	Each	2.50	3.99	59.60%	3.99	59.60%	3.49	39.60%	2.99	19.60%
Lettuce - Green leaf	Each	1.88	1.79	-4.79%	1.89	0.53%	1.79	-4.79%	0.99	-47.34%
Lettuce- Iceberg Bulk	Each	1.14	1.29	13.16%	1.49	30.70%	1.28	12.28%	1.29	13.16%
Lettuce - Romaine Bulk	Each	1.88	1.79	-4.79%	1.89	0.53%	1.99	5.85%	1.29	-31.38%
Limes	Each	0.18	0.25	38.89%	0.17	-5.56%	0.69	283.33%	0.50	177.78%
Mangos	Each	0.64	0.99	54.69%	0.99	54.69%	1.79	179.69%	0.79	23.44%
Mushrooms - White Package	16oz	2.98	4.18	40.27%	3.49	17.11%	4.14	38.93%	3.36	12.75%
Nectarines	Lb	1.25	0.99	-20.80%	1.99	59.20%	1.99	59.20%	0.69	-44.80%
Onions - Red	Lb	1.48	1.00	-32.43%	1.59	7.43%	1.89	27.70%	0.89	-39.86%
Peaches - California	Lb	1.25	1.79	43.20%	1.99	59.20%	1.49	19.20%	1.29	3.20%
Pears - Bartlett	Lb	1.37	1.49	8.76%	1.29	-5.84%	1.00	-27.01%	0.88	-35.77%
Peas - Snap	8 oz	2.63	3.69	40.30%	1.68	-36.12%	2.99	13.69%	2.50	-4.94%
Peas - Snow	8 oz	2.63	4.92	87.07%	1.68	-36.12%	4.00	52.09%	2.50	-4.94%
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	0.78	0.99	26.92%	1.29	65.38%	0.86	10.26%	0.49	-37.18%
Peppers - Jalapeno	Lb	1.12	1.49	33.04%	0.99	-11.61%	0.88	-21.43%	1.49	33.04%
Peppers - Serrano	Lb	1.98	3.99	101.52%	1.89	-4.55%	1.42	-28.28%	1.49	-24.75%
Pineapple	Each	3.48	4.99	43.39%	4.49	29.02%	3.99	14.66%	2.00	-42.53%
Plums	Lb	1.25	1.00	-20.00%	1.69	35.20%	1.99	59.20%	0.99	-20.80%
Potatoes - Red Bulk	Lb	0.88	1.29	46.59%	1.99	126.14%	1.29	46.59%	0.99	12.50%
Potatoes - Russet Bulk	Lb	0.98	1.29	31.63%	1.29	31.63%	0.99	1.02%	0.99	1.02%
Radishes	Bunch	1.48	1.00	-32.43%	0.99	-33.11%	0.99	-33.11%	0.49	-66.89%
Salad - Caesar	12.8 oz	3.78	4.22	11.64%	5.76	52.38%	6.40	69.31%	6.40	69.31%
Salad - Garden	12 oz	2.78	2.04	-26.62%	2.52	-9.35%	3.29	18.35%	2.99	7.55%
Salad - Spring	5 oz	2.98	3.49	17.11%	2.99	0.34%	3.29	10.40%	2.99	0.34%
Salad - Organic	5 oz	2.98	3.99	33.89%	2.20	-26.17%	3.25	9.06%	3.49	17.11%
Squash - Zucchini	Lb	1.28	1.89	47.66%	1.69	32.03%	1.38	7.81%	1.49	16.41%
Strawberries - 1# Pkg	Pkg	1.88	1.99	5.85%	2.49	32.45%	2.50	32.98%	2.50	32.98%
Tomatoes - On The Vine	Lb	1.84	1.69	-8.15%	1.49	-19.02%	1.98	7.61%	1.49	-19.02%
Tomatoes - Plum/Roma	Lb	1.38	1.00	-27.54%	1.69	22.46%	1.45	5.07%	0.69	-50.00%
Watermelon - Seedless	Each	3.50	5.99	71.14%	4.99	42.57%	4.98	42.29%	1.88	-46.29%
MARKET BASKET		89.28	111.45	24.83%	106.35	19.12%	108.33	21.34%	83.32	-6.68%

PRICES IN RED HAVE BEEN ADJUSTED TO REFLECT WAL-MART UNIT PRICES.

	Super Target	% Over Wal-Mart	Tom Thumb	% Over Wal-Mart
	1.62	10.20%	1.69	14.97%
	1.62	18.25%	1.99	45.26%
	0.99	1.02%	1.99	103.06%
	0.52	0.00%	0.59	13.46%
	1.99	38.19%	1.99	38.19%
	1.99	5.29%	2.49	31.75%
	1.69	-8.15%	1.99	8.15%
	2.99	11.99%	2.99	11.99%
	1.57	190.74%	0.89	64.81%
	1.99	158.44%	0.99	28.57%
	2.39	51.27%	2.99	89.24%
	1.09	32.93%	2.29	179.27%
	1.99	-28.42%	2.99	7.55%
	1.29	-6.52%	1.99	44.20%
	3.49	17.11%	5.99	101.01%
	1.69	6.96%	2.29	44.94%
	0.34	3.03%	0.59	78.79%
	0.59	-13.24%	1.29	89.71%
	1.99	11.80%	2.99	67.98%
	0.94	46.88%	1.29	101.56%
	1.89	-4.55%	2.99	51.01%
	2.29	15.66%	2.99	51.01%
	1.19	6.25%	0.89	-20.54%
	2.39	-4.40%	4.99	99.60%
	2.19	16.49%	1.99	5.85%
	1.19	4.39%	1.68	47.37%
	1.79	-4.79%	1.99	5.85%
	0.19	5.56%	0.33	83.33%
	0.44	-31.25%	1.99	210.94%
	3.58	20.13%	4.58	53.69%
	1.27	1.60%	2.99	139.20%
	0.99	-33.11%	1.99	34.46%
	1.04	-16.80%	2.99	139.20%
	1.47	7.30%	1.99	45.26%
	2.99	13.69%	3.49	32.70%
	2.00	-23.95%	4.65	76.81%
	0.79	1.28%	1.29	65.38%
	0.99	-11.61%	1.49	33.04%
	1.99	0.51%	2.99	51.01%
	3.49	0.29%	4.99	43.39%
	1.27	1.60%	2.49	99.20%
	0.89	1.14%	1.69	92.05%
	0.99	1.02%	1.19	21.43%
	0.99	-33.11%	0.99	-33.11%
	4.48	18.52%	5.11	35.19%
	2.99	7.55%	3.16	13.67%
	2.99	0.34%	3.79	27.18%
	3.99	33.89%	3.99	33.89%
	1.99	55.47%	1.69	32.03%
	2.09	11.17%	3.49	85.64%
	2.99	62.50%	2.69	46.20%
	1.24	-10.14%	1.99	44.20%
	4.49	28.29%	6.99	99.71%
	98.32	10.13%	134.84	51.03%



So when Wal-Mart's Neighborhood Market took the low price crown on an equally sized market basket of produce, it was probably due to either a pricing error or an in-store markdown.

Although Brookshire's came close in 2003, being only 7 percentage points over the Wal-Mart Supercenter in pricing, Kroger, Albertsons and Tom Thumb all took a licking.

In general, whatever problems Wal-Mart may have had back in 2003, it really was still the low-price leader, and if consumers were going to go elsewhere, it would certainly cost them money when it came to buying fresh produce.

Fast Forward to 2011

In many ways, the picture hasn't changed in 2011... although in one big way it has. Analyzing a common market basket of produce gathered from Wal-Mart and six conventional stores, plus an Aldi store in mid-August, the conventional supermarkets remain at a significantly higher price point. Albertsons, which back in 2003 came in at 22.68 percent over Wal-Mart Supercenter pricing, now eight years later finds itself at 24.83 percent over Wal-Mart Supercenter pricing.

Kroger, which back in 2003 came in at 19.05 percent over Wal-Mart Supercenter pricing, came in at 21.34 percent over



HOW THEY STACK UP AGAINST WAL-MART SUPERCENTER

Region	% over Wal-Mart		% over Wal-Mart		% over Wal-Mart	
	Store	Wal-Mart	Store	Wal-Mart	Store	Wal-Mart
Connecticut-5/02	Super Stop & Shop	.23%	Shaws	.34%	Big Y	.36%
Salt Lake City-10/02	Harmon's	.2%	Smith's	.6%	Albertson's	.12%
South Florida-2/03	Super Target	.22%	Publix	.31%	Winn-Dixie	.52%
Dallas, Texas-10/03	Albertsons	.23%	Brookshires	.7%	Kroger	.19%
	Neighborhood Market	—1.2%	Tom Thumb	.27%		
Portland, OR-3/04	Albertsons	.30%	Fred Meyer	.22%	Haggen	.27%
	Safeway	.37%				
Phoenix, AZ-8/04	Albetsons	.22%	Bashas'	.25%	Fry's	.15%
	Safeway	.17%				
Palm Springs-10/04	Albertsons	.19%	Jensen's	.60%	Ralphs	.16%
	Vons	.20%				
Detroit, MI-1/05	A&P Food Basic	—17%	Farmer Jack	.24%	Kroger	.28%
	Meijer	.3%				
St. Louis, MO-5/05	Dierbergs	.22%	Schnucks	.14%		
Houston, TX-9/05	HEB	.15%	Kroger	.30%	Fiesta Mart	—0.3%
Atlanta, GA-11/05	Harry's	.18%	Ingles	.16%	Kroger	.25%
	Publix	.13%	Target	.3%		
Denver, CO-5/06	Albertsons	.16%	King Sooper	.21%	Safeway	.25%
Portland, OR-10/06	Albertsons	.32%	Fred Meyer	.21%	QFC	.54%
	Safeway	.30%				
Toronto Canada-7/07	A&P	.35%	Brunos	.28%	Loblaws	.13%
	Sobeys	.45%				
Kansas City, KS-10/07	Dillions	.20%	Hen House	.15%	Hy Vee	.18%
	Price Chopper	.13%				
Los Angeles-4/08	Fresh & Easy	.15%	Stater Bros	.8%	Ralphs	.25%
	Vons	.14%				
Orlando, FL-10/08	Publix	.32%	Super Target	.22%	Whole Foods	.38%
	Winn Dixie	.28%				
Phoenix, AZ 4/09	Wal-Mart Markewtside	.23%	Wal-Mart Neighborhood	.7%	Bahas	.30%
	Fresh & Easy	.32%	Fry's	.27%	Safeway	.37%
Raleigh, NC 9/09	Food Lion	.24%	Fresh Market	.31%	Harris Teeter	.35%
	Kroger	.21%	Super Target	.11%		
Philadelphia 4/10	Acme	.17%	Genuardi's	.22%	Giant	.26%
	Super Fresh	.21%	Wegmans	.5%		
New Jersey 10/10	FoodBasics	—1%	Pathmark	.15%	ShopRite	.8%
Dallas 10/11	Albertson's	.25%	Central Market	.19%	Kroger	.21%
	Sprouts	—7%	Super Target	.10%	Tom Thumb	.51%



Wal-Mart Supercenter pricing. Safeway's Tom Thumb banner, which is an upscale alternative in the market, obviously didn't mind its performance at 27 percent over Wal-Mart back in 2003 to be problematic, as its produce pricing in 2011 came in an astounding 51.03 percent over Wal-Mart. This is the one of the greatest differentials we have seen in our rolling study – though Tom Thumb still comes in second place to Jensen's Foods out in Palm Springs, CA, which tallied a produce basket 60 percent over Wal-Mart in 2004.

Although Tom Thumb is an outlier, the lack of effective price competitiveness by the conventional grocery segment is not at all surprising. All across the country, after 20 years of competition with the Wal-Mart Supercenter concept, conventional grocery stores typically remain from 15 percent to 20 percent more expensive than Wal-Mart Supercenters when it comes to fresh produce pricing. This seems to work for these stores because they have successfully



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**WAL-MART SUPERCENTER VS 6 CHAINS
PRICE COMPARISON — DALLAS, TX
Prices Available To Card Holders**

Produce Item Supercenter	Sold As	Wal-Mart	Albertsons	% Over Wal-Mart	Central Market	% Over Wal-Mart	Kroger	% Over Wal-Mart	Sprouts	% Over Wal-Mart
Broccoli Crowns	Lb	1.84	1.99	8.15%	1.99	8.15%	1.00	-45.65%	1.49	-19.02%
Cantloupe - Whole	Each	1.58	1.00	-36.71%	2.29	44.94%	2.50	58.23%	1.50	-5.06%
Cherries	Lb	2.98	3.99	33.89%	4.99	67.45%	3.99	33.89%	2.49	-16.44%
Corn - Yellow	Each	0.33	0.50	51.52%	0.59	78.79%	0.40	21.21%	0.50	51.52%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	1.98	1.79	-9.60%	2.49	25.76%	1.69	-14.65%	1.50	-24.24%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	1.98	1.99	0.51%	2.49	25.76%	1.69	-14.65%	1.50	-24.24%
Green Onions	Bunch	1.12	0.89	-20.54%	0.69	-38.39%	0.62	-44.64%	0.49	-56.25%
Mangos	Each	0.64	0.99	54.69%	0.99	54.69%	1.00	56.25%	0.79	23.44%
Nectarines	Lb	1.25	0.99	-20.80%	1.99	59.20%	1.49	19.20%	0.69	-44.80%
Peaches - California	Lb	1.25	1.79	43.20%	1.99	59.20%	1.00	-20.00%	1.29	3.20%
Peas - Snap	8 oz	2.63	3.69	40.30%	1.68	-36.12%	2.99	13.69%	2.50	-4.94%
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	0.78	0.99	26.92%	1.29	65.38%	0.86	10.26%	0.49	-37.18%
Radishes	Bunch	1.48	1.00	-32.43%	0.99	-33.11%	0.99	-33.11%	0.49	-66.89%
Salad - Garden	12 oz	2.78	2.04	-26.62%	2.52	-9.35%	3.29	18.35%	2.99	7.55%
Salad - Spring	5 oz	2.98	3.49	17.11%	2.99	0.34%	3.29	10.40%	2.99	0.34%
Salad - Organic	5 oz	2.98	3.99	33.89%	2.20	-26.17%	2.99	0.34%	3.49	17.11%
Strawberries - 1# Pkg	Pkg	1.88	1.99	5.85%	2.49	32.45%	2.50	32.98%	2.50	32.98%
MARKET BASKET		89.28	111.45	24.83%	106.35	19.12%	104.20	16.71%	83.32	-6.68%

PRICES IN RED HAVE BEEN ADJUSTED TO REFLECT WAL-MART UNIT PRICES.

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All across the country, after 20 years of competition with the Wal-Mart Supercenter concept, conventional grocery stores typically remain from 15 percent to 20 percent more expensive than Wal-Mart Supercenters when it comes to produce pricing.

differentiated themselves from Wal-Mart by offering a more upscale experience and by executing better at the store level.

In many ways, conventional grocers have ceded the low income market to Wal-Mart and others, closing stores in lower income areas while adding service and flair to their other stores. In this way, they have succeeded, and Wal-Mart's gains in market share over the years have typically come from the independent sector, as these less well capitalized retailers found themselves unable or unwilling to make the very substantial investments necessary to remain competitive.

income shoppers shop at Wal-Mart, the conventional chains need to keep on their toes. H.E.B. is not the major player in Dallas that it is in South and Central Texas, but its Central Market concept, famous for its upscale ambiance and quality assortment — which one might expect to have a price point more similar to Tom Thumb than a conventional supermarket — actually beat both Albertsons and Kroger, coming in a 19.12 percent over the Wal-Mart Supercenter.

Although the gap is not large, with a market basket of fresh produce that cost \$106.35 at Central Market, \$108.33 at Kroger and \$111.45 at Albertsons, the fact that Central Market is pricing like a conventional supermarket rather than an

Unconventional Competition

Though they may be willing to let low

	Super Target	% Over Wal-Mart	Tom Thumb	% Over Wal-Mart
	1.69	-8.15%	1.49	-19.02%
	2.39	51.27%	1.50	-5.06%
	3.49	17.11%	2.99	0.34%
	0.34	3.03%	0.50	51.52%
	1.89	-4.55%	2.49	25.76%
	2.29	15.66%	2.49	25.76%
	1.19	6.25%	0.50	-55.36%
	0.44	-31.25%	1.50	134.38%
	1.27	1.60%	2.99	139.20%
	1.04	-16.80%	0.88	-29.60%
	2.99	13.69%	2.49	-5.32%
	0.79	1.28%	0.50	-35.90%
	0.99	-33.11%	0.50	-66.22%
	2.99	7.55%	2.04	-26.62%
	2.99	0.34%	2.49	-16.44%
	3.99	33.89%	3.99	33.89%
	2.09	11.17%	3.00	59.57%
	98.32	10.13%	120.58	35.06%



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upscale alternative means it will be a powerful competitor.

For Wal-Mart, though, Central Market is not the problem. One issue is the growth of Target and its supercenter concept. It performs in our study pretty much right where one would expect. With a price point at 10.13 percent over Wal-Mart, its produce pricing comes in a little less than conventional supermarkets and a little more than Wal-Mart.

Added Loyalty

Another question is whether other retailers can use loyalty cards to offer their core customers deep bargains. Although we have seen a substantial difference in price competitiveness when factoring loyalty card discounts in recent cities studied, such as Philadelphia, Raleigh and Phoenix, that doesn't seem to be the case in Dallas.

Kroger's loyalty card shifted its price position from 21.34 percent over Wal-Mart to 16.71 percent over Wal-Mart, and Tom



Thumb went from outer space to merely high orbit as its number dropped from 51.03 percent over Wal-Mart to merely 35.06 percent over Wal-Mart.

And Then There's The Alternative

Wal-Mart's real problem is the rise of alternative formats that are exceedingly price-competitive. Sprouts emphasizes produce and value, and it shows. Offering a full range of produce, Sprouts beats Wal-Mart's produce pricing, coming in 6.68 percent below Wal-Mart.

Yet the biggest threat is, literally, off the charts. We went to see one other retailer in Dallas. Its assortment is not large enough to include in our main study, but it is a fierce competitor on the items it does sell. Who is this fierce competitor? Its name is Aldi. It had a pretty rich produce assortment, offering 35 items out of the 53 items on our comprehensive basket.

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**Wal-Mart SuperCenter vs Aldi
Price Comparison — Dallas TX**
Prices Available To the General Public

Produce Item	How	WalMart	Aldi	% Over
Apples - Granny smith	Lb	1.47	0.86	-41.50%
Apples - Red Delicious	Lb	1.37	0.86	-37.23%
Avocados	Each	0.98	0.79	-19.39%
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	0.52	0.44	-15.38%
Blackberries	Pkg 6 oz	1.98	1.99	0.51%
Blueberries	Pkg Pint	2.98	1.49	-50.00%
Broccoli Crowns	Lb	1.84	1.39	-24.46%
Cabbage - Green	Lb	0.54	1.39	157.41%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	1.58	0.99	-37.34%
Carrots - Regular 1# Bag	pkg	0.78	0.70	-10.26%
Cauliflower	Each	2.78	2.29	-17.63%
Celery	Each	1.38	1.19	-13.77%
Corn - Yellow	Each	0.33	0.62	87.88%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	0.68	0.55	-19.12%
Grapefruit - Red	Each	0.64	0.59	-7.81%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	1.98	0.89	-55.05%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	1.98	0.89	-55.05%
Lettuce - Iceberg Bulk	Each	1.14	1.09	-4.39%
Lettuce - Romaine Bulk	Each	1.88	2.59	37.77%
Limes	Each	0.18	0.12	-33.33%
Mangos	Each	0.64	0.99	54.69%
Mushrooms - White Package	16oz	2.98	3.18	6.71%
Onions - Red	Lb	1.48	0.80	-45.95%
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	0.78	0.66	-15.38%
Peppers - Jalapeno	Lb	1.12	0.98	-12.50%
Pineapple	Each	3.48	1.49	-57.18%
Potatoes - Red Bulk	Lb	0.88	0.60	-31.82%
Potatoes - Russet Bulk	Lb	0.98	0.44	-55.10%
Salad - Caesar	12.8 oz	3.78	2.55	-32.54%
Salad - Garden	12 oz	2.78	0.99	-64.39%
Salad - Spring	5 oz	2.98	1.99	-33.22%
Squash - Zucchini	Lb	1.28	1.19	-7.03%
Strawberries - 1# Pkg	Pkg	1.88	1.49	-20.74%
Tomatoes - Plum/Roma	Lb	1.38	0.99	-28.26%
Watermelon - Seedless	Each	3.50	1.99	-43.14%
MARKET BASKET		56.93	42.05	-26.14%

PRICES IN RED HAVE BEEN ADJUSTED TO REFLECT WAL-MART UNIT PRICES.

volume items, they account for a much higher percentage of produce department sales.

Aldi came in at a full 26.14 percent under Wal-Mart's produce pricing. In other words, the difference in price between Aldi on the low side and Wal-Mart on the high side is actually larger than the gap between Wal-Mart on the low side and conventional supermarkets on the high side.

Thus Wal-Mart's reputation for offering the lowest prices in Dallas begins to tatter and, in the end, Wal-Mart finds itself in the middle, being squeezed by deep discounters such as Aldi on price and conventional

supermarkets on service.

Is there a way out from this dilemma for Wal-Mart? Stay tuned for the next edition of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report to find out.

pb





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Business for S. Katzman is driven by supply-and-demand, so the company is always sure to have what its customers need.

Partners In Profits

The wholesaler/retailer relationship takes on heightened importance. **BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ**

Mounting competition in the grocery industry has resulted in the need for a laser-like focus on providing the customers what they need when they need it. Seeking to service an increasingly demanding consumer, retailers have come to realize out-of-stocks are unacceptable. So, too is sub-par product — or product that doesn't offer the kind of value the consumer has come to expect.

Produce retailers are expected to have high quality product in stock at all times — product that delivers great taste, great nutrition and great value, not to mention product integrity, particularly in this era of growing food safety concerns. In other words, servicing today's produce shopper is a tall order, indeed. If one retailer is unable to give the consumer what they expect, another will be more than happy to step up to the plate.

For produce buyers, that means relying more heavily on wholesalers, not only to provide them with needed product, but also to give them data, pricing, and other information that will enable them to make buying and promotional decisions with greater precision.

"We are both after the same goal. They want to sell their product, and we want to sell ours," says Mike Maxwell, president of

Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., headquartered in Philadelphia, PA. "We want to make sure their shelves are full all the time and that the price is aggressive. It's definitely a partnership in growth."

Maxwell says his company increasingly serves as a "professional reference" to the retail buyers it services, meeting and strategizing to discuss up-and-coming trends, new product initiatives, and most importantly, helping them see the "big picture," which can

be easier said than done when you're mired in the day-to-day operations of running a chain. "Retailers often only see what's going on in their stores," says Maxwell. "They really have to be aware of what outside sources are putting pressure on them and what other competition may be knocking on their door."


Not everyone in the wholesale produce industry agrees. For a terminal market wholesaler, like D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York Inc., located on the Hunts Point Market, the nature



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Procacci Brothers is the exclusive distributor for Santa Sweets Inc., a brand known for its flavorful grape tomatoes.

of the business dictates a limited relationship between supplier and retailer. Buyers come and shop the market, selecting produce from amongst the 42 companies selling their wares. Once the produce is off the platform, all that remains is the matter of the bill. The relationship is “the sale itself,” according to vice president Matthew D’Arrigo, and even that can get somewhat contentious. “The core business here is a professional buyer going against a professional seller on a supply and demand market,” he adds. “It’s like ‘buyer and seller beware’ territory.”

Working Together

S. Katzman Produce Inc., in the Bronx, NY, prides itself on being someone large retailers can rely on for “filling in shorts” due to the company’s proximity and its ability to replace product needed for immediate orders. General manager, Stefanie Katzman, says she considers the relationship to be one of partners, rather than seller and customer, because that’s the way it has to be in order for both parties to succeed. Due to the nature of the terminal market business, she explains, prices can change in an instant if a truck doesn’t show up or if extra trucks come in. By working together and keeping the lines of communication open, both the buyer and the seller can adjust their pricing accordingly, resulting in more product moved and more revenue realized.

“Our market is greatly driven by your basic supply-and-demand economics, and these price swings on our end need to follow through to our customers’ price structure in order for us both to be successful,” explains

Katzman. “The communication between us and our retail customers allows both of us to better run our business and make more sales.”

Steven Piazza, president and treasurer of Everett, MA-based Community Suffolk Inc. also considers his company’s relationship with its retail customers a partnership. In fact, he goes so far as to use the term “trusted partner” to describe the association — one that he says extends all the way to the bottom line. “Our biggest effort is to be more aggressive buyers than their own buyers could be because the produce buyers at a chain store nowadays are responsible for so many items,” he contends. “We are constantly striving to provide a better value than they could provide for themselves and help them carry that value forward to their customer, increasing their profit margin.”

While Bronx, NY-based Rubin Bros. Produce Corp. is more of a middleman — and thus doesn’t deal directly with many of the smaller retailers who sell its products — vice president of sales Cary Rubin says the company still strives to make the retailers more competitive. “We provide ad pricing to accommodate the stores so they can match what the chain stores are doing and be competitive in that sense,” says Rubin. “Having the ability to help out those smaller stores is a great thing.”

Relationship-Building

In today’s tough economy, profitability is a significant challenge, says Piazza, one which retailers come to his company to help remedy. Value is the name of the game, he says, with



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can be used to get people in their stores and create volume. “Weekend specials, hot buys, savings on freight, savings on products — anywhere we can create a savings for the retailer, and the retailer can then create a savings for the consumer, is a win-win for everybody,” says Piazza.

Research around pricing is one of the main areas where Toronto, Ontario-based Veg-Pak Produce Ltd. seeks to help its retail customers plan ahead. When retailers want to put a specific kind of produce on special, they are typically working two or three weeks in advance, according to Victor Carnevale, Veg-Pak president. While it can be difficult to project pricing that far in advance, Carnevale says his company will conduct the necessary research to be able to give that retailer a special price.

John Vena, owner and president of Philadelphia-based John Vena Inc., also describes his company’s relationship with the retailers it serves as “close.” Because it is located in the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market, the company has regular contact — sometimes even daily — with its retailer customers. Many of Vena’s customers

“Our biggest effort is to be more aggressive buyers than their own buyers could be because the produce buyers at a chain store nowadays are responsible for so many items. We are constantly striving to provide a better value than they could provide for themselves and help them carry that value forward to their customer, increasing their profit margin.”

— Steven Piazza, Community Suffolk Inc.

are independents or smaller chains, so the biggest requirements his company must fulfill center around “sharp pricing, availability and logistics.” Vena regularly supplies ad pricing to its customers and even offers long-term pricing when needed.

That said, Vena concedes his company could better serve its retail customers if the latter were more forthcoming about decisions made internally. All too often, he says, retailers tend to be tight-lipped in their dealings with wholesalers, which proves to be a hindrance

in giving them the kind of service they have come to expect. “Often, the information we need to better serve our retailers is not available to us in a direct or timely fashion,” admits Vena. “Sometimes, decisions made at the merchandiser level are not shared with us, making it difficult to tailor our product offerings appropriately.”

Vena is seeking to remedy that situation by adding new sales staff, upgrading its training, and adding more support functions in order to improve their ability to effectively commu-

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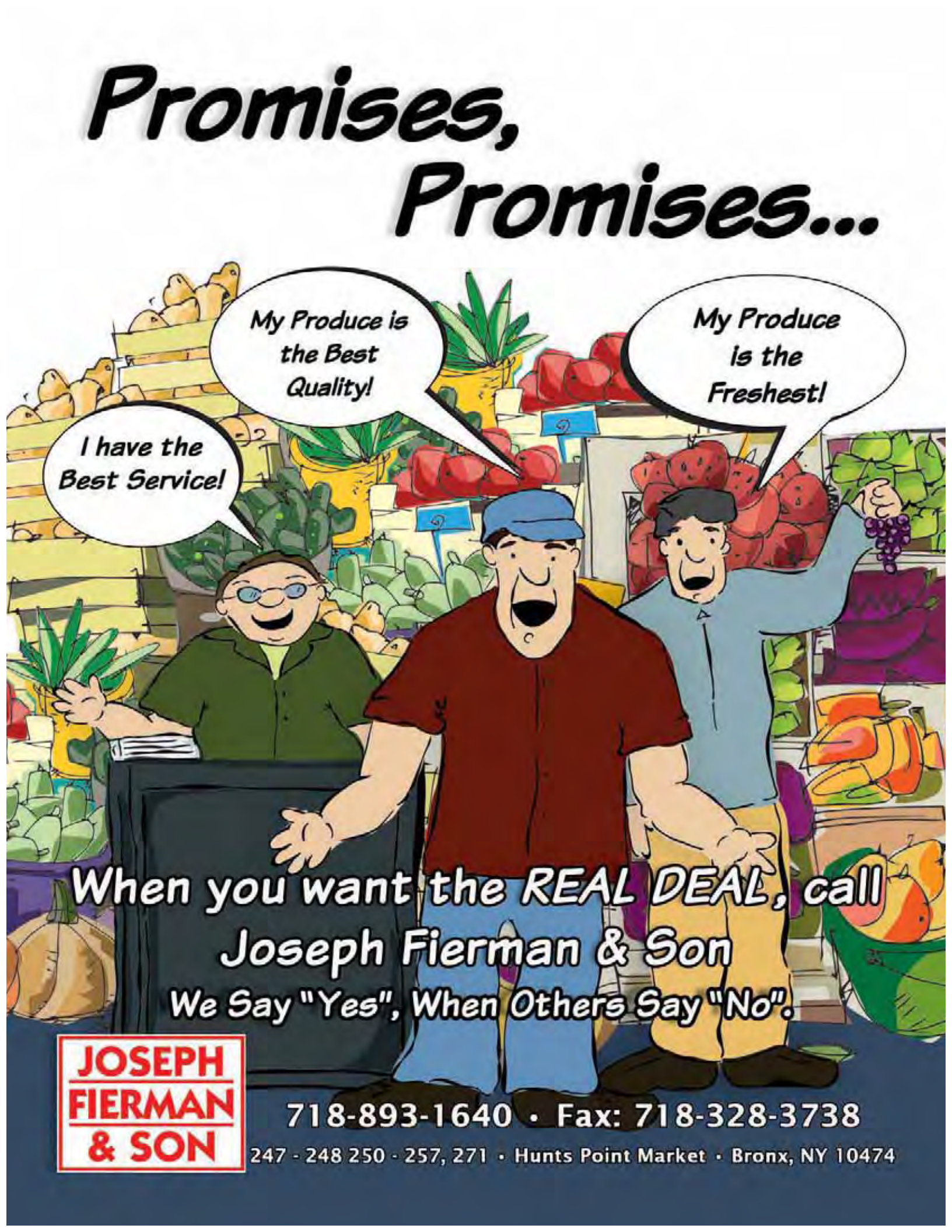
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brands or act as exclusive distributors for their grower-partners. Rubin serves as an exclusive distributor for a number of brands, including Dole, Zeigler's, Azumaya and Organic Girl.

Meanwhile, Procacci Brothers is the exclusive distributor for Santa Sweets Inc., a company dedicated to enhancing the tomato category through outstanding flavor, quality, food safety and sustainability. Santa Sweets grows a number of proprietary varieties,

including Santa Sweets grape tomatoes, UglyRipe heirloom tomatoes, and the exclusive 100 percent Pure Santa Grape Tomato Variety (F1). The latter boasts higher natural sugar content and a longer shelf-life than other varieties in the marketplace. Not surprisingly, such proprietary products carry a premium price. "On our proprietary tomatoes, we have a lot of time and research invested and they are very expensive, but you get the payback in the product that we are

"There are times when even the top-notch labels are not what they should be, so I show them an off-label occasionally, but for the most part, there are certain labels they are looking for and they will actually request them. They know the quality will be there and they are willing to pay a premium for it."

— *Ciro Porricelli, Jerry Porricelli Produce*

providing," says Maxwell. "They are probably on the upper end, but it's a good value day-in and day-out."

While some chains look to Procacci Brothers for fill-ins, Maxwell says others rely on the company to supply 100 percent of their needs. The same is true for Katzman, primarily because its customers range in size from "monster-size chain stores" to smaller bodegas and push cart operators who only need a few boxes of product at a time.

Los Angeles, CA-based Coast Produce Co. Inc. offers a variety of branded lines, including Coast Caliente, comprised of Hispanic produce items sold to both mainstream and Hispanic-based retail stores, and Coast Snacking, designed to give parents a healthy snack alternative for their children. According to Mark Morimoto, senior director of sales and business development, Coast's focus on healthy snacking is intended to get kids and families eating more fresh produce. Morimoto contends that sharing the message about healthy eating initiatives with retailers has helped Coast increase its amount of shelf space in retail stores. "Coast's key initiative right now is to diversify our distribution to more retailers that are not currently using Coast brands or products," he says. "We are sending the message out to retailers that we can help them promote healthy eating through produce to the general public and increase retailers' overall sales in the produce departments."



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Coast also continues with its Farmer's Select program, which highlights local growers, farmers and their products. Product is hand-selected by the farmer for the consumer, creating an emotional connection from field to table. The year-round initiative features a different item each month, telling the story behind the produce.

Back in the Bronx, S. Katzman sells many different brands, including Driscoll's, B&W and Bloom Fresh, Katzman's own brand developed in conjunction with several of its top shippers. According to Katzman, the company protects the brand by only allowing certain shippers to pack in its label with the understanding that all product must be of the finest quality. The result is a brand both retailers and consumers have come to trust. "Our customers and our customers' customers have become comfortable with our brand," says Katzman. "They know that if it says Bloom Fresh on the label, they are getting nothing but the best in fresh, top quality fruit and produce."

Meanwhile, Community Suffolk carries "all the premium labels from California," including Grimmway, Bolthouse, Duda,

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Steinbeck, Dole and Sunkist, as well as a wide variety of items under its own Rosebud label. Piazza proudly proclaims that the quality of his Rosebud products are “as good or better than any national brand” and carry a comparable price tag as a result.

Despite the powerful reputation of such brands, some buyers remain open to alternatives, particularly when quality isn’t where it should be or when supply falls short. In those instances, Piazza says, they are typically willing to try a different brand — as long as the quality and value are there. “Certain chains are label buyers,” admits Piazza. “When they can’t get the label they want, as long as the quality meets or exceeds their standards, pretty much anything will do as long as it’s the same size and variety.”

D’Arrigo has found the same to be true. While many retailers prefer to stick with a favored brand, he says, they can be swayed away if you can offer them a better deal on a comparable product.

As for John Vena, his company tends not to sell “consumer-branded” product lines. Rather, it sells a wide range of brands within its greenhouse vegetable product line, which includes specialty tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, and chili peppers. “Typically, customers are buying the particular pack size, not necessarily the brand name,” he says.

According to Vena, his company typically sells its products at market prices, or “whatever the traffic will bear.” There are some products, however, that warrant a premium price due to “their integrity,” he says. This includes Vena’s fresh herb line and Purple Pride brand Holland-grown eggplants.

Retail Support

From time to time, Vena reports, retail customers ask him to supply product literature or product for sampling. Most wholesalers welcome such requests, as a growing number are stepping up their retail marketing efforts and working in conjunction with their retail partners.

Our retailers expect to have POS signage to help consumer recognition of new produce items and promotions, says Morimoto, especially when it comes to the Coast Farmer’s Select program. Meanwhile, Veg-Pak engages in promotional activity, paying for demos when introducing new product. Procacci Brothers goes so far as to dispense merchandising staff out into the stores to work with retailers, if desired.

Katzman, meanwhile, provides a special service to those retailers who are either just

“We use our knowledge of what’s hot, what’s a big seller, what’s running really well at the moment, and what we have seen work for other retailers to help them set up their stores to promote more business.”

— Stephanie Katzman, S. Katzman Produce Inc.

starting up or looking to “change things up a bit.” Salesmen visit stores regularly to learn firsthand what products sell best to make sure they have product to fill all of their needs. The company also sends its “produce people” directly into the stores to help them set up their shelves and samples. “We use our knowledge of what’s hot, what’s a big seller, what’s running really well at the moment, and what we have seen work for other retailers to help them set up their stores to promote more business,” explains Katzman.

Even those who sell through terminal markets have found opportunities to assist retailers with marketing, according to D’Arrigo of D’Arrigo Brothers. “If you have a particularly good relationship with a shipper on a product, you can do some merchandising and marketing where you would go to a small store group, a single outlet, or even a large chain and represent that item and set up ads and programs for them,” he says.

Because of its relationship with Dole, Rubin of Rubin Bros. is able to tap Worldwide Sales, Dole’s food broker based in Clifton, NJ, to go into stores on its behalf and set up retail slots “the right way.” Dole also provides Rubin the ability to market their products by allowing customers to get reductions in price to accommodate advertisements. Although few retailers have the shelf space for POS materials, Rubin can easily acquire whatever is needed through his Dole connections. In today’s cutthroat retail environment, such initiatives are increasingly critical. “My customer who sells to the retailer now has competition from people that I don’t sell to, so I have to support my customer in order to maintain their existing business relationships,” says Rubin. “It’s a constant struggle.” **pb**



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In June of 2002, Governor George Pataki of New York signed Louis' Law, which requires AEDs in all New York public schools. To date 57 lives have been saved as a direct result of this law in New York public schools. Each time a vibrant, seemingly healthy child suffers a Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA), the Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation mission of protecting youth from SCA and preventable Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD) becomes even more critical. We know it happens and we need to collectively assure others realize it by sharing our Mission and Vision.

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Packaged salads run the gamut to satisfy a variety of palates.

Salads Get Refreshed With New Ingredients

After 20 years in the produce department, the packaged salad category continues to innovate and improve its offerings for a new generation of customers. **BY MEREDITH AUERBACH**

When *PRODUCE BUSINESS* asked a variety of packaged salad growers and producers, “How can you possibly come up with more new and different salad choices?” the universal answer was a chuckle. The general consensus: “We’re just starting.”

There’s no dearth of ideas to develop new products, improved ways to process, better packaging and different markets. Opening up a whole new arena is the rapidly changing consumer. Beyond the product, process and packaging, how a packaged salad gets to market is just as important.

Growth Returns To The Category

Bob Stallman, general manager of retail salads for Fresh Express Inc., a subsidiary of Chiquita Brands International, in Salinas, CA, reports, “Based on syndicated data from Nielsen, dollar sales since last year have increased 2 percent and unit sales are up 1.5 percent — not huge numbers, but an improvement over the past three years. An indication of the challenge ahead is some

growth in cut garden-style, which might be due to some trading down.”

Looking at segments within the category tells a different story. Both organic blends and single-serve salads have experienced dramatically strong growth. Processors also report strength in private label. “In the 52 weeks ending in July, organic salads are up 13.1 percent,” reports Samantha Cabaluna, director of communications for San Juan Bautista, CA-based organic producer Earthbound Farm. “A couple likely reasons may be that organic salads carry a minimal premium compared to other organic products in the store, and consumers have high trust in organic foods.”

Tristan Kieva, director of marketing for the Irwindale, CA-based Ready Pac Foods Inc., points out, “Our six single-serve Bistro bowl varieties increased 23 percent in dollar value for the 13-week period ending in July compared to last year.”

Barbara Dan, Ready Pac’s vice president of marketing and research and development, adds, “Our view is that if we can solve a problem, consumers will continue to buy.”

As John Burge, vice president of sales and

marketing for Classic Salads LLC, a grower and processor of baby leaf salad greens, in Watsonville, CA, points out, “This category grew from zero to \$3 billion dollars a year in just over 20 years, and for many retailers, it is their No. 1 profit section in the produce department.”

New Products Keep Coming

As technology evolves, new products proliferate. New development continues to expand into additions of protein — both animal and plant-based — and salad blends of greens with more complex flavor profiles. Packaging that prolongs viable shelf-life and enables the assembly of previously incompatible ingredients opens the door to the concept of pantry-loading — the ability to buy ahead for up to a week. This new technology brings value to today’s time-starved consumers.

It’s not just that producers can keep coming up with new combinations and new flavors. In a category with potentially hundreds of SKUs, new lines of greens, salad blends and single-serve salads offer retailers opportunities to refresh the section, appeal to their own unique set of customers, balance the price structure and in



Ready Pac's line of Bistro Bowls continue to be popular and increase in sales.

PHOTO COURTESY OF READY PAC FOODS INC.

short, differentiate every store or every banner.

Blends of salad greens continue to evolve. What started as cut iceberg lettuce, sometimes mixed with carrot shreds, has become more complex with mixes of spinach, herbs, arugula, kales, red and green butter lettuces and romaine. Classic Salads' Burge comments, "We focus on the greens with emphasis on the baby tender leaf varieties for both our own blended products and for private label as well."

Dole lays claim to more than 20 different blends of greens. "Because there's such a wide range of flavors and textures, we've developed on-package guides to help consumers understand the taste and texture of the various greens," reports Ronda Reed, vice president of marketing for Monterey, CA-based Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc.

Apio Inc., in Guadalupe, CA, is introducing its Chipotle Salad Kit, a new flavor to the company's already successful line, that capitalizes on the restaurant-based trend toward using more bold pepper flavors and the Chipotle flavor profile, in particular. "Vegetable salads offer novel alternatives to traditional leaf-bases salads," said director of marketing, Cali Tanguay, in a recent press release. "These salad kits offer quick, easy solutions for side dishes or they can easily have a protein added to create a nutritious main dish."

A Retailer's Decision

So how do retailers navigate all the choices and brands? Typically, retail buyers align with a major national brand, a processor of organic salads that could be separate or one in the same and, for larger retailers, a private label mix. At that point, there may even still be space for a couple of specialty items to suit specific interests.

Larry Tucker, produce merchant and category manager of fresh produce UPC-coded products for Raley's Family of Fine Stores,

based in Sacramento, CA, agrees, but adds, "There's more competition for that prime refrigerated produce space than ever before — fresh packaged ready-to-cook vegetables, microwaveable bags, salad dressings, cut fruit and juices, and fresh sauces and salsas. It's hard for stores to keep up with all the new choices. They are very profitable, but they also need close management."

When it comes to choosing exactly what to stock his shelves with, Tucker "looks at unit sales as well as dollar sales; each SKU has to

"It's hard for stores to keep up with all the new choices. They are very profitable, but they also need close management."

—Larry Tucker, Raley's Family of Fine Stores

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THE BLURRING OF DELI AND PRODUCE

Produce and packaged salad are all about “fresh.” More and more, so is the deli section. Garth Borman, president at Taylor Farms Pacific Inc., located in Tracy, CA, thoughtfully comments, “Leading retailers put their focus on fresh as the means to define and differentiate their stores and to generate greater sales and profitability. The action is in the perimeter. As we see it, stores are gradually moving to group fresh foods together.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAYLOR FARMS PACIFIC INC.

Borman continues, “About 80 percent of our salad business is private branded and we work with many of the major retailers around the country serviced by our eight processing plants. “The key to making it work is the distribution and it is critical. It may be counter-intuitive, but here at Taylor Farms we believe that to push consumption, you must shorten shelf-life. When it is shorter there’s a better eating experience. When cut product is involved there’s, at most, 48 hours before degradation.”

pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF APIO INC.

In response to the trend of bold flavors, Apio has released a new flavor profile, its Chipotle Salad Kit.

earn its spot on the shelf,” he asserts. “As a retailer, we want to make sure we don’t move beyond our core consumer. We do not want them to only buy on promotion. We also want to make sure that the next generation of shoppers thinks of salad as a daily part of dinner or lunch and there is no loss of frequency.”

In the center of the country, Dick Rissman, produce manager for the 15-store chain Dahl’s Food Markets, headquartered in Des Moines, IA, sounds an optimistic note, saying, “We’re seeing good movement and hear from

customers that packaged salads are a good value and there is no waste. Is there some trading down perhaps from a kit or blend to cut lettuce? Maybe some, but not a lot.”

Packaging Is Part Of The Story

Increasingly, salad blends and tender leaf greens come in both bags and rigid clamshells. Most, but certainly not all, salad kits are packed in clamshells. The clarity of a clamshell

aids shoppers in being able to see exactly what’s included, which is a point of differentiation, as there is little commonality when it comes to items such as forks, dressing and even pepper.

Classic Salads’ Burge comments, “There’s been plenty of experimentation in packaging. Zip-locks were tried but didn’t catch on, perhaps due to cost, and they didn’t improve shelf-life. Clamshells became popular six or

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Source: Client calculations based in part on data reported by Nielsen through its SCANTRACK Service for the Packaged Salad Category for the 12 week period ending 7/11/11 for the Total U.S. market



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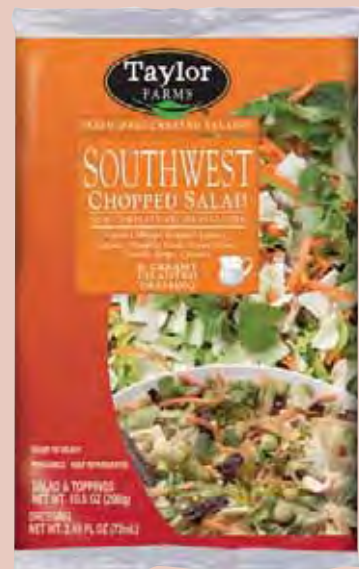
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INNOVATIONS PUSH THE SALAD-CATEGORY ENVELOPE



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As consumers become more aware of nutrition guidelines, seek to eat more vegetables and whole grains and look for great-tasting ways to do that, packaged salads are ready to help. Research and steady innovation drive the process.

Protein continues to find its way into the single-serve salad kits as processors seek to move more center-of-the-plate, and new packaging breakthroughs deliver longer shelf-life. Bob Stallman, general manager of retail salads for Fresh Express Inc., a subsidiary of Chiquita Brands International, in Salinas, CA, of Fresh Express points out, “By the time the protein level is up to six grams, the salad and the protein become the entree. Kits that include all the ingredients mean that a meal can be ready on short notice. Contrast that with a bag of cut lettuce where consumers still need all the other ingredients on hand and ready to go. Each type of salad or kit has a different role and a place in different meal occasions.”

Three new Dole salads combining blends of tender lettuces with servings of popular fresh vegetables — up to six

vegetable servings — are being introduced at the PMA Exhibition in Atlanta in October. The vegetable additions in Dole’s Extra Veggie salad line include tomatoes, snap peas, or a garden vegetable mix of radishes, carrots and red cabbage.

According to Michelle Gonsalves-Kirch, director of marketing, new products for Dole Fresh Vegetables, in Monterey, CA, “Dole was able to crack the code on providing a high quality product through a unique, customized approach.” She adds that the company is working on filing a patent to protect this new process.

“With these salads, we expect to create a new segment within packaged salads,” says Ronda Reed, vice president of marketing for Dole Fresh Vegetables. “Creating the optimal all-natural environment to ensure both ingredients can successfully maintain their flavor and texture is key. Our packaging process enables lettuce blends and vegetables with different respiration rates to maintain their maximum flavor and crunch.”

Gonsalves-Kirch adds that one bag of Extra Veggie will provide 100 percent of the

USDA’s recommended daily vegetable intake for adults. “With this level of vegetable delivery, Extra Veggie could replace the need to add a veggie side to a family’s meal or more veggies to their salad.”

Earthbound Farm is pursuing ways to increase protein without using animal products. “We call our newest single serve salads Power Meals,” says Samantha Cabaluna, director of communications for San Juan Bautista, CA-based organic producer Earthbound Farm. “The three kits range between 340 and 360 calories and have up to 9 grams of protein so they are filling. All three used plant-based protein provided by grains, seeds and legumes like the Blueberry Quinoa with Sunflower Seeds Distribution started in the West and is moving across the country.”

Three chop salads from Taylor Farms push the envelop of development further along. These include Asian, Vegetable and Southwest-style chopped salads. Some of the ingredients could break down quickly but each is individually packaged: small packages within the greens package. **pb**

seven years ago and look great, but don’t breathe, and rigid lids can’t be sealed,” he laments. “You need a breathable film to totally seal the package, but they are not then re-sealable. Many of the next innovations in the salad category will be in packaging.”

One innovation in clamshells packaging currently underway is to make them more

environmentally sensitive. Cabaluna of Earthbound Farm reports, “Our clamshells are made from recycled post-consumer plastic, which can continue to be recycled. The materials are regularly tested to make sure they meet recycling standards for quality and re-use. Even with the changes, we’ve been cost-neutral since 2009.”

According to Stallman of Fresh Express, “Packaging is such a critical issue. The goal is to use it to maximize quality through the supply chain. We have implemented a process to seal bags without heat, which better controls the atmosphere in the bag. We’ve found we can also use less plastic as part of the seal, thereby increasing sustainability.” **pb**



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Consumers searching for value and quality in home cooking are fueling tie-in demand.

Demand For Salad Tie-Ins Grows In A Tight Economy

Time-starved and health-conscious consumers are taking the salad tie-in category by storm. **BY SUSAN FEINBERG**

A slow-to-recover economy has made consumers more cautious in their purchasing decisions. Despite tough economic times, consumers' interest in nutrition, health and wellness continues to drive produce consumption. Traditional and new varieties of salad tie-ins that are properly marketed for their nutritional benefits are experiencing growth during these challenging times. Health campaigns, such as First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move," have received accolades and are expected to further spur fresh food and produce consumption among children, teens and their parents.

"Even during an economic recession, people continue to pay more attention to the nutritional benefits of the food they're eating," notes Douglas Hawkins, Jr., chairman of the board at Sandpoint, ID-based Litehouse Inc. "Today's consumers are much more aware of the nutritional benefits of foods than they were in the old days, when a lot of food was canned. People are getting the message that what we eat matters. They're looking for that type of item in

produce departments, whether it's unsalted nuts, fresh berries, cherry tomatoes, or refrigerated salad dressings."

While consumers are cutting back on dining out in restaurants, there's been an increase in the number of people buying produce and salad tie-ins. "Both the produce dressing category and the Marie's brand have shown growth in the face of the economic slowdown," says Randy Bartter, vice president of marketing for consumer products at Ventura Foods LLC, headquartered in Brea, CA. "It really is a question of value. Consumers are looking for ways to make a quality meal at home, and they recognize that the best quality, freshest tasting dressing is worth the price. This is seen as a good value because it lets them make a restaurant-quality meal at home."

At Bristol Farms, a 13-unit retailer based in Carson, CA, the salad dressing category sales have also increased. "I believe that this is partly due to more at-home meal preparations and our focus on a reduced SKU offering," says Raul Gallegos, senior director of produce and floral. "In addition, customers in many cases are trying to replicate restaurant offerings at

home in their own meal preparations. This results in increased requests for unique salad toppings."

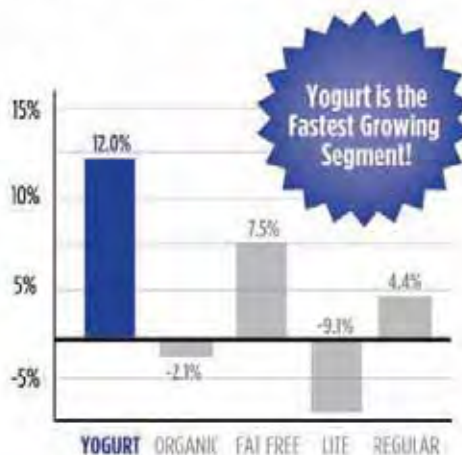
Even in a difficult economy, consumers are still treating themselves to high-quality food. At Mooney Farms, sales of sun-dried tomatoes are up dramatically. Mary Mooney, director of sales and marketing for the Chico, CA-based company, believe this surge in sales is due in part to all of the recent publicity about lycopene. "Sun-dried tomatoes have more lycopene than fresh tomatoes," she says. "It's a super healthy food, which many people are learning about through interest in the Mediterranean Diet. Sun-dried tomatoes are so huge right now that you can't turn on Dr. Oz or the cooking channel without hearing about them. So now, consumers are just grabbing them and sprinkling them on salads more than ever before."

Peter Neville, president of Concord Foods, headquartered in Brockton, MA, reports that he's seeing a sales increase in most of the company's salad tie-ins, including coleslaw. He attributes this to consumers' heightened interest in cooking and adding more produce

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“Even during an economic recession, people continue to pay more attention to the nutritional benefits of the food they’re eating. Today’s consumers are much more aware of the nutritional benefits of foods than they were in the old days, when a lot of food was canned. People are getting the message that what we eat matters.”

— Douglas Hawkins, Jr., Litehouse Inc.

to diets. “The value of convenience is offsetting any impact of the tight economy,” he says. “And our prices are quite low. Generally, our product is under a dollar, so it’s perceived of as a nice add-on, rather than a major luxury. It’s less expensive to buy a head of cabbage and use our coleslaw mix and make your own than it is to find a prepared product, and it tastes far better.”

Beyond The Traditional Salad Tie-In

Many of the traditional salad tie-ins, such as salad dressings and croutons, remain popular. But today’s consumers are looking for a variety of well-balanced salad tie-ins — almonds, sun-dried tomatoes, berries and nuts, to name a few — that enhance the flavor of their salad and provide health benefits. They value convenience, price, ease of preparation, consistent results, and of course, taste. “Nothing sells a second time if it doesn’t capture consumers’ taste expectations,” says Dixie Michie, marketing manager at Linsey Foods Ltd., headquartered in Markham, Ontario, Canada.

More and more, consumers are seeking creative ways to add taste and variety to salads with salad tie-ins. “People are putting different things in salads, from craisins to nuts to different types of cheeses, than they did in the past,” says Neville. “This trend started in restaurants, where chefs have gotten very creative. The trend has moved from restaurants to the supermarket and to consumers wanting to do this on their own. The whole salad/cabbage/coleslaw complement of products has grown because consumers enjoy this creativity. It’s a fun way of improving their diet and adding different types of salads to their regular repertoire.”

Carla Laylin, group marketing manager, produce dressings and toppings, at Columbus, OH-based T. Marzetti Co., emphasizes the trend in food products is moving toward simple, minimally processed products with easy-to-understand labels displaying informa-

tion about ingredients and nutritional value. “We believe this trend is here to stay, as is an increased focus on health and wellness,” says Laylin. “Marzetti Simply Dressed salad dressings meet these needs because they are made with extra virgin olive oil and canola oil (providing Omega-3) — two oils that consumers recognize and realize the benefits of — and sea salt. These dressings have no preservatives, trans-fat, high fructose corn syrup, MSG or artificial flavors. This line capitalizes on that “back-to-basics” trend as consumers are continuing to look at labels for ingredients they know and understand.”

“Consumers are also interested in dressings with lower fat and calories,” Laylin adds. “That’s why we are expanding our Simply Dressed line to include Simply Dressed & Light options, to begin shipping in October 2011. This line includes five varieties, four of which are made with yogurt, and one of which is fat-free. Additionally, we will introduce Simply

Dressed & Light Raspberry Acai, which is fat-free.”

At Ventura Foods, merchandising head or cut cabbage with Marie’s Coleslaw Dressing, or strawberries with Marie’s Strawberry Glaze, has proven to be successful. “These tie-ins provide meal preparation solutions for consumers and add to the market basket for the retailer,” says Bartter. “Produce departments have done these types of tie-ins for years and are familiar with them.”

According to Mooney of Mooney Farms, the Greek salad is becoming “huge.” She notes, “With the popularity of the Mediterranean Diet, everyone’s been talking about Greek salad. All I hear is ‘feta cheese, cucumbers and tomatoes.’ Sometimes people combine these foods with marinated artichoke hearts and gourmet croutons. One of our most popular salads is the Sun Dried Tomato Greek Salad. Items from the produce department including sun dried tomatoes, cucumber, feta cheese, olives, peppers and olive oil are all part of this delicious year-round salad.”

B&R Stores, based in Lincoln, NE, is having success with a new salad tie-in. “We just started merchandising Good Sense Salad Pizazz,” says Randy Bohaty, produce director for the 17-store chain. The item, marketed by Waymouth Farms, in New Hope, MN, “is a topping that contains nuts, fruits and different items that enhance the eating experience. There’s one citrus and one cranberry version. The items from the salad topper line are good enough so that people can even snack on them out of hand.”

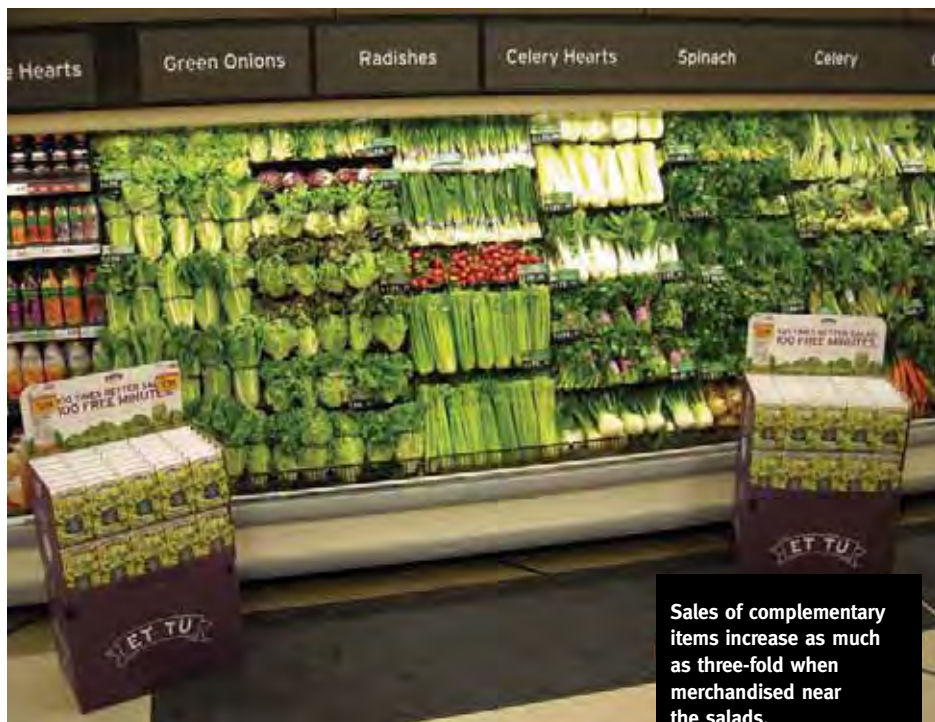


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Sales of complementary items increase as much as three-fold when merchandised near the salads.



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“You want to give consumers a one-stop solution, rather than making them walk across the produce department. If the coleslaw is next to the shredded cabbage, both items will sell better. Concord Foods offers different display methods of tying them together, whether hanging from the overhead or cutting them into the sides.”

— Peter Neville, Concord Foods

Fueling Consumer Demand For Tie-ins

The first rule of driving consumer sales of salad tie-ins? Keep it easy and simple. “Many people are shopping for food after work, and they’re short on time and tired,” Mooney asserts. “So it had better be convenient or they’re walking out the door. Produce departments are realizing this and aren’t making them walk all over the store. They’re putting salad tie-ins together now, trying to put a salad together for consumers. I’m seeing sun dried tomatoes next to croutons and salad dressings, different types of lettuces, olive oil and vinegar and pine nuts. Now produce departments have fabulous tie-ins like fresh basil tomatoes, and even feta cheese and gourmet cheese.”

The placement of salad tie-ins in the produce department is a key factor in driving sales. “For these items to be successful, they have to be near what they’re going to be used with,” explains Michie of Linsey Foods. “In our case, because we have everything in the kit, the best place to merchandise our product is near the lettuce,” she adds. “We find that our sales increase three-fold when we’re displayed there, but we can’t always get that kind of placement. Since ours is a packaged good, we find that either a temporary corrugated display or a rack are the best ways to get the product near the lettuce, not only for impulse sales, but so brand loyalists can easily find it. This helps the consumer who has this item on her shopping list find it on every store visit.”

Neville of Concord Foods agrees that product placement is critical to success. “You want to give consumers a one-stop solution, rather than making them walk across the produce department,” he advises. “If the coleslaw is next to the shredded cabbage, both items will sell better. Concord Foods offers different display methods of tying them together, whether hanging from the overhead or cutting them into the sides.”

Salad tie-ins such as salad dressings and croutons are a natural fit for cross promo-

tions with fresh produce. “At Litehouse, we cross-merchandise items with types of companies associated with produce departments,” says Hawkins. “For example, we’ll try to work with a crouton company and do a coupon that offers consumers the opportunity to save a dollar on two items when you buy both. Regardless of the item, we’ll cover the cost of some of the additional produce items to make that salad. We’ve tried a few programs like that and had fairly good success.”

Bartter of Ventura Foods reports, “Marie’s Dressing has successfully coordinated tie-ins simultaneously with the produce buyers and the various produce suppliers for those retailers. The produce suppliers see it as a way to link a value on Marie’s Dressing to their sale, and to play a more important role with the retailer. We see it as a way to capitalize on the traffic through the department and improve the market basket for the retailer. It’s a win-win for the manufacturer, the retailer and the consumer. The tie-ins need to make sense to the consumer by offering a one-stop shopping meal solution. Successful tie-ins usually include a purchase incentive at the shelf, such as a price reduction or coupon and usable content such as a recipe.”

In the future, technology will play an increasingly important role in the sales and merchandising of salad tie-ins and produce. “Today’s technologies are changing food shopping and how we sell produce,” says Mooney of Mooney Farms. “Consumers used to make shopping lists on little pieces of paper. Now they’re downloading lists from magazines of products that keep women healthy to their smart phones, and then going to the grocery store. At Mooney Farms, we’re in tune with Facebook and Twitter as well as online recipes, contests and blogs. Companies who are proactive are definitely marketing their products that way. Anyone who isn’t doing this kind of marketing really needs to consider it.”

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Clamshells and other clear packaging give the perception of high quality, with visibility of freshness.

How Packaging Helps Sell More Produce To Consumers

Produce consumer packaging helps build retail sales. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**

Today's produce consumer packaging is attracting more customers and helping build retail sales. It is meeting many of current society's demands. Retailers will continue to have beautiful bulk displays of colorful fresh produce, but new packaging is joining the produce retail scene in a positive way.

Many societal changes and concerns have brought produce consumer packaging to the fore, affecting today's consumer produce packaging and research on ways to improve food safety; consumer appeal of fresh-cut produce; items coming from greater distances; labeling regulations; customer demand for greater preparation and storage convenience; and more perishable items available.

Package Sizes Are Changing

Opinions differ in the produce industry as to today's packaging trends. However, most agree that there is a trend to smaller packages. "There has been strong growth in single-serve and grab-and-go style packaging," says Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer for Clear Lam Packaging Inc., an Elk Grove Village, IL-based manufacturer of rigid and flexible materials used to package produce.

"Consumers want portion-control packages, featuring pre-sliced, pre-measured aspects that address health and wellness, as well as convenience," maintains Tanya Rhem, North American retail strategic marketing at Sealed Air's Cryovac Food Solutions, a Duncan, SC-based manufacturer of a wide range of protective packaging and performance-based materials. "They also are looking for ease-of use across all categories. This includes utilizing easy-open and resealable packaging. Cryovac has recently designed a number of packaging technologies to address these needs."

Grab-and-go convenience packaging is a newer trend for Sunkist Growers Inc., of Sherman Oaks, CA. "We're using Giro Bags for Clementines, Cara Caras and other specialty citrus offered in 2- and 5-lb. packs, as well as Meyer lemon 1-lb. pouch bags," states Dean Troxell, director of packaging. "Smaller unit packs meet retail price points."

Last season, Sunkist offered a new, smaller unit-count Navel orange value-carton. The company plans to expand the offer for the upcoming season. The carton provides more affordable value, with graphics designed toward consumer appeal for purchase as holiday gifts.

According to Jim Scattini, vice president of

sales and marketing at Sambrailo Packaging, in Watsonville, CA, "A greater percentage of fruits and vegetables are now packaged and sold as value-added or processed produce. There is a growing interest in test marketing single-serve value-added fruit cups."

Ready Pac Foods Inc., in Irwindale, CA, is soon planning to introduce a new Fresh Fruit Parfait line that will be in proprietary packaging. Yogurt, granola and fresh fruit components will all be kept separate until the consumer is ready to use it, according to Tristan Kieva, director of marketing.

Some companies are seeing a growth of larger containers, spurred by the demand of the club stores. "Fruit or vegetables sold in supermarkets in half-pint or pint containers are often sold in 1-, 2- or 3-lb. containers in club stores. Some of our new Safe-T-Fresh offerings hold up to four pounds of cut fruit," says Herb Knutson, director of marketing for Shelton, CT-based Inline Plastics Corp., a manufacturer of a complete line of plastic containers for produce.

Clamshells Growing In Popularity

The use of clamshells and clear rigid plastic containers has grown. "This packaging gives the perception of high quality, with visibility of

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INTEREST IN GREEN MATERIALS RISES

The use of environmentally friendly materials follows along with weight reduction as the packaging industry looks at all the options in reducing the weight of the produce package. One company that has introduced a new product into the produce packaging arena is Earthcycle Packaging Ltd., in Vancouver, BC, Canada. "Our packaging is certified home compostable, recyclable and renewable," says Shannon Boase, founder and CEO. "It is made from an agricultural waste product of the palm oil industry."

The packaging was launched seven years ago with a range of products for the produce industry. Today, the firm is no longer just servicing the organic produce market, but has been able to penetrate packaging for conventional produce as well. "We believe this is because retailers have become more concerned about their packaging footprint and their customers are pressuring them to reduce the use of petroleum-based products," adds Boase. "Many of our customers think it is the right thing to do, plus they see increased customer loyalty, and employees feel better about using environmentally responsible products."

Sambrailo Packaging, in Watsonville, CA is looking at the use of Sugar-Cane Fiber compostable baskets for a wide array of produce items, according to the firms' Scattini.

"The demand for environmentally friendly packaging continues to expand as consumers begin to better understand the differences between terms such as renewable, recyclable, recycled content, compostable and biodegradable," comments Jim Scattini, vice president of sales and marketing. "A lot of work is going into utilizing recycled plastic or paper whenever possible. Most of the flexible bags and rigid trays used for consumer applications are not recycled in America due to the inability to sort plastic garbage effectively." **pb**

freshness," explains Carol Zweep, manager of packaging and nutrition labeling services for Guelph Food Technology Centre, in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. "It also indicates product safety because the product is protected from direct handling and tampering. This creates

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MISLABELING OF BIODEGRADABLE IS A CONCERN

Wyatt Brown, Ph.D., director of the Cooperative Research Consortium on Packaging Science and Technology at California Polytechnic State University, in San Luis, believes that mislabeling of products that say they are biodegradable is a big concern. “The industry is self regulated and so everyone is dependent on what the industry says. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) has set standards that should be followed. A good question to ask is whether label directions meet these standards. Especially with green packaging, there may have been poor testing or no testing done at all. It is important for those in the industry to ask questions and ascertain if the proper standards are being met on a particular product being considered for use,” he states.

“There are concerns about the green washing of consumers with unsubstantiated claims of environmentally friendly packaging,” acknowledges Carol Zweep, manager of packaging and nutrition labeling services for Guelph Food Technology Centre, in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. “The environmental movement is being

encouraged by retailers, such as Wal-Mart, that are putting pressure on their suppliers to reduce packaging by the introduction of their packaging scorecard.”

The Wal-Mart packaging scorecard was introduced several years ago as an initiative to reduce packaging across the company’s global supply chain by five percent by 2013. It was designed to allow suppliers to evaluate themselves relative to other suppliers, based on specific metrics. Two hundred leaders in the global packaging industry outlined the metrics for the scorecard. The metrics list used evolved from favorable attributes announced earlier: Remove, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Renew, Revue and Read. Suppliers can determine how their packaging innovations, environmental standards, energy-efficiencies and use of materials match up against those of their peers. Suppliers receive an overall relative score to other suppliers, as well as relative scores in each category. Since the initial introduction in the United States, the initiative has moved into Canada, and more recently, Mexico. **pb**

marketing and branding opportunities.”

“Clamshells are a major part of our business and we see them as a protection of the product from field to table,” says Sambrailo’s Scattini. “They also offer opportunities to meet labeling requirements and provide traceability of the product, now seen as an important aspect of

marketing produce. What began with berries, grapes and salads has infiltrated herbs, apples and cherries.”

Inline Plastics manufactures Safe-T-Fresh clamshells, which are tamper-evident and leak-resistant. The company has recently introduced a line of 10-inch diameter clamshell bowls in

48-oz. through 80-oz. sizes.

Regarding fresh produce, the consumer’s main concern is preserving freshness without chemicals and extending shelf-life in the store and at home, according to Mona Doyle, president of The Consumer Network Inc., in Philadelphia, PA. The network is a research firm

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that operates a national shopper panel to keep in close touch with consumers' concerns. "Consumers are frustrated by berry packaging because the containers allow rinsing in the package, but then the berries spoil faster or are perceived as spoiling faster," she says, adding that, once rinsed, the berries should be consumed within a day or two because once water reaches the berries, they start to deteriorate.

Packaging Helps Change Salad Bowl Marketing

The increased purchases of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables have led to technological innovations in packaging. "Our proprietary Single Seal Technology that is used in the Ready Pac Bistro bowl salad allows us to use minimal packaging so consumers can see all the fresh ingredients inside the bowl and the topper tray," states Ready Pac's Kieva. "The technology keeps everything fresh from the time of purchase over the weekend until the consumer uses the salad for a brown bag lunch later in the week."

For retailers, the company has added a "foot" to the salad bowl package to allow easy upright merchandising of the bowls without a springload system. The upright merchandising showcases the fresh, value-added ingredients in each bowl, attracting more consumers to the shelf.

This fall, the company plans to test market a new family-size Ready Pac Bistro Dinner Solutions bowl in the Western United States, complete with fresh-cut lettuce, gourmet toppings and a complementary dressing. The new salad will be available in a clear bowl so consumers can see the fresh ingredients inside. It will have the same Single Seal Technology to keep ingredients fresh.

Bagged Salads A Popular Consumer Option

Prepackaged salads in bags are another option for consumers. Varieties of salad greens and blends offered continue to increase. Some packages have added salad dressings or other ingredients, sealed in bags within [see "Salad Trends" article on page 85]. In 2009, Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc., Monterey, CA-based Dole Food Co., introduced the Dole Salad Guide, the first on-pack ratings of salad taste and texture. Earlier this year, an updated word-based system was developed in tune with how salad consumers like to shop. A consumer-friendly taste and texture descriptor scale was developed. The taste scale ranges from Sweet & Subtle to Zesty & Bold, to Complex & Robust. The texture scale includes Tender, Crisp" and Crunchy designations.

Later this year, the company will launch

three new Dole Extra Veggie Salads. These combine blends of tender lettuces with hearty servings of popular fresh vegetables, up to two full cups per bag, to satisfy 100 percent of the USDA's daily vegetable requirement.

"To support the new line, we developed a unique new packaging process that enables lettuce blends and vegetables with different respiration rates to maintain their maximum crunch and flavor until the salad is tossed and eaten at home," explains Ronda Reed, vice president of marketing for Dole Fresh Vegetables. "We also made a significant investment in a

global patented continuous wash-and-drying system. The revolutionary system is now being retrofitted into each of Dole's salad plants. It is specifically designed to handle fragile vegetables and can be customized to the needs of each product." The line will be previewed at PMA Fresh Summit this month, with commercial production beginning in November, 2011.

Packages For Steaming

"Steaming technology that provides a healthy way to prepare meals is exploding because of consumer popularity. This trend hit the frozen

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PRODUCE INTERESTS SUPPORT RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

Consumer packaging for produce is obviously becoming more sophisticated and expensive. Realizing this, a group of produce suppliers have become supporters of a Cooperative Research Consortium on Packaging Science and Technology at California Polytechnic State University, in San Luis Obispo. Support for and guidance of the Consortium is provided by member companies that have business interests, such as packaging, in a relevant area of science and technology. A research agenda is led by Cal Poly faculty, with Consortium industry members having a major say in which projects are funded. A range of projects, currently spanning packaging design to heavy-metal content of recycled plastics, are analyzed in terms of size, focus and cost.

Some of the trends Wyatt Brown, Ph.D., director of the Consortium, sees as concerns for future research are: truthful labeling in what is designated “greener packaging” and what is truly biodegradable and what is not; increased safe

packaging, with nothing transferred from plastic or other packaging to food; and inhibiting the transfer of diseases, such as e-coli and salmonella, from workers to food.

“Packaging is the final frontier. Without proper produce packaging there is less consumer appeal and fewer sales,” states Jay Singh, PhD, associate professor of industrial technology and packaging program director at California Polytechnic State University, and also a founder of the Research Consortium. One project Dr. Singh is working on is designs for cartons to validate physical abuse. “In our labs, we can recreate almost any environment around the world. We test for shock, vibration, compression, relative humidity and temperature. The tests tell us not only about the outside container, but what happens to packages within it,” Dr. Singh explains. This demonstrates how interwoven packaging technology has become. Transportation research from farm to market can show how it affects the small package of produce the consumer takes home from the store.

Another area of package research that has taken on new importance is package weight. “Retailers do not necessarily want to change the size of the package, but they want to use less material, leaving a smaller foot print,” acknowledges Dr. Singh. “The volume may be the same, but less material or new lighter materials could be the answer.”

“Weight reduction is a key goal for most packaging,” contends Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer for Clear Lam Packaging Inc., in Elk Grove Village, IL. “This translates into less trucks, waste and pollution. We are beginning to see peel/reseal technology introduced into the produce market that eliminates rigid lids with lidding film that can be peeled open and then resealed. This new technology is good for the consumer and provides weight savings for the retailer. It is well suited for central processors and commissary operators.”

“Smart Packaging” is another area of research in which functional future “smartness” in produce packaging would be

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tested and developed. It might include actively preventing food spoilage and expanding shelf-life. It could indicate seal integrity or respond to changes in the product or package environment. Such research is being conducted at California Polytechnic State University. As an example, research would quantify greenhouse gasses and energy associated with the package. An RFID (radio-frequency identification) tag on a package could change color to indicate to a consumer the amount of ethylene in the package and the product's ripeness. **pb**

aisle and has been extended to the fresh produce aisle, utilizing packaging such as our Simple Steps package," states Cryovac's Rhem.

"Simple Step is an easy-open, microwavable package providing a simple way to steam fresh vegetables," Rhem continues. "The package is self-venting, with stay-cool handles, plus there is direct service from the tray. There are raw or pre-cooked product applications; post-pasteurization is either by steam, HPP (high-pressure processing) or water. High barrier properties ensure lock-in freshness and extended shelf-life."

StePac was the first company to offer pack-

aging that could be used in microwave appliances, according to Don Stidham, president of StePac USA, based in Encinitas, CA, a division of StePac LA Ltd., in Tefen, Israel.

A New Look For Produce Bags

"There is a trend toward laminated stand-up pouches, with very colorful graphics to grab the consumer's eye," reports Roy Ferguson, CEO of Chantler Packaging Inc., a producer in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, of a wide range of flexible packaging for the food and produce industry. "There are several reasons why: lower cost; lower carbon footprint; they store in less space and can be printed with all the pertinent information, rather than applying labor-intensive labels. This year, we have launched a line of consumer PrimePro bags being retailed through one of Canada's premier chain stores."

PrimePro is a packaging technology designed to extend the shelf-life of fresh fruits and vegetables by removing ethylene gas.

Grapes, now being marketed by Sunkist, appear in new bag packaging. It is zip Poly V bags, using clean graphics with the company name. The grapes are also available in clamshells, weighing two to five pounds, with attractive labels on the top.

New Approaches To Shrink

Shrink is a major concern of retailers, especially in these economically stressful times with tight margins. Packaging that can help increase the shelf-life of its contents is being demanded from packaging suppliers. Many of the newer packages are aimed at extending the shelf-life of the various produce items. "Packaging is key to reducing the shrink in the growing fresh-cut market," says Knutson of Inline Plastics.

"There is simply no sensible reason for waste levels of some commodities to be as high as they are," comments Stidham. "StePac's packaging technology has been used to reduce air shipments of some produce commodities. When our Xtend products are properly employed with best post-harvest practices and best cold chain practices, shrink levels can be lowered to nearly zero. This has a huge effect on the carbon footprint as well."

"I believe a pressing issue is that of waste," suggests Ferguson. "It's in the news a lot, but no one seems to believe reducing waste can become a profit area. If waste at the retail level can be reduced from what I'm led to believe is 3.5 to seven percent, an average retail chain could save \$95,000,000 per year. Having their

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Grower Alliance, LLC partners with a variety of Mexican fruit and vegetable growers, imports these products and reaches out to retailers, foodservice, wholesalers, distributors, and brokers in the U.S. and Canada. The partnership with a variety of growers provides the ability to have production through the entire Nogales season – typically from October through June. The group was formed by Jorge Quintero (sales), Luis

Caballero (head of Mexican operations), and 2 growers from Mexico in August of 2007.

In this, their fifth season, they project about 2.5 to 2.8 million packages. They'll offer customers a steady supply of core items including watermelons, honeydews, green beans, cucumbers/euro cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, eggplant, and

green bell peppers. Besides these core items they'll also ship hot peppers (jalapeno, Caribe, Anaheim, pasilla, serrano), carrots, Roma tomatoes, mini watermelons, pickles, snap peas, sweet corn, and fava beans.

At the heart of the GROWER ALLIANCE organization are the more than 14 growers who make up the partnership.

PRODUCT AVAILABILITY 2011 - 2012

	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL
Beans										
SDLS Wmelon										
Mini Wmelon										
Honeydews										
Italian Squash										
Grey Squash										
Eggplant										
Cucumber										
Euro Cucumbers										
Green Bells										
Red Elongated										
Red/Yellow 11lb										
Roma Tomatoes										
Grape Tomatoes										
Sweet Corn										
Pickles										
Hot Peppers										

Nov-15 to Apr-15

Oct-15 to Dec-15 / Apr-25 to Jun 25

Oct-10 to Nov-10 / Apr-20 to Jun-5

Oct-5 to Jan-30 / Apr-25 to Jun-30

Sep-26 to May 30

Sep-26 to Dec-10 / Apr-10 to Jun-20

Nov-10 to Apr-5

Oct-10 to Jun-20

Nov-1st to Apr-30

Dec-15 to Mar-15

Dec-15 to Mar-15

Call for availability

Dec-15 to May-15

Nov-20 to Mar-15

Oct-20 to Dec-20

Oct-20 to Jan-15

Call for availability

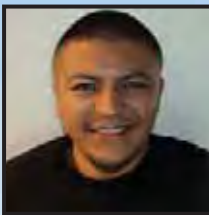
Grower Alliance, LLC

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KEY PEOPLE TO KNOW

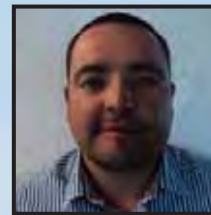
Following are the key people involved with
Grower Alliance who can be an asset to your business:



Jorge Quintero, Jr.
Sales, Managing Member
(daily sales, contract planning and advertising)



Jorge Quintero, Sr.
Sales Manager, Managing Member
(marketing director, daily sales)



Luis Caballero
Mexican Operations, Managing Member
(contracting growers, planning production
schedule, grower relations)



Jaime Martinez
Head accountant & grower relations



Frank Hernandez II
Sales Assistant



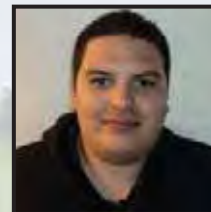
Saul Gonzalez
Sales



Sandra Betancourt
Accounts Payable/Accounts Receivable



Armando Robles
Quality Control



Jose Villareal
Dispatcher

produce packed in modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) would be a big step ahead.”

Graphics And Labeling Have Changed

With all the new packaging being introduced and tested, graphic designs and labels have also changed. Improvements in printing equipment technology have made producing high graphic artwork for packaging much more cost effective. Sunkist's Troxell notes, “Technologies in Smart phones and electronic media are allowing suppliers to provide QR codes on

packaging. The consumer can scan the code with a Smart phone and get additional valuable information about the product or company.”

Ready Pac recently experimented with a graphic redesign on a popular salad item, and ended up returning to the original design. “Consumers recognized the bright color palette and they shop based on color. We also see a renewed focus on inspiring consumers to try new recipe combinations,” comments Ready Pac's Kieva. “For example, we give consumers recipe ideas that combine Ready Pac's partner-

ship with Nature Sweet Cherub Tomatoes, in which we used our proprietary bag banner to share a coupon and usage ideas with consumers in the Southern California market.”

“Packaging graphics continue to evolve, but more importantly the illustration of freshness is paramount,” suggests Rhem of Cryovac. “Food marketers are looking for smart ways to convey brand information, required nutrition information and product specifications while balancing visibility of the product. Utilizing packaging films with sophisticated printing capabilities is one way to easily address these trends.”

Some Packaging Options For Food Safety

In the area of food safety, Europe has been using a packaging technology called Flo Packaging for quite some time. Wyatt Brown, Ph.D., director of the Cooperative Research Consortium on Packaging Science and Technology at California Polytechnic State University, in San Luis, believes it is a packaging process that should be beneficial to consumers. One company using a version of it, called Flow-Packing, is Primary Package, in Visalia, CA. “It is an effective method for packaging minimally processed fresh produce, especially when used with engineered films,” explains the firm's president Scott Cernosek. “It maintains freshness and creates a sanitary environment. This can be done on a ‘top seal’ or ‘bottom seal’ machine.” Flow-Packing can preserve the quality of many leafy vegetables, especially when using gas-flush or modified-atmosphere/modified humidity films.

Huge strides have been made in the agricultural practices used to keep the fresh produce safe as it moves to market. Many packaging firms recognize this and want to help take the products to the next step to the consumer. “We can provide packaging technology that is capable of extending shelf-life through a natural process of modifying the environments inside our Xtend bags,” reports Stidham of StePac USA. “This product is approved for use with organic fresh produce. We also market an Xsense wireless temperature and relative humidity monitoring technology in the form of sensors. This is capable of providing temperature and relative humidity data in real time from the farm to the store and alerting parties should a problem occur.”

Food safety is a key consumer issue and tamper-evident technologies are evolving. “There are mechanical tear strip-style containers and there are containers that incorporate lidding films that act as ‘safety seals,’” says Forowycz of Clear Lam Packaging. **pb**

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As consumers demand aesthetically pleasing produce, shadehouses become the name of the game.

West Mexican Growers Work To “Protect” Their Crops

Shadehouses and other means of protected agriculture are becoming more prevalent amongst West Mexican growers, who are realizing the benefits in quality, yield and extended growing seasons. **BY LISA WHITE**

Last winter was not easy for those in the produce industry. As the West Mexican regions of Culiacan and Hermosillo contended with their coldest weather in more than half a century, the production of a number of vegetables significantly declined.

In the past eight years, West Mexican growers have added a new option to their arsenal, but it has only been in the past three years that there has been a wholesale push to move a significant portion of the production to protected agriculture.

“Everyone finally understands that the needs and requirements of the market have changed,” says Danny Mandel, chairman of SunFed, based in Rio Rico, AZ. “Customers no longer want cucumbers with yellow bellies. They want long, straight dark green cucumbers and they want them every time. This type of consistency can only be achieved in protected agriculture.” For this reason, SunFed, along with an increasing number of growers, will carry bell peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes and other produce exclusively from protected agriculture this season.

Although not a cure-all, shadehouses

have become more prevalent in the region, due to the many benefits these structures provide. According to the Asociación Mexicana de Productores de Hortalizas en Invernaderos (AMPHI), The Mexican Greenhouse Growers’ Association, shadehouses make up 44 percent of Mexico’s protected culture area, just behind plastic greenhouses, which comprise 52 percent.

A typical shadehouse is approximately 12 acres and between nine and 13 feet high, compared with greenhouses that are less than 2.5 acres and between 16 and 19 feet in height. Made of air-permeable mesh, supports and cables to protect crops from wind damage and sunburn, shadehouses provide limited protection from cold temperatures and no protection from rain.

“The reason the unit size is so large is because ventilation is not an issue,” explains Alejandro Canelos, director of Nogales, AZ-based Apache Produce Co. Inc., a distributor of Plain Jane-branded produce. Because the sides of a greenhouse are air-permeable mesh and the roof is plastic or poly, a larger growing area in these structures would pose serious ventilation problems.

Shadehouse Phenomenon

The proliferation of shadehouses in West Mexico is similar to what happened in Europe 30 years ago, with greenhouses dominating Holland, then moving into Spain and Morocco. “North America has been behind the times in terms of this segment, but is currently following the same path as Europe did years ago,” Canelos points out.

Like in Europe, these protected growing areas are expected to transform the way produce is growing on this continent. “This trend will continue to pick up speed,” Canelos adds. “And there’s room for everyone, from the greenhouse guy to the shadehouse guy to the high-tech guy. Good growers find a way to make it work.”

When it comes to placing traditional outdoor crops under protection, consistency begets success. “We’re seeing different levels of technology, and as time goes on, it will get more sophisticated,” Canelos acknowledges.

Many in the industry contend that, in order for West Mexico to compete with the U.S. agriculture industry, especially with Florida in the winter months, shadehouses must play an integral part in the production schedule. “Everyone

is starting to see that shadehouses are the way of the future for Mexican agriculture, especially due to the demand from the United States,” says Nicholas Gatzionis, a sales associate at C.A.B. Produce LLC, based in Nogales, AZ. This has resulted in more shadehouse installations throughout West Mexico’s valleys, with more on the way.

Because these structures are relatively new to the West Mexican landscape, growers in this area are just starting to figure out what products are most successful in terms of cost effectiveness. Seed companies also have begun conducting trials in Mexican shadehouses to determine what grows best in these environments.

Even though these protected shelters are relatively low-tech in nature, the industry hopes shadehouses will provide beneficial rewards for the region. “The average American consumer doesn’t understand the advances in Mexican agriculture and the technologies in place,” Gatzionis contends. “People are concerned about food safety, but Mexico’s produce safety is on par with the United States, Canada and Europe.”

Due to the benefits and return on investment, a number of companies, including Ciruli Brothers LLC in Tubac, AZ, are continuing to increase shadehouse use for products such as tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers. “We continue to see more growers going into shadehouses, and expect to see a 30 percent increase this year,” says Christopher Ciruli, COO. “The structures have been out there and the commodity crops are standardized. Now the seed companies need to catch up. We’re waiting for non-open field seed types like green beans and eggplant to catch up to the shadehouse infrastructure in West Mexico.”

As incimate weather continues to impact growers, many predict there will be less open field planting in the years ahead. “In general, we’re seeing and hearing about more shadehouses going up in West Mexico and less open fields being used,” says Ernie Robles, product manager and salesman for Crown Jewels Produce Co., in Fresno, CA. “More people are investing in these structures. The freeze had a big influence in pushing toward more shadehouses being used.”

Grower Alliance LLC, in Rio Rico, AZ, is starting its fifth shadehouse season. “We’ve had growers we’ve worked with for the last three to four years that have begun implementing shadehouses more frequently,” says Jorge Quintero, Jr., manager and salesman. “The plan is to increase our acreage little by little each year, with the majority of our crops being grown in shadehouses. Most Mexican growers



PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRULI BROTHERS

are moving toward this growing method, some in a big way.”

The Many Benefits of Shadehouses

The prevalence of shadehouses is due to the many advantages these structures provide growers. Weather protection is a big benefit, especially with the recent record cold temperatures in some regions of West Mexico. “In terms of the cold weather, the shadehouse growers came out in better shape than those in the field,” Ciruli says.

Pests, such as white flies, also are deterred in these growing environments. This is a big problem in West Mexico, particularly in May and June. Weather protection and decreased pests add up to higher quality product. Shadehouse proponents contend that the difference is obvious. “There is definitely an increase in the quality shadehouses are putting out due to the better control in these structures compared to in the field,” Robles says.

Robles adds that the No. 1 product being grown in these structures is cucumbers, followed by bell peppers and eggplant. “The quality difference is day and night with these products,” he contends. “Cucumbers are straight; eggplant sizes are more uniform; and there is less throwaway overall. Plus, we have happier customers because they’re receiving a better quality pack that has more eye-appeal.”

“Just a few years ago, it was assumed that when talking about cucumbers, these were produced in open fields,” Quintero says. “When shadehouses began making an impact about seven years ago, the industry realized products grown in this environment needed to be marketed differently because the quality is different.” Although many say customers are

not yet seeking produce grown in shadehouses,

there is a positive connotation associated with items produced in this environment.

Another benefit of these structures is the higher yields they produce. “We’re seeing higher yields for product we put in shadehouses, with more exportable product and better yields of No. 1 quality,” Ciruli of Ciruli Brothers says.

With overall acreage down, shadehouses are seen by some as the answer in terms of providing a higher crop yield in less space. “A shade house’s yield is five times what an open field offers,” reports Joe Bernardi, president and CEO of Bernardi & Associates Inc., headquartered in Nogales, AZ. “Acreage is decreased, but total yield is increased. Consequently, with more produce being grown in shadehouses, we increase total packages. That has been the biggest difference.”

A big plus — and one that is on trend with the entire food industry as a whole — is the added control shadehouses offer from a food safety perspective. “Everyone is trying to improve their food safety programs and implement as many initiatives as possible to follow the government’s requirements,” Robles of Crown Jewels says. “Shadehouses offer better control for growers.”

The return on investment can take time, but if done right, it is eventually realized. “It can be a long-term investment, but the cost ratio is there, and higher yields are proof of that,” encourages Ciruli. “We’ve found shadehouses are worth the expense.”

“With more produce in a smaller space, labor and water use are decreased,” adds

Ciruli Brothers is continuing to increase its shadehouse use for products such as tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers.

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“Advantages are numerous, including better working conditions for employees, reduced water use, natural pest control and expanded production periods. Open field production still plays an important role in supplying the market, however, by offering a competitively priced product with lower growing costs.”

— Ben Reilly, The Giumarra Companies

C.A.B.'s Gatzionis. As a result of conserving water and space, shadehouses have been touted as a more sustainable method of growing.

Nogales, AZ-based Al Harrison Co. Distributors, utilizes drip systems in its shadehouses, which helps reduce costs. “We also are more efficient with the use of certain fertilizers and pesticides in these environments,” notes Brent Harrison, the company’s president.

A huge benefit, and one that has impacted revenues in a positive way, is the longer West Mexican produce season created by the increased use of shadehouses. “We can now get product in the marketplace earlier and have items in later than we can with produce grown in the open field,” Ciruli says. “West Mexico is now more of a nine-month deal. We expect to soon close the gap for year-long availability of produce from the region.”

This has lengthened the employment of those in the field as well, potentially giving a boost to the West Mexican economy.

Despite the many benefits of shadehouses, this growing environment is not for all types of crops. Growers are still experiencing a learning curve when it comes to determining which products do best in these structures. “Growers are still discovering that certain crops do better in shadehouses than others, and certain varieties are better suited than others,” says Bernardi of Bernardi & Associates.

For example, in the past, there has been a big learning curve with cucumbers. Some varieties were experiencing a shorter shelf-life and soft tips. “Also, round tomatoes initially had better success in this environment than Romas, but now we’re finding Roma varieties that are doing well and are having great success with these items,” Bernardi details.

It has become a kind of balancing act for growers who are looking for the varieties that can obtain the best quality, color, sizes and yields in a shadehouse environment. “We’re learning more every year about what works better,” Bernardi says. “This is a relatively new way to grow for a lot of people.”

Protected agricultural production, such as that in shadehouses, assists companies like Rio Rico, AZ-based The Giumarra Companies in managing the many variables involved with farming. “Advantages are numerous, including better working conditions for employees,



PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRULI BROTHERS

reduced water use, natural pest control and expanded production periods,” enumerates Ben Reilly, the company’s Midwest business development manager. “Open field production still plays an important role in supplying the market, however, by offering a competitively priced product with lower growing costs.”

Meet The Challenges Head On

As there are numerous benefits for shadehouse growers, there also are challenges with these growing environments. The risk of disease is greater for produce grown in these structures as compared to greenhouses. In its report, *Greenhouse Tomatoes Change the Dynamics of the North American Fresh Tomato Industry*, the USDA Economic Research Service stated that due to especially high

disease risk during the fall in the northern part of the Baja, California, peninsula, growers could eventually determine that greenhouse production is required to ensure fall volumes. Currently, some growers are experimenting with what is referred to as “hybrid” structures, a combination of shadehouse and greenhouse technology. This may provide many of the benefits of greenhouses, including reduction of disease risk, at a lower cost.

There is no question that moving product indoors — even partially as with shadehouses — helps increase yields and improves quality. Yet, growers have to really look at whether it’s possible to maximize their dollars in terms of their region. “For example, if you’re in an area that doesn’t need heat, it doesn’t make sense to add heat,” Apache’s Canelos says. “We are in a boom phase in terms of moving produce outdoors to indoors, but at the same time, everyone needs to follow their own strategy. What one person is doing isn’t necessarily what another should be doing. When it comes to agriculture, everyone does things their own way, because there is no text book to tell you what to do.”

Despite the many benefits, shadehouse use has not caught on with all companies or products. For example, Big Chuy Distributors & Sons, in Nogales, AZ, does not use shadehouses for growing its watermelon and hard squash, reports Mike Gerardo, a sales associate.

In many cases, the biggest hurdle to overcome is cost. Although shadehouses are less costly to build than greenhouses, they still require a significant investment that takes time to recoup. This puts these structures out of reach for many West Mexican growers. “We’re not seeing any limitations except for cost,” C.A.B.’s Gatzionis says. “These structures are expensive to implement and those costs have to be reflected in the marketplace to compensate. Sometimes they are and sometimes they are not, but the biggest limitation is capital.”

In addition, one of the largest obstacles to expanding infrastructure, such as adding shadehouses, is that it is somewhat cost prohibitive. “Through the help of the government, many structures have been built for the purpose of growing without the necessary and complementary packing facility, leaving several of these sites dormant,” Sunfed’s Mandel explains. “The larger exporters have known for a while the importance of protected agriculture and are continuing to move production inside when it makes sense to do so. If a particular product sees no yield increase and little increase in consistency, it does not make sense to transition that product indoors due to the high initial



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costs of the build out. As with all things, the returns must justify the investment.”

For growers where cost is less of a factor, investments in shadehouses are on the rise, as more produce volume is being produced indoors. Apache, which has chosen to invest more in greenhouse growing, tried implementing sheet shadehouses 15 years ago. “We found that we were better off investing in a higher-priced asset,” Canelos says. The company’s products are 100 percent greenhouse-produced.

Critics of shadehouses say that these structures vary in terms of materials and technology. “There is no real definition of a shadehouse that is accepted across the produce industry,” contends Canelos. “As a result, there is a wide variance in these structures and, even in our area, there are different levels of technology.”

When deciding to make the switch, growers need to determine the return on investment and whether implementing a shade house makes sense in the long run. “Figure out whether you will get the money back that you’re spending in a timely matter versus taking a cheaper route,” Canelos says. “This is an economic decision growers must make, taking into account their short- and long-term capital needs and the availability of capital.”

Another limitation is the types of products and produce varieties that thrive in a shadehouse environment. With some items, like cucumbers and tomatoes, the quality improvement is substantial. However, other products don’t fare as well.

As the technology improves and testing continues, some predict there will be more product diversification in shadehouses that will further expand the usage of these structures in West Mexico. “The industry has to continue coming up with new seeds, regardless of growing conditions,” Bernardi of Bernardi & Associates says. “This will result in a move toward diversification in shadehouses. However, diversification for one grower may be different than for another. This means different things to different people.”

The recent aforementioned freeze in Culiacan and Hermosillo was costly to growers with produce in open fields and even for items by the shadehouse perimeters. “Most of these structures are plastic, not glass, so there is not as much protection,” notes Charles Thomas Jr., president of Rio Rico, AZ-based Thomas Brothers Produce Co. Inc. “Even the few glass houses did not have the proper heating devices. No one planned ahead, so many growers lost a lot of product and money.”

As a result, some are looking to more

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“More growers are harvesting later in the season, so there is a more expanded time frame for this produce. However, I don’t know if this is beneficial. Customers feel that once the Mexican season is over, it is over. It’s all in the minds of buyers.”

— Ernie Robles, Crown Jewels Produce Co.

substantial protective structures, using glass and foregoing plastic, despite the added expense. “The industry is going more that route, probably approaching close to 40 percent for certain items [that need more protection from the elements and pests],” Thomas says.

Another downside of shadehouses is that these can require added labor with certain commodities that need more attention, Harrison of Al Harrison says.

And, although the West Mexican growing season can be extended with these structures, because many buyers are not yet aware of this, they may not be seeking produce from this region during the off season. “More growers are harvesting later in the season, so there is a more expanded time frame for this produce. However, I don’t know if this is beneficial,” Crown Jewels’ Robles admits. “Customers feel that once the Mexican season is over, it is over. It’s all in the minds of buyers.”

As the industry becomes more aware of all shadehouses have to offer, many predict it will become difficult not to be involved in this type of growing environment. “Our customers have requested the use of more shadehouses in our total overall program,” Harrison says. “The future of our industry is more shadehouses for certain products. It’s part of the infrastructure expansion.”

Higher quality and yields will help propel the continued use of shadehouses, as the growing seasons and profits continue increasing. “Eventually, buyers will realize the quality difference in shadehouse products,” Quintero of Grower Alliance says. “It’s peace of mind for customers to know exactly what they can expect in terms of quality.”

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The Mexican government views the promotion of sales of Mexican fresh fruits and vegetables to the United States as a major priority, and is working closely with growers in many areas to promote trade, quality and food safety. Food safety issues are not stopped by borders and everyone involved in the distribution chain – growers, packers, transportation companies, and wholesalers – have a vested interest in ensuring food safety. This is one area in which there can be no compromise of standards or requirements, both the Government and private sector in Mexico remain committed to doing the maximum possible in this area.

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is one of the region's most prosperous, considering the advantages afforded by its skilled population, its strategic location, the existence of specialized clusters in certain sectors, and the development of the

services and infrastructure necessary to participate actively in the international market. For More information on investing in Mexico contact ProMexico at www.promexico.gob.mx.

SEVERAL ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MEXICAN FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN THE US MARKET, SUCH AS PARTICIPATION IN TRADE SHOW, TRADE



TOP NOTCH SUPPORT WHEN BUYING FROM MEXICO

To help support buyers, Mexico boasts a variety of programs and agencies providing a wealth of assistance to those trading with Mexico. The Agricultural Office at the Embassy of Mexico offers various opportunities to build business with Mexican fruit and vegetables. Be sure to check out all

the support and available programs.

Their Direct Buying Program & Trade Missions helps retailers enhance the value chain of produce from Mexico by organizing business agendas and trade missions. The Mexican Fresh Produce Exporters Directory promotes the exportable supply of the Mex-

ican produce sector. Trade shows within and outside of Mexico give buyers the chance to meet key Mexican businesses and view their products. Various Mexican Promotion Boards provide a direct link to crucial information about Mexican products.

DIRECT BUYING PROGRAM & TRADE MISSIONS

The Agricultural Office at the Embassy of Mexico offers TRADE MISSIONS to help buyers enhance the value chain of produce from Mexico by organizing business agen-

das and trade missions. More than 20 of the largest U.S. retail firms have visited Mexico under this program. There are three different types of Missions: 1. Customized

Missions; 2. Missions Linked to Tradeshow; and, 3. Supplier Visits.

MEXICAN FRESH PRODUCE EXPORTERS DIRECTORY

The Directory is a marketing tool with the main objective of promoting the exportable supply of the Mexican produce sector. It includes a master catalogue with

information on growers, firms, production, availability, volume, seasons and varieties, among other information. It also offers integrated public and private databases and

regular updates of registered growers. Available in an annual printed edition, a CD-ROM, and website. www.mexbest.com

PROMOTION BOARDS/PRODUCER ASSOCIATIONS

Industry boards with a common goal of fostering an entrepreneurial culture through promotion of Mexican agricultural products offer a multitude of opportunities for infor-

mation and networking. They provide access to targeted promotion campaigns designed to increase consumption, and development and execution of advertising

strategies and promotional campaigns. Some of our major promotion boards include:

- Avocados from Mexico, www.avocadosfrommexico.com
- ALPUM (Association of Grape Producers), www.aalpum.com.mx
- AMHPAC (Greenhouse Producers Association), www.amhpac.org
- National Mango Promotion Board, www.mango.org
- Proberries (Berry association): www.congresodeberries.com.mx

TRADE SHOWS

MexBest promotes Mexican agricultural food products with export quality at exhibitions and the conferences of the agricultural industry. The MexBest logo represents the Aztec symbol for eternal movement

(Ollin) and it intends to show the constant evolution in the trade of Mexican agricultural products within the global economy. There is no doubt that at the MexBest pavilions you will find only the best of the

Mexican agriculture, with products that guarantee a certified quality and safety under the highest international standards. For more information: www.mexbest.com

For 2012, the Ministry of Agriculture of Mexico under the MexBest image will be participating in the following trade shows:

- WINTER FANCY FOOD SHOW
- SCAA
- NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO WEST
- UNITED
- SUMMER FANCY FOOD SHOW
- SOUTHWEST EXPO SHOW
- EXPO COMIDA LATINA
- NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO EAST
- PMA FRESH SUMMIT

Key shows in Mexico that buyers may be interested in attending include:

- EXPO AGRO SINALOA
- ALIMENTARIA
- ANTAD
- AGRO GUANAJUATO





Chile, Mexico, Uruguay, Argentina and Guatemala supply the bulk of offshore berries to the United States.

Boost Sales Of Imported Berries This Fall And Winter

With product being grown around the world, the berry category has become a year-round staple in produce departments. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

Fresh berries are no longer a novelty in the fall and winter. New plantings and proprietary varieties offer excellent quantity and quality during these seasons. In addition, shoppers are becoming just as accustomed to the thought of fresh blueberry and cranberry relish with their Thanksgiving turkey as they are to blueberry pie on the Fourth of July.

Raul Gallegos, director of produce and floral at Bristol Farms, a 13-store chain headquartered in Carson, CA, asserts, "Consumers are definitely interested in berries year-round. I think this is being driven by all the media reports about the nutritional benefits of berries. In addition, importers have recognized this growing demand and have worked hard to deliver good size and high quality in all types of berries."

Imports of fresh blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries collectively represent 6.6 percent of total produce sales, according to the Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based market research firm. This compares to 8.8 percent of the produce depart-

ment's berry dollars during the domestic season. This 2.2 percent opportunity gap is worth millions and is ripe for retailers to take advantage of through a greater awareness of offshore market dynamics, value-sized packaging and promotions.

Seasonal Outlook

Retailers can boost berry sales by working closely with importers to obtain real-time crop updates. Jose Manzano, produce director at the three-store Dorothy Lane Markets, based in Dayton, OH, reports, "We try to carry all four major varieties of berries when available."

Gaps in supply during the cooler weather months are narrowing, says Gallegos. "We've seen suppliers grow different varieties that extend availability and new areas of production that close the windows of unavailability of the past."

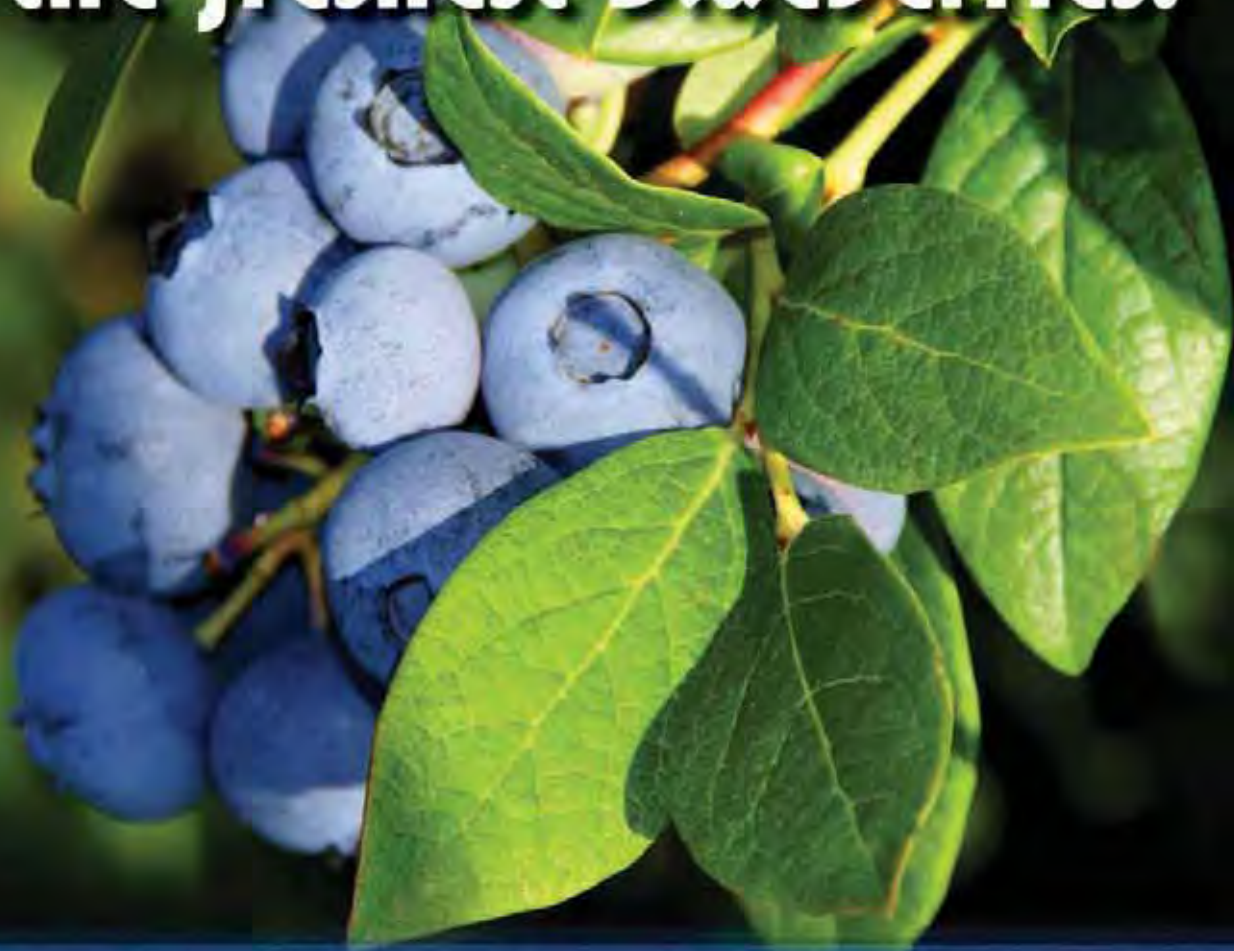
Countries that supply the bulk of offshore berries to the United States include Mexico, Guatemala, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. Marketing organizations in these countries are assisting in providing this time-sensitive infor-

mation. "For example," says Andrés Armstrong, managing director of the Santiago-based Chilean Blueberry Committee (CBC), "in 2010, we started to publish weekly crop updates during our season to provide suppliers, importers and retailers with the most up-to-date harvesting and export forecasts. Greater transparency of production and export information is helping the industry to mature and better program its promotions and sales."

Similarly, Inés Peláez, manager of the Argentinean Blueberry Committee (ABC), located in Buenos Aires, notes, "This year, our Committee has hired a U.S. agency to better communicate the reliability and timing of our supplies and ensure that everyone receives our pre-season and season reports. This will allow retailers to better plan their promotion programs."

BLUEBERRIES: The only potential gaps in blueberry supply occur in transition times between the import and domestic seasons, reports Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms LLC, headquartered in Estero,

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FIVE-YEAR IMPORT SHARE OF DOMESTIC FRESH-USE BERRY CONSUMPTION

Fresh blueberries (percent):

2006	42.7
2007	43.7
2008	46.9
2009	45.2
2010	49.0

Fresh raspberries (percent):

2006	16.4
2007	25.8
2008	23.6
2009	18.8
2010	29.0

Fresh strawberries (percent):

2006	8.36
2007	8.34
2008	7.28
2009	8.49
2010	8.87

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce

FL. “We try to bridge the mid-September to mid-October window with controlled-atmosphere berries out of California until Argentina and Uruguay start. The backside window, from late March to May, is closing fast due to new production in Mexico.”

Uruguay and Argentina’s blueberry crops are forecast to increase by 10 to 20 percent this season. Julia Inestroza, marketing and merchandising manager for Gourmet Trading Co., in Los Angeles, CA, says, “Uruguay provides an additional source of supply at the same time as Argentina, rather than fills a new window of supply.”

Uruguay and Argentina airfreight most of their blueberries to the United States due to fumigation requirements for pests, says Roberts. “The 70-degree heat treatment required for fumigation can affect the shelf-life of the berries, so it’s best to send them by air than boat,” he says. “New, less damaging, technologies are being researched, but are still a few years off. This means both countries need to get a premium for their fruit to cover the airfreight rates. Chile doesn’t have this challenge because their product doesn’t require fumigation for entry into the United States.”

Don Guzi, berry category manager for Southern Specialties, in Pompano Beach, FL, says, “We begin importing blueberries from

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the Tucuman region of Argentina by the end of September and ship through mid-December from Buenos Aires, with peak production mid-November.”

This marks the second season Gourmet Trading will offer its Superblues out of Argentina, notes Inestroza. “The berries are twice the size of regular blueberries, or an average of 15-mm in diameter, with a nice crunch. We recommend carrying only the Super Blues when they are available because

they command a higher price point due to their size.” The Superblues are available year-round, as Argentina provides the supply from September to December and Chile from November to April.

Chile is the second-largest producer and the leading exporter of blueberries in the world as well as the largest grower in the Southern Hemisphere. Fresh blueberry exports to the United States from Chile during the 2010-2011 season totaled 49.6 million pounds, with a 55.5 percent

gain over the year prior, according to data provided by Encore Associates Inc., in San Ramon, CA; the 2010 domestic season where blueberry volume totaled 141.9 million pounds.

Chile’s blueberry crop is forecast to be 25 to 30 percent greater than last season, reports Keith Mixon, president of Sunnyridge Farm Inc., in Winter Haven, FL. “This is due in part to increased plantings, but more so from higher yields on more mature acreage.”

The CBC’s Armstrong adds, “Blueberry production in Chile will continue increasing over the next five seasons because there is still an important share (18 percent) of current planted area, which is not yet in production, and 31 percent, which is still to reach full maturity, so 49 percent of all the plantations are increasing their output. In terms of planted area, however, the actual growth is only marginal — just a little more than 1 percent annually.”

Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co., in Brooks, OR, says, “Peak blueberry production out of Chile starts toward the end of December and we plan our largest promotions for January and February.”

Mexico, especially Central Mexico, is emerging as small but strong blueberry player.

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“Larger packs are becoming increasingly popular as consumers eat more berries and are looking for value. For blackberries, 6-oz. is the most prevalent size, with 12 ounces increasing in popularity.”

— Ben Reilly, Giumarra VBM International Berry LLC

Mixon says, “The niche for Mexico is the timing — October to November in the fall and February and March in the spring. Mexico’s advantage is that it’s close to the North American market, only four or five days by truck versus flying or 10 days to 12 weeks by boat.”

Finding the correct blueberry to grow is critical to Mexico’s success as a producer. Naturipe’s Robert’s says, “This year, we expect our first full harvest of a proprietary Evergreen variety from Spain. It’s got great size, flavor and appearance. In the next five years, we expect Mexico’s blueberry production to rival that of Florida or 18 million pounds-plus.”

The unique nature of Mexico’s blueberry production is that Evergreen varieties will produce over a five- to six-month rather than a four- to six-week time frame”, explains Julio Ortuzar, a consultant with Fresh Results LLC, in Sunrise, FL. “Production will be lower, but it will be consistent and longer. This availability superimposed on top of Argentina and Chile will help to supply increased demand.”

BLACKBERRIES: Blackberries from Mexico have been a staple in Dorothy Lane Market’s produce department for the past few years, says Manzano. “The quality has improved and has been really nice the past few years.”

Demand for Mexican-grown blackberries is increasing exponentially, says Ulises Sabato, vice president of Fresh Results. “This has centered on a change to the Tupi variety, which is sweet and firm, travels well and performs well at store level without huge shrink.”

Mexican blackberry production spans from October to June with peak production in April.

Roberts shares, “We’re working on a proprietary breeding program to produce the next generation of blackberry varieties and anticipate these will be even more promising. The company also imports blackberries from Guatemala from the last week in July through November primarily for East Coast markets.

Chile is also a major exporter of blackberries. Fresh blackberry exports to the United States during the 2010-2011 Chilean season totaled 10.4 million pounds, up 2.3 percent over the year prior, according to data provided

by Encore Associates. This compares to the 2010 domestic season when blackberry volume totaled 28.3 million pounds.

RASPBERRIES: Mexico and Chile supply the United States with raspberries during the fall and winter. Roberts states, “Raspberries are at their lowest in January and February, but this window is getting closed a bit by Mexico. Like blackberries, we have three new proprietary varieties in production that we started in California and now grow in Mexico. Attributes are size, yields and flavor.”

The real opportunity to grow raspberry sales, according to data provided by Encore Associates, is from December to March. Consider that the dollar share of total produce sales during these four months for blueberries, blackberries and raspberries is 3.8 percent. This compares to 4 percent for these three berries together during the domestic season from April to November. This 0.2 percent difference is represented by raspberries, and translates to \$41 million. In other words, there is a \$41 million dollar opportunity gap for growers/shippers/importers to increase imports of raspberries during this time frame.

Fresh raspberry exports to the United States from Chile during the 2010-2011 season totaled 13 million pounds, up 19.7 percent over the year prior, according to data provided by Encore Associates. This compares to the 2010 domestic season when raspberry volume was 45.3 million pounds.

The Chilean raspberry industry is made up of a number of small growers, notes Fresh Result’s Ortuzar, “who produce chiefly for the frozen market due to their perishability.”

STRAWBERRIES: Florida supplies 15 percent of the nation’s strawberries and virtually all of the domestically grown strawberries during from December to March. Still, there are opportunities for imports. Naturipe grows strawberries in Central Mexico, according to Roberts. “This location has advantages over Baja in that there is good land, labor and water, but not the right varieties yet,” he details. “We’re currently growing Florida varieties such



“Greater transparency of production and export information is helping the industry to mature and better program its promotions and sales.”

— Andrés Armstrong, Chilean Blueberry Committee

as Treasure, Festival and a little Albion.”

Roberts adds, “We cross our Mexican strawberries through McAllen, Texas. They are available at the same time as Florida, but they go primarily to markets in the Midwest, and occasionally the Northeast, depending on what is happening weather-wise in Florida.”

Vince Lopes, vice president of sales for Dole Berry Co. LLC, in Monterey, CA, adds, “We are testing proprietary varieties of strawberries in Central Mexico.”

Offer Small And Large Packaging

“Larger packs are becoming increasingly popular as consumers eat more berries and

are looking for value,” says Ben Reilly, Midwest business development manager for Giumarra VBM International Berry LLC, in Los Angeles, CA. “For blackberries, 6-oz. is the most prevalent size, with 12 ounces increasing in popularity.”

Data provided by Encore Associates for the 2010-2011 Chilean season certainly backs up this observation. The 6-oz. was indeed the best-selling pack style across all berry types. Even larger sizes showed significant sales increase. For example, sales of 12-oz. raspberries and blackberries increased by 58 percent and 68 percent, respectively, while sales of 18-oz. blueberries grew by over 84 percent from

the year prior.

Most 18-oz. blueberry packs are sold in club stores, says Fresh Result’s Sabato. “Fifteen to 20 percent of all blueberries during the Argentine season move in 18-oz. clamshells.”

Interestingly, according to Encore Associates’ data, the 4.4-oz. pack ranked sixth in volume of blueberries and blackberries sold during the 2010-2011 Chilean season.

At Dorothy Lane Markets, “Best-sellers are a 6-oz. and one-pint clamshell of blueberries and 6-oz. clamshells of raspberries and blackberries,” details Manzano. “We rarely carry the 4.4-oz. size.”

There’s debate in the industry over whether

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PROMOTE THREE WAYS

There are three profitable ways to promote imported berries: traditional price promotion, seasonal promotion and strategic promotional campaigns.

TRADITIONAL PRICE PROMOTION:

One of the biggest challenges in promoting offshore berries is price point. “The pricing for blueberries varies each year,” says Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co., in Brooks, OR. “Typically, imports are priced higher, but not necessarily. It depends on each season and the weather we’ve experienced, the quality consumers are receiving and so many other factors. Strong retail demand, strong processor demand and delayed crops in the United States often pushed domestic pricing higher this past summer.”

Looking ahead, retailers should not expect to advertise imported berries at the same prices they did last year, says Eric Crawford, president of Fresh Results. “The devaluation of the dollar; production cost increases in Chile and Argentina, including the cost of labor and hand-picking; opportunities to sell to countries such as China; and strong demand from the IQF (individually quick frozen) side are all pushing prices higher. This means, for example, that we could see FOBs on pint blueberries increase from \$20 to \$25.”

“Yet, there will be opportunities for promotion,” contends Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties Inc., based in Pompano Beach, FL. “These will be supply driven.”

Curry maintains, “It really comes down to planning. We work closely with our retail partners to identify our imported blueberry availability and we build our marketing plan from there. As a retailer, make sure you keep delivering the message to your customers that you have blueberries,” he advises. “During the course of the season, there are numerous opportunities to run promotions with strong shelf-space support. These promotions help drive sales during these higher volume periods.”

One trend Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms LLC, headquartered

in Estero, FL, is seeing is retailers promoting blackberries in stand-alone ads. “We’re seeing this more during the eight- to 10-week time frame from late December to late February when production is strong out of Chile,” he says.

SEASONAL PROMOTION: Major holidays and cool weather themes are ripe for imported berry promotion.

“In the past,” says Fresh Result’s Sabato, “retailers have been hesitant to put blueberries on ad at Thanksgiving. We can now offer a reliable and consistent supply due to new production in Argentina.”

Thanksgiving is a great time for seasonal ads on Superblues, says Julia Inestroza, marketing and merchandising manager for Gourmet Trading Co., in Los Angeles, CA. “They make an impressive holiday dessert with whipped cream. Beyond this,” she adds, “it’s not just apple pie for the holidays anymore. Berry pies and desserts such as berry pavlova is becoming popular.”

Capitalize on the low-calorie nature and health benefits of berries in New Year’s promotions, recommends Roberts. “Blueberries are very promotable this time of year.”

Curry & Co.’s Curry agrees. “We encourage our retailers to continue to tout the health benefits of blueberries,” he says. “They are low-fat, saturated fat-free, sodium-free, cholesterol-free, a good source of fiber and a good source of vitamin C.”

STRATEGIC CAMPAIGNS: Marketing organizations in Argentina and Chile are making it easier for retailers to promote imported berries. New this season is an advertising/public relations campaign from the ABC. Lesley MacDonald, ABC spokesperson, explains, “Since spring and summer fruit is sourced from U.S. growers and Chile is claiming the ‘winter’ season, we are laying claim to the ‘fall’ season for Argentinean blueberries.”

The campaign theme is “Fall for Argentinean Blueberries” and the imagery features a vibrant combination of orange/yellow fall leaves with the rich blue

of the fruit. Campaign messaging focuses on direct delivery (largely by air) from field to store, emphasizing the freshness of the product, as well as the premium quality of the fruit and hands-on communication with the growers to ensure the latest information on crop volumes and availability.

Jay Bell, a Sonoma, CA-based spokesperson for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), details, “On behalf of the Chilean Blueberry Committee, we will administer a multi-faceted consumer media public relations program that is aimed at awareness of winter availability of blueberries to provide new information and data on their nutrition benefits, and to increase demand by developing new usage ideas using blueberries as ingredients in recipes. Distribution includes national and regional print, web-based and broadcast media.”

“In addition,” says Bell, “There will be a season-long retailer support program that includes in-store merchandising aids (including recipe folders) and the services of four regional merchandisers who field such things as POS events and display contests among chain-store markets.”

One chain that found success partnering in such a retail-based campaign is Bristol Farms. Raul Gallegos, director of produce and floral at Bristol Farms, a 13-store chain in Carson, CA explains, “We conducted a big promotion with Chilean berries in January. The promotion was a sales contest among our 14 stores to see who could increase their sales of blueberries the most. At the same time, we decided to do an across-the-board promotion with all berries. It’s harder to do this with blackberries and raspberries due to the perishability, and hence more shrink and risk, but produce managers got behind it by building larger displays, building displays in the front of the store and demo-ing the berries with customers.”

“The promotion was a success,” adds Gallegos. “Berry category sales increased by double digits. Next year, we’re looking at expanding the promotion by adding recipes and cross-merchandising berries in other departments such as the bakery and deli.” **pb**

or not the 4.4-ounce clamshell of berries has become a dinosaur. Sunnyridge Farms’ Mixon explains, “We’ve heard about the death of the 4.4-oz. clamshell for the last 10 years, but it’s still around in an effort to achieve a good price point, especially when there is pressure on

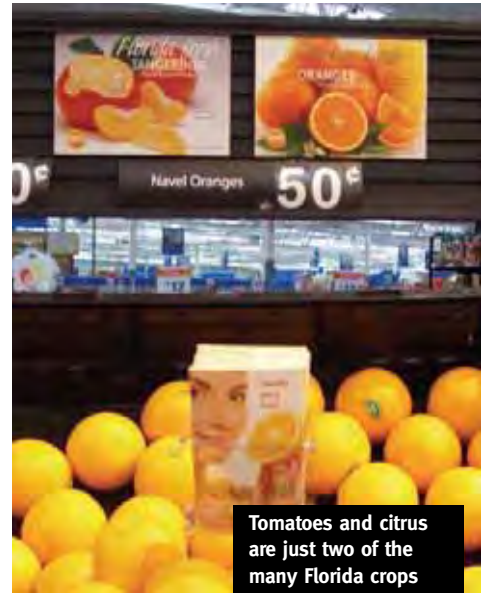
supplies from the frozen market, or during a transition time when supplies are short. For example, the difference between \$3.99 for a 4.4-oz. or \$4.99 for a 6-oz. can make a dramatic difference in the number of grabs.”

“More retailers are now offering at least two

SKUs, if not more, of blueberries,” says Curry & Co.’s Curry. “These retailers recognize that there is a demographic for the 4.4-oz. package and that an 18-oz. package might also be a great value size to offer their customer. They aren’t limiting themselves to one package size.” **pb**



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Tomatoes and citrus are just two of the many Florida crops that flood produce departments beginning in the fall.

Florida Fall Produce Report

Florida growers continue to recover from last winter's freeze, but look forward to Florida's favorite fall crops. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

Florida supplies a sizable slice of the nation's winter fruits and vegetables. However, it is the fall deal that bridges the gap in availability between growing regions in the Northeast, Midwest and even up into Canada with a cost-effective source of fresh produce.

Michael Purvis, director of produce for Harveys Supermarkets, a 71-store chain based in Nashville, GA, with seven stores in northern Florida, says, "As soon as Georgia finishes up, we switch right into Florida and that's usually early to mid-November. There's a 'local' aspect that Florida produce provides that definitely appeals to our customers, especially when we let them know through point-of-sale (POS) signage what buying fruits and vegetables from Florida means in terms of supporting the local economy."

Further north, Don Buller, director of produce category management for Sobeys, a chain based in Stellarton, Nova Scotia, Canada, and the second largest retailer in Canada with over 1,300 stores, comments, "Our customers prefer Florida produce to that of other areas this time of year; it has a positive perception. Freight costs are favorable, too."

Aside from citrus, it is a variety of vegetables and strawberries that contributes much of Florida's production during the peak November

to May time frame. Cash receipts for fresh market vegetables and strawberries in 2009 totaled \$1.64 billion and \$313.6 million, respectively, according to the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS) 2009-2010 Annual Report. Comparatively, the fall and early winter months of October through December contribute a smaller but significant \$373.91 million for the top nine vegetable crops and \$82.50 million for strawberries, according to data provided by the Florida Agricultural Statistics Service, in Orlando, FL.

Opportunities And Challenges

The greatest opportunities for merchandising Florida's fall produce lies in supply, timing and freight savings. Brian Rayfield, vice president of sales and marketing for J&J Produce Inc., in Loxahatchee, FL, says, "We'll usually start in the beginning of November with bell peppers, cucumber, green and yellow squash, eggplant, green beans, cabbage, vine-ripe tomatoes, sweet corn and various other vegetables out of Florida."

Two of the biggest eating holidays of the year are in November and December, points out Adam Lytch, grower development specialist and operations manager for the Raleigh, NC-based L&M Companies. "Florida is where

much of the produce, especially along the East Coast, comes from, and we have plenty of promotional volume available at these times."

Locally grown and regionally correct have been gaining focus over the past few years, says Jason Bedsole, Eastern vegetable and citrus sales manager for Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc., headquartered in Oviedo, FL. "With freight rates continuing to escalate, this will play a role in what is grown in Florida," he asserts.

Regarding transportation, Daniel Whittles, director of grower sales development for Rosemont Farms, a C.H. Robinson company located in Boca Raton, FL, says, "Some services we offer and engage with food retailers are around consolidation and distribution of LTL (less-than-truckload) shipments ranging from temperature-controlled to floral and dry shipments. We're also stepping in to help with appointment scheduling or other task-driven events as our greater scale allows us to drive down costs."

Labor, competition from other countries and the weather are some of Florida grower's chief challenges. "Labor is definitely a hot-button issue," says Steve O'Brien, vice president for C&D Fruit and Vegetable Co. Inc., in Bradenton, FL.

Lisa Lochridge, director of public affairs for



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the Maitland-based Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association (FFVA), agrees. “For now, the foremost concern in producers’ minds is the ability to have an adequate workforce to plant and harvest the crop,” she says. “As an organization, we have been working at the state and federal level to educate lawmakers about the unique needs of labor and agriculture. What we’d ultimately like to see in any bill passed in Washington is the inclusion of guidelines that make sense for a fresh seasonal industry such as agriculture.”

Water shortage continues to be an on-going challenge, adds Lochridge. “Yet, as one producer put it, draught is a non-issue if there’s no crop due to a labor deficit. Where I don’t think people connect the dots is that no workers mean no Florida crops. That means we would have to rely on imports.”

Another challenge to Florida agriculture is a considerable growth in imports, recognizes Dan Sleep, development representative supervisor for the division of marketing and development at the Tallahassee, FL-based FDACS. “Some of the items coming during November and December include beans, broccoli, eggplant, lettuce, melons, okra, green onions, bell peppers and tropical fruits out of Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama

and El Salvador.

Mike Shapiro, a sales associate at Weis-Buy Farms Inc., in Ft. Meyers, FL, says, “What Florida can’t supply to the nation for tomatoes, pepper and other items is largely imported from Mexico. McAllen, TX, and Nogales, AZ, are the major import cities. We have also visited Colombia and the Dominican Republic seeking new products and buying opportunities. For example, we made a deal with a grower in the Dominican Republic to be selling agents for his red, yellow and orange peppers. The products arrive and ship from South Florida.”

J&J’s Rayfield adds, “Today, major customers expect year-round supply and national distribution. In addition to growing in Florida and Georgia, we’ve turned our seasonal facility in White Pine, TN, into a regional distribution center for just-in-time deliveries and regional repacking for retail and foodservice in the fall and winter. We’ve also opened a ground office in Nogales this year to establish a permanent presence there. Geographical diversity is the key to providing an uninterrupted supply chain.”

Weather issues in Florida have caused supply shortages that have sent retailers looking beyond the state for their produce

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needs. This happened in December, 2010, when unusually cold weather destroyed much of Florida's green bean and corn crops, amounting to \$273 million in crop loss, according to statistics provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture.

"Weather losses such as this, compounded with the increase costs of farming, means we lose growers," says C&D's O'Brien.

"As a result," adds L&M's Lytch, "planted acreage is projected to be down this year, especially in South Florida where the freezes hit hardest. Our acreage, however, will remain the same. Our farms are pretty spread out in north, central, east and southern Florida, but it's South Florida where the production comes from starting in November."

Crop Update

"Harvest for Florida's 2011-2012 crop year begins in October," reports Sleep, "and builds for all commodities in November. By December, the strawberries start to ramp up."

Weis-Buy's Shapiro notes, "Crop forecasting is getting better and more precise."

Lytch adds, "We regularly provide our retailers with crop updates, especially when weather events could potentially cause supply issues."

The Top Ten fruits and vegetables produced during the fall in terms of dollar value are tomatoes, strawberries, bell peppers, snap beans, corn, squash, cucumbers and cabbage.

TOMATOES: November is a peak month for promoting tomatoes. In fact, the top months for Florida tomato promotions are November and May, according to Samantha Winters, director of education and promotions for the Maitland-based Florida Tomato Committee. "We are cautiously optimistic about fall volume, but so far so good," she reports. "The fall season for Florida tomatoes typically gets an initial kick-start from Quincy in October; volumes begin again in Plant City, Palmetto-Ruskin and Ft. Pierce in early November; then toward the middle of November we'll see Immokalee charge up. December actually has the potential to be an interesting month as you could see volumes shipping from every regulated Florida region — even possibly Homestead."

"This season we'll be introducing the Tasti-Lee tomato to consumers at Publix, where it will be sampled to customers along with POP materials, such as recipes," adds Yolanda Roundtree, development representative supervisor for the FDACS. "The flavor, color and

appearance of the Tasti-Lee could make it a favorite with consumers and a multi-million dollar industry for Florida." The Tasti-Lee tomato is a premium fresh market traditionally bred hybrid developed at the University of Florida. Publix Super Markets, headquartered in Lakeland, FL, started carrying the tomato in August and signed an exclusive three-year deal to sell it in all the chain's locations.

STRAWBERRIES: Florida's strawberry harvest ramps up through December, reveals Ted Campbell, executive director of the Plant City-based Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA), "provided our weather cooperates," he adds. "Last December was unseasonably cold and delayed some of the harvest. This season, our industry is highly optimistic and probably will increase production acreage by more than 10 percent. The primary increase is now coming from the Florida Radiance variety, which has many favorable characteristics. Last year, Radiance represented about 20 percent of production acreage, and that could increase substantially this season. In addition, we have strong new varieties coming out of our breeding program, and incredible research support collaboration with the University of Florida. The entire berry

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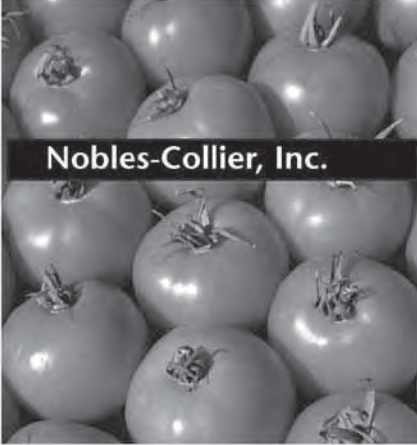
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category has become a best performer at retail, and the consumer appeal continues to build."

VEGETABLES: "We are excited to be looking forward to a nice crop of bell peppers, cucumbers, squash, beans, eggplant and tomatoes," says Rosemont's Whittles. "Most of these items become available in Florida once you get into the second half of October. As for promotional volumes, with good weather, they are typically available through the entire fall time frame."

Pero Family Farms Food Co. LLC, in Delray Beach, FL, now offers 8-oz. and 2-lb. zip-top gusseted bags for its mini sweet peppers in addition to 1-lb. clamshells. Scott Seddon, Pero's brand manager, says, "We planted our field-grown mini sweet peppers earlier this year to meet demand. Harvest should start in October, peaking by Thanksgiving."

This fall, Pero will also offer its January 2011-launched line of fresh-cut vegetables called SteamyCuts. The 12-oz. microwavable bags feature single items such as snipped green beans as well as combinations of cut, diced and shredded vegetables such as bell peppers, onions, carrots and squash in both organic and conventional. Each bag comes with a recipe and has a 14-day shelf-life.

Florida's sweet corn crop typically starts harvest mid- to late-November, says Jason Stemm, spokesperson for the Maitland, FL-based Fresh Supersweet Corn Council (FSCC). "A total of more than 315,000 crates were sent to market during the fall of 2010. That number would have been much more if not for the two huge freeze events in December. During previous years, harvest typically would continue right through the end of January and the number of crates sent to market during this time frame usually totals more in the range of more than 1.2 million crates."

Stemm adds, "Growers continue to improve the quality and distribution of sweet corn throughout the year with careful seed selection, modern infrastructure and seamless movement."

"Celery and radishes are available out of Florida in the fall," says Duda's Bedsole. "We are currently looking at new pack sizes and packaging to better service our customers."

"In general," says J&J's Rayfield, "we're moving into more overwrap tray packs. We call it source-packing, in other words, packing right at farm-level and delivering high-quality food-safe product to retail. This allows for competitive pricing because it doesn't have to go through a regional re-packer."

TROPICALS: Eddie Caram, general manager of New Limeco LLC, in Princeton, FL, reports, "Avocados are available out of Florida

RETAIL SUCCESS

Florida produce is featured in retailers such as Harvey's Supermarkets in Georgia and Sobeys in Canada. Michael Purvis, director of produce for Harveys Supermarkets, a 71-store chain based in Nashville, GA, with seven stores in northern Florida, says, "We'll switch to Florida in the fall as soon as Georgia finishes. Squash, tomatoes, green beans and cucumbers are some of the items we start with. Then strawberries hit in December."

Likewise, Don Buller, director of produce category management for Sobeys, a chain based in Stellarton, Nova Scotia, Canada, and the second largest retailer in Canada, says, "The local harvest here in Southern Ontario finishes up in the fall with onions, carrots, rutabagas and apples. We have a big hothouse industry, so we won't transition to Florida tomatoes and cucumbers until December when daylight limits production. Before that, by the end of October, we'll start with eggplant, zucchini and corn, followed by beans, squash and green peppers."

Florida produce is displayed in its usual plan-o-gram location for the particular item at both chains; however both retailers call out the state's produce with Fresh from Florida logos on in-store signage and ads. Purvis shares, "We also put the Florida logo on a big banner we hang from the ceiling."

While the amount of Florida produce and the dollar sales of it aren't as much in the fall as in the spring, Purvis adds, "It's still very important to us and our customers." **pb**

from June through March."

Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Brooks Tropicals LLC, in Homestead, FL, says, "There may be some potential for fall promotions on our SlimCados. This year's Florida star fruit crop looks to be a good one, too," she adds. "We grow them on the West Coast of Florida and they are sweet. Our star fruit season runs through March. As for packaging, our StarPac helps ripen star fruit and prevents bruising."

Promotional Opportunities Abound

Retail promotional opportunities are available from Florida's grower/shippers and commodity groups as well as from the FDACS. Ostlund notes, "We work closely with our retailers on promotions and POS materials."

Weis-buy promotes peppers and tomatoes

Visit the "Fresh From Florida" Pavilion at Booth 2921



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
FreshFromFlorida.com

as well as other produce during the winter months. Shapiro adds, "For some products, we can supply special price points for retailer ads. We can provide month-in-advance pricing that help retailers and wholesalers place promotional ads."

The fall is a great time to promote Florida tomatoes, says the FTC's Winters. "Research shows that retailers can really benefit from setting up fall field-grown tomato promotions. In fact, the Perishables Group conducted extensive consumer research and promotional practices of the tomato category and found November onward to be an excellent time to push round, field-grown tomatoes," she reveals. "Moreover, tomatoes are a key ingredient in Thanksgiving Holiday meal planning and should be cross-promoted with key items such as packaged salads and onions."

"Going forward," continues Winters, "we are continuing our partnership with the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services to build awareness for the goodness and versatility of fresh Florida tomatoes and teaming up with Justin Timineri — best known as "The Florida Chef" — to drum up more consumer interest in Florida tomatoes." The FTC offers POS recipe tear-off cards,

handling tools, in-store radio and other merchandising support to retailers who promote Florida field round tomatoes.

Similarly, the FSGA provides retailers with recipe brochures as well as in-store informational videos featuring the cartoon character, Jammer, which focus on strawberry nutrition, handling and storage and recipes. Campbell says, "This year, we initiated social media to develop blogs for consumers and foodservice professionals. We will expand our social media outreach with additional informational blogs; continue our consumer media contacts with food editors as well as cooking and general consumer publications; and enhance our foodservice newsletter during the winter months to increase awareness of Florida strawberries and continuously drive overall consumption."

As for Florida sweet corn, the FSCC's Stemm, says, "Although we do not support fall promotions so that we can focus our limited resources during the April/May peak, there is POS on the website that retailers can order, as well as training materials for staff."

The FDACS runs two Fresh from Florida retail ad incentive programs each year. One is called *Winter Circle*, which targets Florida

retailers, and a second is called *Global Grid*, which reaches states outside Florida as well as over a dozen other foreign countries. *Winter Circle Phase I* and *Global Grid I* run from November 1 through January 31. Sleep explains, "In our *Global Grid* retail campaigns, we'll generate 300,000 to 400,000 Individual Store Ads (ISA) during Phases I and II. For example, Publix may run 30 to 40 Fresh from Florida ads and generate 35,000-plus ISAs, while Sobeys may run 40-plus and produce 50,000 ISAs. Conversely, a smaller chain like Sweetbay, could run 30 ads and generate 3,000 ISAs. Volume makes a tremendous impact."

These retail ad campaigns have been successful both in promoting Florida's fresh produce industry as well as individual commodities. For example, Sleep says, "Florida strawberries are a product we've strived to build sales and understanding of when these berries enter the market. Too often retailers thought of buying them during February, whereas our production is from mid-December through March." As retailers began to understand the availability, ordered and put the berries on ad, sales skyrocketed and cash receipts grew from \$167.3 million in 2000 to \$362 million in 2010," he reports. **pb**



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Clementines and Cara Caras are just two of the varieties growing in popularity.

California Citrus: New Twists In An Old Category

New varieties, along with those targeted at moms and their kids, reinvigorate the California citrus industry. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

California citrus is making its way to market, but this is not your grandparents' citrus. The development of new varieties and the evolution of consumer tastes have remade the category.

The Navel orange is still No. 1, albeit by a narrowing margin, and shipments from the Southern Hemisphere have made Navels available 12 months of the year. But even the Navel orange category is changing, as more consumers come to know the pleasures of specialty Navels like the Cara Cara, which Sunkist markets as the "Power Orange."

According to Claire Smith, director of corporate communications for Sunkist Growers Inc., in Van Nuys, CA, "Cara Caras are a Navel, but they are pink and they have a little bit less acidity in them. Sunkist has been selling them as the 'Power Orange,' and when people taste them they fall in love. Demonstrations have been very effective." Sunkist Growers is a 118-year-old cooperative owned by citrus growers in California and Arizona that ships \$1 billion in fruit annually.

In addition to the growth of Cara Caras, the entire citrus category is being turned upside down by the meteoric rise of the smaller fruit known alternately as "the easy peelers," or

hand-held fruit perfect for kids' lunch boxes. Even within the popular Clementines and Satsumas, new varieties are capturing consumer interest and market share at incredible speed. "You're seeing a major shift in the Clementines. There is a move away from the Mirasol, from Morocco and Spain, to the Clemenola, which is the best variety among the Clementines," contends Adam Lazo, director of customer relations for Sun Pacific Marketing Cooperative Inc., based in Pasadena, CA. Sun Pacific grows and ships citrus, tomatoes, grapes and kiwis out of California's San Joaquin Valley.

Even with increased imports from Australia, South Africa and other Southern Hemisphere locations, California still grows and ships well over a quarter-million acres of citrus annually. But the mix of citrus has changed, and continues to change. While Navel orange production grew by 10 percent in the first decade of the century, Valencia orange acreage steadily declined. The greatest change was in the production of the easy-peeling Mandarins and Tangerines, which nearly tripled to reach a half-billion pounds annually.

The Easy-Peelers

Once the trend in citrus went toward the smaller, hand-held easy-peeler fruit, Cali-

fornia growers were quick to claim their spot as producers of the highest quality product. "Retailers were finding Mirasols for a good price, but their customers weren't coming back," remarks Lazo. "Now they're saying, 'I'll pay a little more for the Clemenolas from California.' In California, we're going to start harvesting Clemenolas at the end of October or the beginning of November. They'll be gassed and ready to ship sometime around November 7 to November 12."

The market for this smaller citrus fruit was first developed on a large scale by imported fruit from the Mediterranean. "Morocco and Spain began shipping Clementines around 20 years ago. They start in early December and continue for three months," says Dennis Johnston, partner in Edison, CA-based Johnston Farms. Johnston Farms is a fourth-generation family firm shipping more than one million cartons of citrus annually from its orchards in the San Joaquin Valley.

After the imports began to capture significant market share, the California citrus industry found a way to compete. "There have been big plantings of Clementines and Murcots," Johnston adds. "We have had huge volumes in Clementines and Murcots the past five years. There's also been good movement

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NEW RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES

The new varieties of both Navel oranges and hand-held easy-peeler citrus have opened up new challenges and opportunities for citrus promotion at the retail level. “Specialty varieties are bringing new users into the category with sales growing faster than the mainstays, so we suggest that retailers spotlight the main specialty varieties like Cara Caras, Minneolas and Blood Oranges,” advises Scott Ross, corporate category manager for Sunkist Growers. “We recommend that at the peak of season — eating quality wise — varieties be given secondary displays in heavy traffic flow along with educational signage.”

Sampling can be an effective way to ride the wave of these popular new citrus varieties. “Our advice, and what we’ve learned over the most recent years, is that merchandising should encourage trial, and in the end, increased consumption,” shares Ross. “Scheduled demos and sampling are also very effective in promoting these varieties. Pixie Tangerines and Golden Nuggets have recently created some excitement due to the fantastic sweetness they possess. Here again, dedicated displays with attribute information along with sampling and product demonstrations are very effective.”

Retailers who invest in citrus sampling find it works for the right varieties at the right time. “When there’s labor support to sample we do, but that’s not often,” admits Lee Reynolds, produce director at Haggen Inc., a 78-year-old Bellingham, WA. “It works for peak season Navels and the Clementines.”

With the entire citrus category changing, and becoming more interesting, it may be worth the time to learn which varieties will be best accepted by the demographic of your particular market.

“The biggest seller for me during citrus season is the Honeybells,” says David Lukens, grocery manager at West Point Market, a single-unit store in Akron, OH. The Honeybell is actually a Tangelo, or a hybrid tangerine-grapefruit. “My biggest seller among the grapefruit are the Texas Red. Among the lemons I sell more of the Meyer. But I’m a little bit of an outlier.”

There are also cross-merchandising opportunities for many citrus varieties. “With lemons, the key in building added consumption is to teach consumers new and different ways to use them,” says Ross. “Cross-merchandising with seafood (fresh and frozen), bottled water, drink mixes and tea bags is very effective. Again, secondary displays in key positions along with recipe or cross-usage ideas is suggested.”

Oranges, in particular, have long been associated with good health and this can be an effective part of merchandising. “Promote the health benefits of citrus fruits, and get the young people to eat them,” Jim Marderosian, president of Fowler, CA-based Bee Sweet Citrus Inc.

It is even possible to increase citrus sales by moving displays to the area of the supermarket where customers go for their medicine. “We have done work with several retailers where citrus displays have been built within the pharmacies,” recollects Sunkist’s Ross. “The sales results have been extremely encouraging. Citrus makes a perfect tie-in with health, wellness, disease prevention and healthy lifestyle initiatives that many savvy retailers have already embarked upon. Some retailers feel strongly that many pharmacy shoppers may not be shopping the rest of the store, so cross-merchandising there may expose these items to additional potential shoppers.” **pb**

of Satsuma Mandarins.”

The largest citrus producers led the charge by developing Mandarin and Tangerine varieties adapted to California conditions and planting them in enormous acreage. “Sun Pacific and Paramount were willing to gamble and put huge acreage in,” acknowledges Johnston. “We found out there are Clementine varieties that can grow well here, so continued prosperity is likely for California citrus. China is opening up, and we’re selling to India now. U.S. shipments are increasing.”

Some U.S. retailers are finding that the

smaller citrus fruit offers more lucrative opportunities than the traditional Navel oranges. “The problem with oranges is when you sell them for 49-cents a pound you have to sell a whole lot of them to make any money,” explains Lee Reynolds, produce director at Haggen Inc., a 78-year-old Bellingham, WA-based chain serving the Pacific Northwest with 13 stores in Washington and Oregon. “That’s why you’re seeing 3- or 5-lb. boxes of Clementines or Satsumas. People are moving away from oranges to the smaller varieties, the more

lunch box-friendly kid-sized stuff, like Clementines and Satsumas. I saw the fewest number of orange ads last year that I’ve ever seen,” he adds.

Reynolds has found that the margin on oranges is so small that they make citrus seem more like a chore than an opportunity. “Citrus is a small piece of the puzzle with all the fruit that is out there,” he says. “In February or March, it’s an important piece of the puzzle and a bit of a must-have.”

The major California citrus producers have jumped into the market for the smaller fruit in a big way. “Sunkist Pixies and Sunkist Gold Nuggets are two varieties of Mandarins that are enjoying growing popularity,” reports the company’s Smith. “They have a very high Brix and are 100 percent seedless. The rinds tend to be pebbly, which is characteristic of these varieties, but they have great flavor, are very juicy and peel easily. While there is not a large volume available yet, they are claiming a growing niche in the citrus category and distribution is increasing. In two blind taste tests, where consumers were only told they were Mandarins, they scored with very high ratings. But the season is short — generally March to May.”

Sunkist and other California citrus producers are also finding increased demand for their smaller hand-held fruit. “In the winter, there’s a lot of demand for Clementines and Murcotts, which are usually marketed as ‘Cuties’ or ‘Sweeties,’” says Neil Galone, vice president of sales and marketing at Booth Ranches LLC, headquartered in Orange Cove, CA. Booth Ranches is a family-owned firm shipping citrus from orchards between Fresno and Bakersfield in the San Joaquin Valley.

The combination of California and offshore producers has made this smaller citrus fruit available virtually 12 months of the year. “The Satsuma Mandarins start in late October and continue into December, and the Clementines continue to mid-January; Murcot Mandarins go into mid-May; there are imports available from late May until you have Satsumas again,” enumerates Jim Marderosian, president of Fowler, CA-based Bee Sweet Citrus Inc. “So there are Mandarins 12 months of the year.” Bee Sweet grows and ships citrus out of its orchards in the San Joaquin Valley, and imports citrus from the Southern Hemisphere.

Consumer demand for this fruit has kept pace with the increasing acreage, as even bumper crops are finding homes. “We just came off a large Mandarin crop in California, and it went through the system pretty well,”

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“Specialty varieties are bringing new users into the category with sales growing faster than the mainstays, so we suggest that retailers spotlight the main specialty varieties like Cara Caras, Minneolas and Blood Oranges.”

— Scott Ross, Sunkist Growers

reports Marderosian. “You’re seeing more demand for the easy-peelers, like the Murcot Mandarins. The volume for those varieties has even eaten into the mid-season Navels.”

The full range of easy-peeler fruit has expanded consumer choices, and made the entire citrus category more interesting. Sunkist’s Smith remarks, “The Clementines have gotten the most publicity, but all of these easy-peelers have increased in availability and popularity over the past 10 years. It’s given consumers more choices in citrus. Whereas Navels used to be the dominant variety in the winter, Mandarins and Tangerines have been increasing in the past few years.”

The New Navels

Even with the dramatic increase in production of new and interesting Mandarin

and Tangerine varieties over a longer harvest window, Navels remain No. 1. According to Smith, “Navel oranges are still high up on the list. In terms of volume, Navel oranges are still at the top.”

There are new, interesting and better varieties of Navel oranges coming out of California. “People are becoming more comfortable with the Fukumoto and Beck Navel oranges,” remarks Sun Pacific’s Lazo. “They have early maturity, good flavor, size and color. They’ve been around for six or seven years now. November 1 the Fukumoto and Beck Navels begin harvest, and it ends around Thanksgiving. Then come the Fishers, Atwoods and Washingtons.” According to Lazo, Fukumoto and Beck are both better Navel varieties than the previous standards Thompson Improved, True Golds and

Bonanzas. “The Navel window will end for us in July,” he adds. “We are growing Powell and Barnfield Navels; they are Australian varieties that we grow in California.”

There is also increasing consumer interest in the Cara Cara Navels. “There’s been a shift to a lot of the different Mandarins. There’s also been a shift to the more exotic Navel oranges, like the Cara Cara,” reveals Marderosian.

Sunkist and other California growers have invested in plantings that will substantially increase the supply in the next few years. “A lot of Cara Cara acreage has been put in and supply will increase over the next five years,” Sunkist’s details.

These new and interesting varieties have allowed Navel oranges to maintain a secure spot at the top of the citrus hierarchy. “I think Navels are still the staple in the produce department; Cara Caras are growing in popularity,” maintains Booth Ranches’ Galone. “I think imports have impacted Valencias. The imports that have affected us are from the Southern Hemisphere, and they come in the summer when the Valencias are ready.”

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when citrus is not at its peak in the produce department. “The imports don’t really overlap with us, except that we have Valencias when the Australians and Chileans have Navels. You see imports increasing in the summer time, but in the summer, citrus is not the front runner being grown here,” Marderosian of Bee Sweet explains.

Other producers agree that the imports are impacting Valencias, but not Navel oranges. “The Valencia is decreasing in popularity, especially with the late Navels coming in July,” notes Johnston Farms’ Johnston. “Navels are as strong as ever, and have been fairly well received the past few years. There hasn’t been much impact of the imports on the Navels, because they are

contra-seasonal, but the imports have hurt the Valencias a little,” he admits.

Globalization has had the affect of making Navel oranges, like Mandarins and Tangerines, available virtually year-round. Sunkist’s Smith recognizes, “Trade barriers

have been coming down, and transportation has been improving. It used to be that Navels were only available in the winter. But now, with imports from Australia, South Africa and other countries, Navels are available year-round.” **pb**

“We just came off a large Mandarin crop in California, and it went through the system pretty well. You’re seeing more demand for the easy-peelers, like the Murcot Mandarins. The volume for those varieties has even eaten into the mid-season Navels.”

— Jim Marderosian, Bee Sweet Citrus Inc.

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The Red River Valley has the longest red potato-shipment season of any area in the country.

Red River Valley Potatoes — Quality Enduring

Despite weather challenges, growers look forward to a good season. **BY MELINDA GOODMAN**

The color and flavor that sets Red River Valley potatoes apart from other growing regions is a story synonymous with nature. Over the years, the Red River Valley potato growing region has withstood the trials and tribulations of Mother Nature, from floods and droughts to cold spring weather and hot fall temperatures that all but halt or disrupt the planting, growing and harvest seasons. Some might say it's to be expected from a land that emerged from beneath a glacier and today bears some of the deepest, blackest and most fertile topsoil in the world.

A bit of a curse, but a clear blessing, it's thanks to that rich soil and abundant water that the Red River Valley region of North Dakota and Minnesota can grow some of the best red potatoes in the country. The Red River Valley potato region is a small sliver of potato paradise that runs from just south of the Canadian border to nearly the South Dakota border and fans out approximately 100 miles east or west. It's in this region that the growers produce the majority of all dry-

land red potatoes in the United States. In fact, this region has the longest red potato-shipment season of any area in the country and typically averages availability for up to 10 months of the year with stocks available from 13 shippers.

New Crop Yields High Hopes

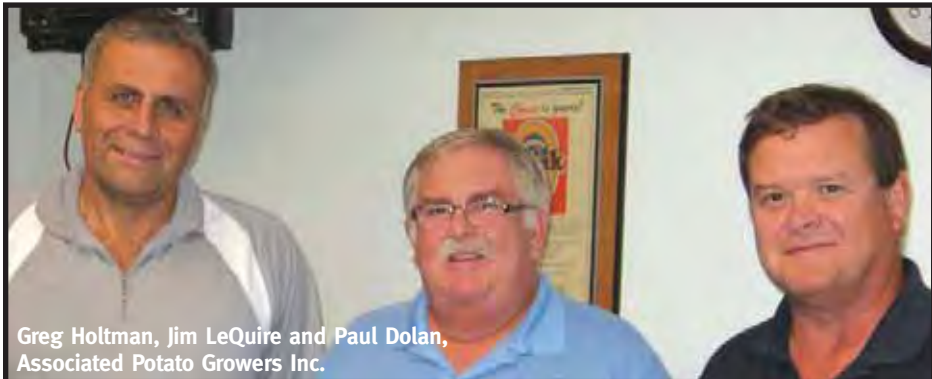
As harvest wraps up and potatoes fill storage bins around the Red River Valley, growers lament that Mother Nature has not been a kind dance partner. A cold, wet spring followed by an even wetter summer and a hot harvest have all posed their share of challenges for the RRV growers this season. But like all good growers that love what they do, spirits are high as they kick off the 2011-2012 season.

With harvest nearly complete, Corey Seim, general manager for Northern Valley Growers LLC, in Hoople, ND, reports yields were slightly down across the Valley, but quality was good to excellent. His remarks were echoed by other grower/shippers. Tom Campbell, a managing partner at Tri-Camp-

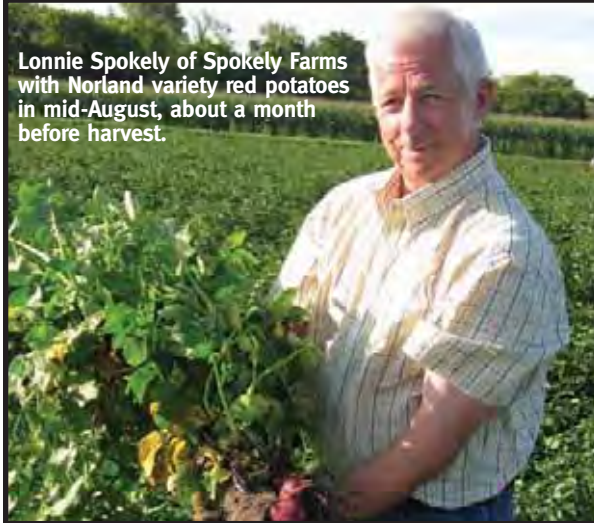
bell Inc., in Grafton, ND, comments, "The weather has taken its toll in various growing locations, but has had less effect in others. Diversity in our growing regions is really the key to managing our overall crop availability and quality."

So with high quality potatoes in the bin, what bodes for money in the bank? Randy Boushey, president of A&L Potato Co. Inc., based in East Grand Forks, MN, maintains pricing had been pretty stable over the past few years due to consistent demand, and he expects the same this season. "With retailers, it's no longer only about price; it's also about consistency. A retailer wants to know you can provide an EDLP (every-day-low-price), good quality and on-time delivery."

When asked about price as a factor of marketing, Dave Moquist, co-owner and sales manager of O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc., headquartered in Crystal, ND, recognizes the same demands for consistency, but he sees a shift in the buyer-seller relationship. "Price used to be set purely based on supply and demand, but today pricing is more of a partnership



Greg Holtman, Jim LeQuire and Paul Dolan, Associated Potato Growers Inc.



Lonnie Spokely of Spokely Farms with Norland variety red potatoes in mid-August, about a month before harvest.



Corey Seim Northern Valley Growers



Steve Tweten, Ron Gjelsness, Mike Repick and Steve Johnson, NoKota Packers Inc.



Dave Moquist, O.C. Schulz and Sons Inc.



Randy Boushey, A & L Potato Co.



Chuck Gunnerson, Northern Plains Potato Growers Association

between the buyer and seller,” he explains.

Get The Potato Party Started

That buyer-seller relationship is critical to category growth, and red potatoes play a critical role. To achieve strong category sales, many suppliers and retailers work together to create short- and long-term promotional plans that include a combination of ad incentives, display contests and consumer-driven promotions, many focused on food- and family-focused holidays.

Additionally, promotional programs should include strong merchandising and key consumer messages. The East Grand Forks, MN-based Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA) works closely with the shippers to spread the word about Red River Valley Potatoes and incorporate consumer messages from the United States Potato Board (USPB). Ted Kreis, marketing and communications director for the NPPGA, outlined the top three tips for successful in-store merchandising: 1. Offer a wide selection of varieties and sizes; 2. Keep stock rotated and fresh; and 3. Promote potatoes every week.

Buxton, ND-based NoKota Packers Inc. president and CEO, Steve Tweten remarks, “Key promotional periods for red potatoes include large cooking holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. These are proven high-demand times. However, we’re also seeing National Potato Lover’s Month (February) and St. Patrick’s Day (March) as prime opportunities to increase sales.”

Glen Reynolds, national director of produce for Black Gold Farms Inc., of Grand Forks, ND, comments, “Working with retailers to develop consistent promotional timing is key to spurring demand, but consumer education is key to maintaining demand. Industry data from the USPB shows that potato sales are still relatively flat, but retailers who promote aggressively are seeing large lifts in category sales.”

Retailers concur. Rod Borden, director of produce operations for Festival Food Stores, a seven-unit chain based in Vadnais Heights, MN, asserts regular promotion of potatoes is key to category movement, but that it’s not necessary to deep discount. “What is important,” he says, “is understanding your customers and responding to what they want. Eating local is definitely a national trend. People want to know where their food comes from and the impact it has in the supply chain. I love the quality of Red River Valley potatoes, as do our customers, but they are also part of our local initiative.”

“The weather has taken its toll in various growing locations, but has had less effect in others. Diversity in our growing regions is really the key to managing our overall crop availability and quality.”

— Tom Campbell, Tri-Campbell Farms Inc.

Merchandising also plays an important role when influencing consumer purchases. In-store signage and large displays help gain consumer attention and awareness for key products or peak season. Borden suggests display contests in the fall are a great way to highlight fresh seasonal products. “Our produce managers like the opportunity to participate in display contests and showcase key items like Red River Valley potatoes,” he notes. “And including recipes and featuring information on social media allows us to connect with our customers and get them cooking.”

Get Online And Get Cookin’

It seems the Internet and cooking go hand-in-hand, with consumers actively using Google searches, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and more to get cooking tips, recipes and meal inspiration. In fact, Google trends showed a consistent increase in potato recipe searches over the past 10 years, with spikes during the November and December holiday months. And a recent search online showed nearly 10 million recipes for red potatoes in the last month alone.

So when consumers connect, what do Red River Valley growers want consumers to know about red potatoes? They’ll tell you bright red color (not pink), great flavor and versatility are what make a Red River Valley potato what it is. Regardless of who you ask, everyone agrees that the combination of the dark soil and the lack of irrigation produces the darkest colored, best tasting red potatoes available. When asked why Red River Valley red potatoes have this premium taste, Paul Dolan, general manager of Associated Potato Growers Inc., based in Grand Forks, ND, explains, “It seems that our heavier, nutrient-dense soils, along with the lack of irrigation helps the potato use more from its natural

environment and allow the potato to develop a higher solids content.” It’s that higher solids content of the red potato that makes it so versatile and able to be used for soups, salads, mashing, boiling, baking or roasting. Clearly, consumers think the same with more than 10 million recipes to prove it.

In fact, RRV suppliers are connecting consumers with information about Red River Valley potatoes by putting to use some of these recipes. Many suppliers include them on their packages, and the NPPGA has over 300

recipes online at www.nppga.org. Other suppliers are getting onboard and using social media outlets such as Facebook and mobile technology. Leah Brakke, marketing and communications specialist at Black Gold Farms, remarks, “It’s important that we be transparent to our customers and the consumers and tell our story. We have four generations involved in the day-to-day operations of our company and we take great pride in showcasing our production and our efforts in the area of sustainability.”

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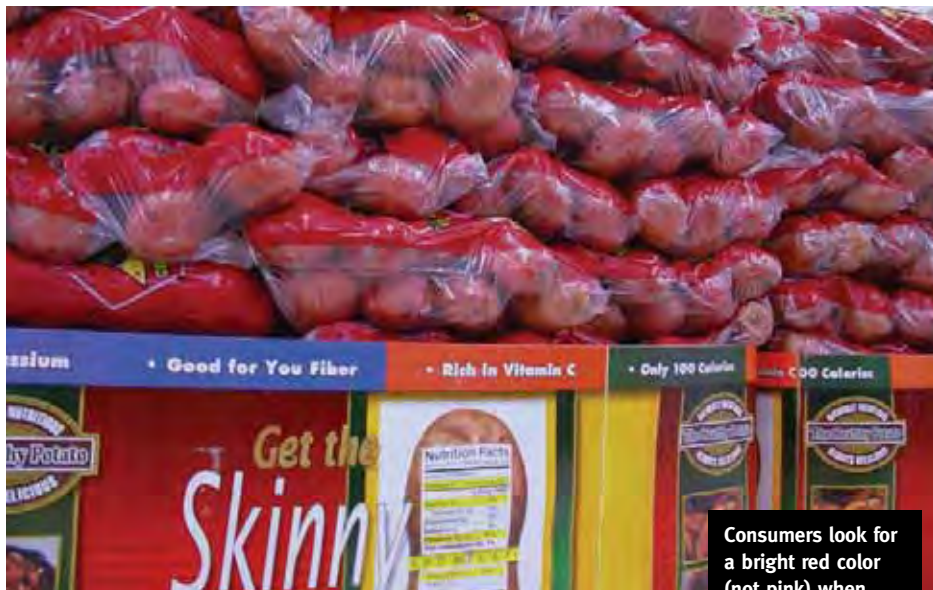


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Consumers look for a bright red color (not pink) when searching for Red River Valley potatoes.

The Road To Change

Sustainability is just one of the many consumer trends that the growers and shippers of the Red River Valley are taking advantage of. Other changes shippers report seeing are continued shifts toward private label packaging, poly-mesh combo bags and shifts to both smaller size 4- and 8-lb. bags and smaller size potatoes to achieve higher margins.

The shift to private label is not that surprising when you consider that a recent survey by *Consumer Reports National Research* revealed that 84 percent of shoppers had purchased a store brand or private label in the past year. Additionally, *Fresh Trends 2011* reported that 67 percent of survey respondents had purchased private-label fresh produce items in the past 12 months. Shippers report varying degrees of their business dedicated to private label — anywhere from 50 to 90 percent — depending on the supplier.

To adapt to changing consumer demand for small potatoes, growers need to capture more small potatoes during harvest and sorting and improve handling efficiency. To answer this need, Kerian Machines of Grafton, ND, has developed improved speed-sizer systems that use spooler rollers versus straight roller technology to improve handling efficiencies. Campbell of Tri-Campbell Farms is quick to point out the importance of staying on the cutting edge of equipment and varieties. “It can be expensive to adopt new technologies, but over the years we’ve found that improved efficiencies and new products like the small size B potatoes help add value to the business,” he remarks.

Consumers alone are not driving innova-

“If anything, the recession has been good for the potato business. More people are preparing meals at home, and although still flat, potato consumption is showing an uptick. Even when potato prices are high, they are still a bargain compared to other foods.”

— Ted Kreis, National Plains Potato Growers Associations

tion in the Red River Valley — bottom-line efficiency is top-of-mind for all suppliers. From new equipment to new varieties, shippers are investing. Many shippers, including A&L Potato Company, reported recent equipment upgrades. In fact, A&L Potato added new scrubbers and dryers that produce a cleaner potato with a brighter shelf appearance, an important factor in United States, where produce is often selected on appearance first.



dent of Scott's Express Inc., located in Grand Forks, ND, sees the economics of the transportation industry from a different point of view — that of labor. "The recent economic stimulus in North Dakota is the oil boom in Western North Dakota and it's creating a lot of high paying jobs that are shifting both drivers and fleets to new locations and industries," explains Seymour. "But for almost 60 years, I've

witnessed a lot of change and I'm confident we will come through these changes better with our work harder and smarter mentality."

NoKota Packers is already on that page. Its executives understand that freight is an important component of its business and they've made a point to provide faster pay and quick dock times for all of their freight providers. In addition, they work closely with

their customers to plan ahead for all orders, especially ad business, to avoid last-minute freight searches that may delay orders.

Regardless of what Mother Nature or the marketplace throws at the Red River Valley, it is prepared to meet the challenges head-on. It seems fair to say that the Red River Valley will continue to have high quality red potatoes for years to come. **pb**

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Colorado Potato Farmers Meet Supply/Demand Ratio

Quality crop, heart-healthy marketing add up to optimism for Colorado potato season. **BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE**

Battling through more than their fair share of tough years, the San Luis Valley potato growers who have emerged as survivors were fortunate to be dealt a 2010-11 season with stronger market prices. With the start of the new season, potato growers and shippers remain optimistic that the supply/demand ratio for 2011-12 will also yield positive results. As harvest and distribution gain momentum in early autumn throughout the San Luis Valley potato production region in southwest Colorado, market conditions are matching predictions and potato prices remain high as of mid-September.

According to Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Monte Vista, CO-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC), planted potato acreage in the San Luis Valley is at 54,000, down 1,500 acres from 2010. This mirrors an ongoing acreage reduction trend in this large potato-growing region, which reflected a planted acreage figure as high as nearly 72,000 in 2002. A cold spring and a dry, windy summer in 2011 are expected to result in reduced yields, which may negatively impact volume figures even more.

The acreage has been reduced voluntarily by members of Monte Vista-based United Fresh Potato Growers of Colorado. The group was organized several years ago as a regional arm of United Potato Growers of America, established with the “unilateral intent to bring supply back in balance with demand,” notes Ehrlich. “It has created a lot of cooperation in marketing within the industry,” he continues. “I think it’s been good for the industry. I don’t know where they’d be without it.”

“From a local standpoint, United helps as a data-gathering organization and coordinates marketing conversations,” adds Jed Ellithorpe, farm and operations manager for Center, CO-based Aspen Produce LLC, and a United Potato Growers proponent. “It helps growers make their own decisions based on good information relating to growing and marketing the crop.”

As the harvest heats up, buyers are welcoming the new crop. Aided by marketing assistance provided through CPAC, the appeal of Colorado potatoes is heightened, and fans of this state’s potatoes are increasing in numbers. “We were already getting a lot of calls by mid-summer about our new crop,” empha-

sizes Center, CO-based Canon Potato Co. Inc.’s president and CEO, David Tonso. “We’re excited that there is so much interest already.”

Colorado ranks as the second largest fresh potato-producing state in the United States. Ehrlich points out that it is also the No. 2 state in organic, fresh potato production.

Although about 85 percent of the San Luis Valley spud volume is in Russet varieties, Ehrlich stresses that Colorado can grow any kind of potato buyers and consumers desire. “With more than 60 varieties to choose from, there is a Colorado potato to meet every specification,” he states. Reflecting consumers’ curiosity for new options, a few more purple potato varieties are being grown, Ehrlich points out. And fingerlings are capturing more attention as well. The elongated, thin shape and assorted colors of Fingerlings have captured the attention of both professional chefs and those creative home cooks who see unique ideas for their families and special guests at dinner parties. “Since the USDA has changed its standards, allowing mixed varieties to be packed together,” he continues, “this creates a lot of opportunities for shippers and more options for buyers.”

Sustainability And Freight Advantage

Variety in sizes, colors, and shapes of potatoes are not the only attractive characteristics of potatoes shipped from the San Luis Valley that draw new buyers. This region is a natural fit for the multitudes that are going green. “We are more sustainable than any growing area,” stresses Ehrlich. “Buying Colorado potatoes means less food miles with our freight advantage, and we have less pesticide need and fewer disease problems because of winter kill. We are justifiably proud of our state and of our unique region.”

The majestic, snow-dotted peaks of the Rocky Mountains surrounding the fertile San Luis Valley in southwestern Colorado provide a showcase of not only beautiful scenery, but also ideal growing conditions for potatoes. “It is here at 7,600 feet elevation — in the highest and largest alpine valley in the world that commercial crops are grown — where the potato flourishes,” Ehrlich continues.

Adding to the potatoes’ allure is the Valley’s centralized location, which provides a natural freight advantage and is becoming even more appealing as the popularity of buying locally grown skyrockets. Jason LaBarba, a principal at Ideal Sales Inc., in Dallas, concurs. “Colorado potatoes can be delivered to our customers in one or two days, which make them fresher and reduces shrink.” He adds that one-stop potato shopping available through a single growing region can be another way to save on freight costs. The 800-mile trip from the San Luis Valley to the Dallas-Fort Worth delivery points “can sometimes even be done overnight,” LaBarba notes. Ideal Sales services both retail and foodservice distributors.

“The industry is realizing, with freight being what it is, that sales and distribution will become more regional,” stresses Aspen Produce’s Dwayne Weyers, a managing member. “It’s a changing world, and we have to change with it.”

Economically A Perfect Fit

Tonso, of Canon Potato Co., stresses, “In times like these, when people are getting back to simplicity, there’s nothing more basic than the value, nutrition and great taste of Colorado potatoes.”

Center, Co-based Skyline Potato Co.’s salesman, Roger Christensen, says potatoes remain among the best fresh produce values for consumers. “We are a full-service potato company, with a year-round supply of potatoes — both conventional and organic.”

The company holdings also include Purely

Organic, a separate packing facility, for its organic volume. “We’ve got a nice organic program that has taken 18 years to develop,” Christensen emphasizes. Because of the varying popularity of organics, “A lot of handlers jump in to organics — and then jump right back out. We’ve had a consistent supply for our customers.”

The company markets a portion of its organic volume through Foodsource, based in Monterey, CA, using the “Tomorrow’s Organic” label. “At the same time, we sell our

own ‘Nature Fresh’ organic label, which are available in the 3-, 5-, and 50-lb. containers, through Skyline,” he adds. “We will also pack private labels for organics.”

“Potatoes are a good food source during tough economic times,” touts Jim Knutzon, president and CEO of Monte Vista, CO-based Farm Fresh Direct LLC. Historically, “There is a direct correlation of announced recessions and more at-home eating of potatoes. And when food prices are high — and they are predicted to continue to increase — potatoes



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are perceived as an even better value.”

Ernie Myers, general manager of Mountain Valley Produce LLC, in Center, CO, agrees. “Consumers need to be reminded that potatoes are still one of the greatest values in the produce department, and they need more education relating to their versatility.”

“We’re encouraging our customers to continue to promote potatoes as ‘recession-proof,’” adds Ellithorpe of Aspen Produce. “What else can you buy for 10-cents a pound?”

Multiply that value with the added bonus of being good for the environment. “People

CPAC ACTIVITIES

With its overall theme centering on the nutritional value of potatoes, the Monte Vista, CO-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee has several marketing activities underway, which kicked off with a “heart-healthy” campaign this summer, according to CPAC Administrator Linda Weyers.

A contest in cooperation with the Colorado Rockies, sponsorship of Olympic gymnast, Rachael Flatt, and a recipe contest through radio advertising during the Denver Broncos games are other promotions CPAC is coordinating that are designed to tout the health benefits of Colorado potatoes.

Drawing attention to the heart-healthy aspects of Colorado potatoes, CPAC worked with the Colorado Rockies and radio station 850 KOA on a contest this summer through the CPAC website. The committee provided two portable defibrillators as grand prizes to contest winners, who then donated them to the school of their choice. American Red Cross co-sponsored the giveaway with CPAC. Six second-prize winners received a heart-healthy pack consisting of a heart monitor, a pedometer, a \$25 Sports Authority gift card, a duffle bag and the newly published *Colorado Potato* cookbook.

The spotlight on Colorado potatoes was especially bright on September 10, when CPAC coordinated its annual Potato Festival in Monte Vista. A new event this year was a mashed potato dunk tank. A second new potato contest was a three-person potato slingshot competition.

Winners were rewarded with cash prizes. The festival also featured cooking demonstrations, field and warehouse tours, a potato-decorating contest, kids’ games and other activities.

Another activity that keeps CPAC involved in promoting potatoes to school-aged kids throughout the academic year is a K-12 curriculum program available to teachers throughout the state of Colorado.

The study encompasses reading, writing, communications, science and history. Older students study nutrition and economics, and all ages engage in field trips to learn more about potato farming, storage, shipping and marketing.

The committee is also working with the U.S. Potato Board on the school lunch challenge and educating consumers on incorporating potatoes as part of a healthful and well-rounded diet.

CPAC is in its second year of sponsoring Olympic figure skater Rachael Flatt. Flatt continues to represent CPAC at various promotions and special events. Flatt lives in Colorado Springs, CO, and is considered a major contender in the sport. Weyers notes that Flatt is a “wholesome, all-American role model and perfect match for Colorado potatoes.”

The Produce Marketing Association’s annual trade show and convention is another major event for CPAC, and the San Luis Valley potato booth will be a part of the Colorado Pavilion at this month’s PMA Fresh Summit in Atlanta. The committee has its own booth space as well as independent shipper representation from the San Luis Valley. **pb**

want to support locally grown to help cut fuel usage and cut costs,” Christensen notes. “That’s good for all of us.”

According to Ray Keegan of American Produce LLC, a Denver, CO-based receiver that services retail and foodservice accounts, “Colorado potatoes are fresher, they have more flavor and variety, and they are convenient and economical. They are the best answer for my customers.”

Variety In Displays Increases Sales

Virginia Myers, office manager for Mountain Valley Produce LLC emphasizes that the variety offered through the company provides

added benefits to retailers. The company offers its customers a year-round fingerling program in addition to its Russet, red and yellow options, and she says that can add up to increased profits for retailers. “The U.S. Potato Board research has shown that providing a variety of options in produce displays in supermarkets helps them generate growth in the entire potato category.”

She adds, “Fingerlings are a convenience potato product as well. They have shorter cooking time and are so versatile.” She provides Fingerling recipes for her clients, as well as consumers, on Mountain Valley’s website.

Consistency of quality is also key to help

WHAT'S NEW IN THE VALLEY?

Skyline Potato Co., Center, CO: Three Skyline sheds are now in operation in the Center area “to fully meet all our customers’ needs,” notes Angela Diera, a sales associate.

The company has renovated the warehouse it purchased from the former Blue Chip Potato Co. and now operates its organics packing company, Purely Organics, out of that state-of-the-art facility. Along with its headquarters and packing facility in Center and another operation about five miles south, the three sheds combine to provide one-stop shopping. Additional convenience is also offered through Skyline’s trucking sister company, P.S. Connections.

New to Skyline is Rob Bache, a 2011 graduate of the University of Arizona, with a degree in agro-economics/management, and the son of general manager and chief operating officer, Randy Bache. “His focus will be on food safety,” notes Diera who says the company is now certified by Primus Labs as Global Food Safety Initiative-compliant. The GFSI certification was anticipated following two days of auditing in early September, and “puts us way ahead of the curve,” she adds.

Skyline Potato expects to ship 1.8 million cwt. from the San Luis Valley this season. Last year, the company’s shipped volume was about 1.5 cwt. of potatoes.

Farm Fresh Direct LLC, Monte Vista, CO: The largest fresh potato shipper in Colorado has joined forces with R. D. Offutt Co.’s, based in Fargo, ND, to create a national sales and marketing company, Farm Fresh Direct of America. With the addition of these operations, Farm Fresh Direct is now the largest grower-owned fresh potato shipper in the United States, claims Jim Knutzon, president and CEO of Farm Fresh Direct.

“We’re extremely excited to have RDO as part of the Farm Fresh team,” says Knutzon. “RDO has a reputation of being one of the best growers in the industry, and with their vast experience in agronomics, food safety and attention to quality, they become a valuable addition to the Farm Fresh team.” The new operations bring approximately 3

million cwt. to Farm Fresh, which enables the company to be a one-stop shop for Russets, organics, Fingerlings and value-added branded products like the PotatOH microwavable potatoes. “The two new operations will also improve our shipping point flexibility and reduce our shipping costs to many of our key customers. It also helps ensure year-round supply by diversifying our geographical growing locations,” Knutzon adds.

“Fresh potatoes have always been a very important part of our farming business,” adds Keith McGovern, CEO of R.D. Offutt. “Most of our focus has been on processing potatoes. The partnership with Farm Fresh, along with their retail and foodservice customer base and sales and marketing expertise will greatly enhance these two operations’ future potential.” R.D. Offutt currently farms over 190,000 acres in the United States., of which 60,000 are potatoes, making RDO the largest potato grower in the country, according to a press release from Farm Fresh Direct.

Farm Fresh Direct operates six packing sheds in Colorado, two of which completed upgrades in time for the start of the 2011-12

Aspen Produce LLC, Center, CO: Troy Lawson has recently come on board as a production and quality control person at the Aspen Produce packing facility, according to Jed Ellithorpe, farm and operations manager, and its sister company, Ponderosa Partnership. “We might implement some new quality control measures, and we are taking a look at additional food safety certifications,” Ellithorpe says. “Not only are we Aspen Produce, a packing warehouse, but we also operate our own farms, which keeps us connected to our growers. We know the challenges they face,” he continues.

Aspen Produce markets a full mix of yellows, reds and Russets. The operation also includes a greenhouse-breeding program through Gunnels Farms. This past year, the program had four new varieties in development. Ellithorpe also reports that Aspen Produce intends to further explore the potential of the use of social media as a marketing and sales tool.

Canon Potato Co. Inc., Center, CO: President and CEO, David Tonso, reports that the company has installed new software at the packinghouse and offices in an effort to be PTI-compliant by the start of the shipping season in September.

Tonso continues, “We offer Russets, reds and yellow potatoes and will custom-pack to our customers’ specifications.” This includes private labeling and the company’s own Rocky Mountain label. Tonso adds that yellow-flesh varieties continue to rise in popularity. “We shipped more yellows last year than we ever have,” he notes.

“With a special focus on food safety and sanitation, we’ve made key upgrades in our warehouse,” reports Tonso. “Now we are perfectly positioned to answer the constantly evolving needs of the potato industry.”

Mountain Valley Produce LLC, Center, CO: Continuing to develop the Fingerling markets for its foodservice and retail receivers, the company has made great strides in its abilities to store and increase the shelf-life of these delicate specialty potatoes, notes Ernie Myers, general manager. The company is in its second year of offering Fingerlings year-round. The summer’s new crop was from California and overlaps with the Colorado Fingerling potatoes.

“Because of our advanced temperature control capabilities, we’ve been able to experiment with quality improvements of our Fingerlings in storage with great results,” Myers emphasizes. “We were still shipping Fingerlings in July and early August that were potatoes we were able to keep from last fall’s harvest.”

Mountain Valley Produce sells its yellow and Russet varieties, along with some of its fingerling volume, through Farm Fresh Direct America, the grower-owned corporation based in Monte Vista, CO. Kurt Holland also handles sales of a portion of Mountain Valley’s Fingerling volume.

New to Mountain Valley Logistics, the transportation arm of the company, is transportation coordinator, Duane Marquez, who joined the company in July, after longtime transportation coordinator, Tim Miller, moved to Texas. **pb**

increase in-store sales, stresses Skyline Potato Co. salesman Bob Noffsinger. “We probably have one of the best source buyers in the area.

Doug Wert does a great job for us. He was with the state inspection service in the past, and he has a great working relationship with

all of our growers. We also have been using the same basic group of growers, which leads to more consistency.” **pb**

Take A Cue From Regional Hot-Spots To Grow Organic Sales

While there are many methods of merchandising the organic produce category, constant attention and clever campaigns will bring success to retailers. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



PHOTO COURTESY OF ACME

Studies report 58 percent of Americans say they choose organic over conventionally produced foods when it is made available to them.

It's been nearly a decade since the national standards defining organics were put into place. Since this time, sales of organic produce have strengthened in regions of the country where this growing method has always found a ready customer, blossomed in emerging markets and lagged behind in still others.

What creates the regional disparities in sales? Less-than-robust sales can't be blamed on the economic recession. Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets, headquartered in Lakeland, FL, says, "With the economy over the past three years, pricing is a sensitive issue. However, we have seen a steady increase in the rise of organics purchased by our customers."

Indeed, sales of organic fruits and vegetables, which represent 39.7 percent of total organic food value and nearly 12 percent of all U.S. fruit and vegetable sales, reached nearly 10.6 billion in 2010, up 11.8 percent from 2009, according to the Brattleboro, VT-based Organic Trade Association's 2011 *Organic*

Industry Survey.

Demographics don't tell the whole story of who buys organics either. Simcha Weinstein, the director of marketing for Albert's Organics Inc., based in Bridgeport, NJ, explains, "It used to be that the profile for the organic shopper was fairly stereotypical: college-educated, fairly well to do, liberal political leanings, etc. Things are pretty different these days. For example, Hispanics are the fastest growing group who purchase organic foods."

Organics have certainly begun to impact the more mainstream population. In fact, 58 percent of Americans say they choose organic over conventionally produced foods when presented with the opportunity, according to a Thomson Reuters-NPR Health Poll published July 20, 2011. What, then, are retailers in the robust selling organic markets doing right? It all boils down simply to best practice merchandising.

Where Organics Are Hot...And Not

There's a three-fold opportunity gap

between the regions of the country where organic produce's contribution to total produce sales is highest and that region where it's lowest. The Northeast is the leader, where organic fruit and vegetable sales represent 18.2 percent of total produce ring, while the West South Center region is the lowest at only 6.2 percent, according to the Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based market research firm. *[Editor's Note: see Research Perspectives article on page 28 for more insights on organic consumers.]*

Other regions where organic produce sales are strong are the Mid-Atlantic (15.7 percent), followed by the West North Central (12.6 percent), Pacific (12.1 percent), East North Central (11.0 percent), Mountain (10.8 percent), East South Central (6.8 percent) and South Atlantic (6.6 percent) regions, according to the Perishables Group.

According to Caroline Hogue, sales manager at Lakeside Organic Gardens LLC, in Watsonville, CA, "It's all about the coasts — East Coast, West Coast and Northwest — when it comes to strong organic sales. A lot of

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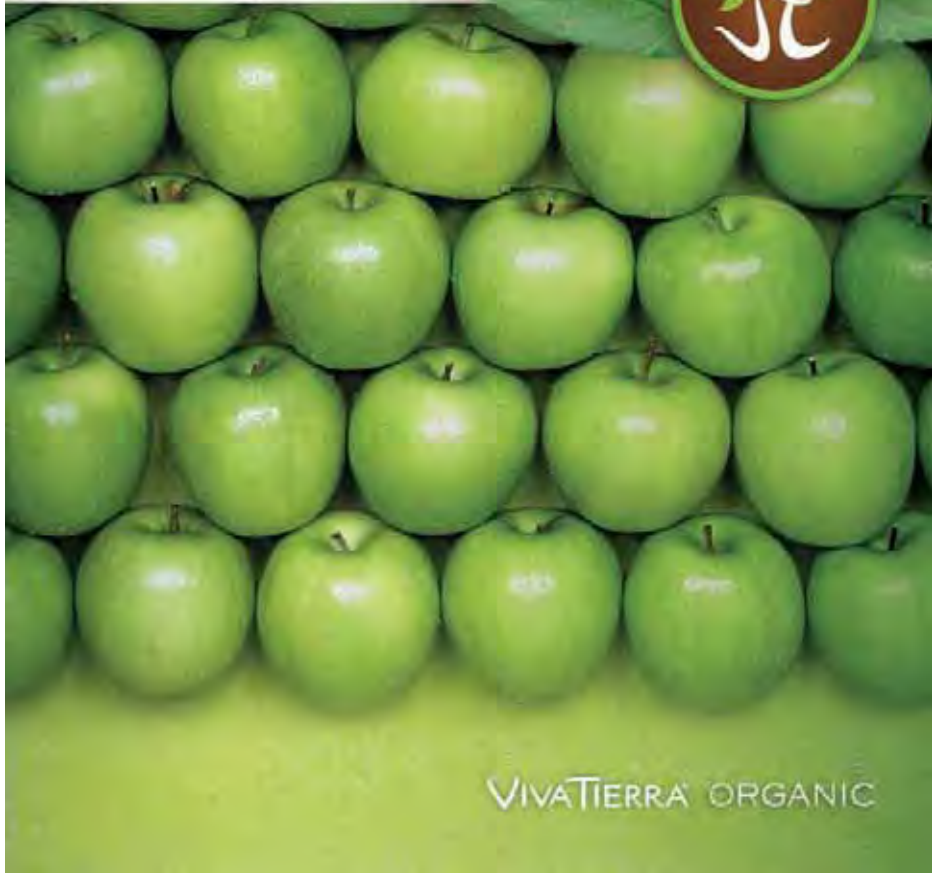
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people in these areas have a higher level of education; there are more young professionals. In addition, these are major growing regions in the country.”

Jeff Fairchild, director of produce at New Season's Market, a 11-store chain based in Portland, OR, where an average of 75 percent of produce SKUs are organic, agrees and adds, “The West Coast is a hot bed for organics. It's full of university towns with educated people who are concerned about the environment and willing to spend the money to buy good food.”

One region that is emerging as a big market for organics is the Midwest. Samantha Cabaluna, director of communications for Earthbound Farm, in San Juan Bautista, CA, reports, “Detroit is one of our biggest markets.”

Andrew Bianchi, sales manager for Arvin, CA-based Kern Ridge Growers LLC, adds, “We're selling more organic product to the Midwest, especially the Minneapolis area and Wisconsin.”

“The Midwest has become a strong market for organics for several reasons,” notes Robert Scaman, Jr., president of Goodness Greeness Inc., in Chicago, IL. “In Chicago, for example, independent retailers have gained strength, while traditional chain stores have lost ground. The small independents have grown quickly and part of this has been driven by an emphasis on perishables. Independents are small enough to react quickly to customer demand and this has helped to grow the organic category, especially in produce.”

Another reason for the growth of organics in the Midwest, particularly the Great Lakes states, “is the influence Canada plays. Canada, especially Quebec, has strong demand for organic,” maintains Scott Mabs, director of marketing for Homegrown Organic Farms, in Porterville, CA.

Nationally, there are other hot spots ripe for growth in organics. Albert's Organics Weinstein explains, “Changing demographics can have a huge impact on where organic food is selling best. For example, a decade ago, a state like North Carolina was not considered a fast growing region for organic food sales, and yet currently, it's very strong. The change is demographic. North Carolina now ranks fourth in the country in states with a college educated population, and this demographic is strong in organic food purchases.”

Take a cue from regional retailers with strong organic sales to boost your ring by considering the following tips:

1. Sell Volume & Variety

“Retailers need to decide how they want to



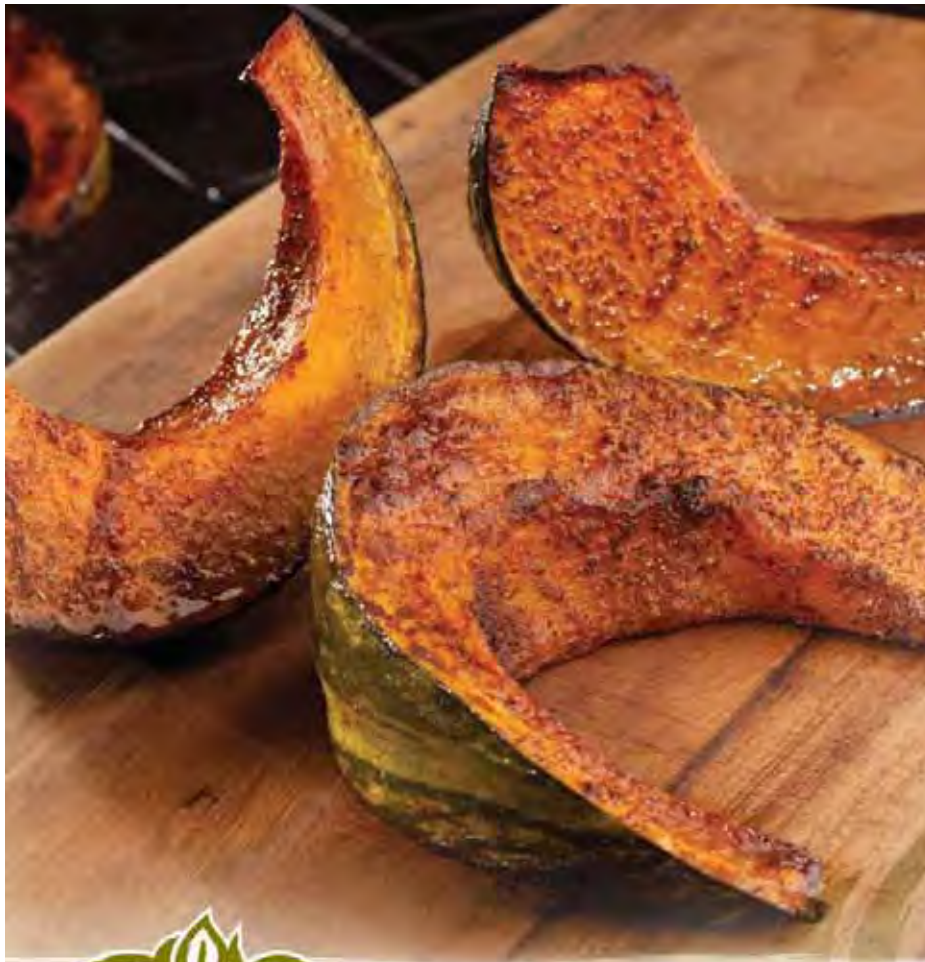
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approach the organic category,” says New Season’s Fairchild. “Do you want to make it a destination or simply offer organic produce as a convenience? If the answer is ‘a destination,’ then you want to offer enough selection to draw customers in, give it a fair value price and maintain a level of quality that consumers expect. The core organic shoppers want the quality of their produce to be as good as or better than conventional.”

Indeed, the key to building a strong organic retail program, “is by making a commitment to truly have a dynamic and effective selection of organic produce,” agrees Weinstein.

Dennis Holbrook, president of South Tex Organics LLC, headquartered in Mission, TX, says, “When the organic industry began, there wasn’t a lot of diversity. It was mainly carrots and apples. Now, you can find just about anything in organic.”

Angelo Caputo’s Fresh Markets, a six-store chain based in Chicago, IL, offers 15 to 20 percent of its produce in organic. Organic offerings include everything from greens like collards, kale and dandelion greens to carrots in several forms, beets, berries, apples and pears. Vince Ottolino, produce buyer, shares, “It seems that every day I get a call from one of the produce managers asking for something new or different. For example, it’s easier now to get items like fresh figs and artichokes in organics. I think this increased demand comes from customers who are interested in their health, and I think it represents a good forecast for organic sales in the future.”

Cooking greens is the category with the highest percent dollar sales represented by organic at 22.2 percent, according to Perishables Group data for the 52 weeks ending June 25, 2011. Carrots follow at (16.8 percent) with packaged salads (14.4 percent), lettuce (10.8 percent), apples (7.3 percent), berries (6.8 percent), onions (5 percent), tomatoes (3.9 percent), cooking vegetables (3.9 percent) and bananas (3.6 percent) rounding out the Top Ten.

At Acme Supermarkets, based in East Whiteland Township, PA, produce director Jay Schneider reveals, “Packaged salads represent the lion’s share of the organic category for us.”

Some categories of packaged salads represent even stronger organic sales. Earthbound Farm’s Cabaluna comments, “49 percent of sales in the baby leaf category of packaged salads are organic. I think when prices between conventional and organic get close, within 10 to 15 percent, consumers are much more likely to buy the organic.”

“Capitalize on this near price-parity to

“Forty-nine percent of sales in the baby leaf category of packaged salads are organic. I think when prices between conventional and organic get close, within 10 to 15 percent, consumers are much more likely to buy the organic.”

- Samantha Cabaluna, Earthbound Farm

garner more organic sales,” suggests Home-grown’s Mabs. “Replace conventional specialty items, such as a pluot or pomegranate, with their organic counterparts when there’s great supply and quality on the organic.”

2. Lose The ‘Niche’ Mentality

“Many conventional retailers still think of organics as a niche and treat it as such,” laments Goodness Greeness’ Scaman. “The only thing special about organic produce is how it is grown, not how it should be marketed. Produce is produce. For example, don’t lump all organics including tomatoes and bananas in one refrigerated display.”

Holbrook of South Texas Organics agrees, and asserts, “Don’t throw everything on an unre-

frigerated table where it shrivels and shrinks.”

“Organic product isn’t supposed to be brown and spotted,” says Addie Pobst, lead import coordinator, food safety and sustainability officer for CF Fresh, in Sedro Woolley, WA. “Many produce associates still believe this to be true. Pull any bruised or damaged items just as you would conventional. Organic growers today have become much better at growing, harvesting, handling and shipping produce, and this means better quality.”

In addition, Scaman warns, “Don’t offer only eight items on a back rack. Organic consumers are looking for a commitment from a retailer, and this means offering a broad selection of organic produce 52-weeks a year in a prominent location. Organic shop-

pers are loyal and the benefit is getting a 20 to 25 percent better margin with the same amount of effort as conventional. Also, organic consumers are more accepting of seasonal shortages and flexible in their purchases. For example, if organic strawberries aren’t available, they will often buy organic blueberries instead.”

3. Integrate Or Segregate: One Size Does Not Fit All

No one strategy — integrating or merchandising organic and conventional produce side-by-side or segregating organic produce in its own section — fits all retail formats, says Goodness Greeness’ Scaman. “I believe the most successful is to start with a segregated display to draw consumers’ attention to the category, then once you build sales velocity, run organic and conventional in a parallel integrated display or sub out organic for conventional.”

Organic produce is displayed segregated at Caputo’s Fresh Markets. Ottolino explains, “We do this so customers can go right to the organics and not have to hunt around.”

Similarly, at Publix Super Markets, Brous



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reveals, “We segregate our organic produce in order to make it more convenient for the customer to locate. We have two separate sections within our produce departments for organic fruits and vegetables: a refrigerated case and a shelf-stable area. We use bins and baskets to enhance our display tables and areas. We also have a callout banner for our organic selections. In addition, stores create in-store signage to highlight their selection.”

Acme Super Markets uses both display techniques. “For the most part, we segregate, with some items integrated near a display of conventional,” shares Schneider. “For example, organic packaged salads are displayed in a 2- to 4-foot section at the end of the conventional display. This works best for us and it keeps compliant with the NOP (National Organic Program).

“Retailers who offer a significant amount of organic produce often integrate,” maintains Greg Holzman, founder and owner of Pacific Organic Produce, headquartered in San Francisco, CA. “Look at Whole Foods. They are a leader in this area, and they integrate.”

Likewise, New Season’s Markets integrates its organic and conventional product. Fairchild discloses, “Everything is together, but separate, to prevent co-mingling. For example, we’ll have the conventional watercress in a package right next to the organic and plastic dividers between the conventional and organic asparagus. We also color-code signage — blue for conventional and green for organic.”

“One of the big benefits of integration,” according to Earthbound Farm’s Cabaluna, “is that the shopper is better able to assess the

value proposition between two choices.”

Albert’s Organics’ Weinstein agrees, and adds, “When you integrate your organic offerings, you’re not saying, ‘This is just a category or a small section.’ What you’re saying to your customer is, ‘We believe in this product and it’s given the same place on the rack as our conventional product.’”

4. Educate Shoppers

Organic consumers are hungry for and welcome information about their food choices. “Education is key,” says Weinstein. “If you simply order the food, put it out in a small little section without a strong signage program or without much educational support, you can pretty much expect your sales to reflect that effort. Retailers with the best organic sales have a well-educated staff, informative signage and handouts educating customers about organic foods.”

Ronni Blumenthal, vice president of administration for Global Organic Specialty Source Inc., in Sarasota, FL, says, “I think having names and information about farms accessible to customers is a strong tool. Recipe cards are also a great merchandising tool for products people know they ‘should’ eat, but don’t always know how to prepare.”

Retailers who really want to grow their organic produce sales should target the least likely demographic to shop for these foods, suggests Weinstein. “By going this route, you’re much more likely to provide more information detailing your product,” he explains. “So, even if the shoppers you are least likely to attract never enter your store, by aiming in their direc-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ACME

tion, you have created an organic program that can be attractive and effective for any shopper who enters your store.”

5. Price And Promote Effectively

“It’s a common misconception that organic produce is expensive and out of reach,” says

Scaman of Goodness Greeness.

Acme Super Market’s Schneider agrees. “Customers expect to pay a little more for organics. However, the price is more reasonable than it was five years ago or so,” he contends.

“How to price organic produce can be a challenge,” recognizes New Seasons Market’s

Fairchild. “There are a number of different strategies. One is giving organics a specialty mark-up with no expectation to sell. Second is a gourmet mark-up so there’s no sticker shock. Third — and what we see large retailers in the Portland area with only 25 to 30 percent of organic produce sales doing —

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“Many conventional retailers still think of organics as a niche and treat it as such. The only thing special about organic produce is how it is grown, not how it should be marketed. Produce is produce. For example, don’t lump all organics including tomatoes and bananas in one refrigerated display.”

— Robert Scaman, Jr., Goodness Greeness Inc.

is pricing aggressively to gain market share because it doesn’t really effect their bottom line since it’s so small. Fourth, and our strategy — and we’re not 100 percent organic for this reason — is to buy aggressively in volume and sell at a value. Retailers in secondary markets where organics aren’t that strong really should evaluate their market pricing strategy and see if it matches their goals for the category.”

Make sure there’s always an organic item on ad, recommends Scaman. “This gives customers a sense of value. Also, if customers buy an organic salad, they may pick up an organic tomato and cucumber, too, and this gives the retailer three rings instead of one,” he says.

One or more organic produce items are advertised every week in the circular at Caputo’s Fresh Markets, according to Ottolino. “The organics have their own section of the ad and a box around them as a call out. We try to be as close to conventional when an organic item is on ad. This way, customers who have never tried organics may be more willing.”

Publix Super Markets promote organics in a similar fashion to conventional produce, Brous notes, such as “in our ads, in-store demonstrations and in recipes.”

Some retailers think out of the box and capitalize on a couple of trends at once. “For example,” says Acme Super Market’s Schneider. “We ran a locally grown organic ad this year and all advertised items followed the seasonality of conventional product.” **pb**



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Foodservice Operators Go Mad For Mangos

Incorporated in a typical mango salsa, or with a newer Asian flavor profile, mangos continue to delight foodservice clients and customers alike. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL MANGO BOARD

A Thai Pork and Mango Salad is one example of the Southeast Asian flavor profiles in which Chef Allen believes chefs will start incorporating mangos.

Mangos are the most popular fruit in the world. Yet, many Americans are just discovering this flavorful tropical fruit. One way they're doing so is by dining out. Dr. Richard Campbell, senior curator of tropical fruit for Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Coral Gables, FL, notes, "Culinary applications are the way the mango will make its biggest impact on U.S. consumers."

Larry Nienkerk, partner and general manager at Splendid Products LLC, in Burlingame, CA, agrees and adds, "Mangos are catching on more and more in foodservice. We're seeing a greater percent of dollars spent on mangos going into foodservice and other fresh markets."

Variety And Form

A consistent supply of good fresh mangos is what Alan Skversky, director of research and development for Chevys Fresh Mex, a 92-unit Mexican-style casual dining chain based in Union City, CA, looks for, "rather than a particular variety."

Chef Alan Susser, formerly of Chef Allen's and Taste Gastro Pub, and known as the

"Mango King," agrees and adds, "If we ask our distributors in advance, they can source specific varieties like the Madame Francis, a dessert quality mango out of Haiti, or the Manila from Mexico. Otherwise, they will usually send us Keitts, Kents and Tommy Adkins."

Kents and Keitts are the best eating and cutting mangos for foodservice because they have a creamy texture and little or no fiber, says Bill Vogel, president of Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles, in Los Angeles, CA. "However, most operators will use Tommys during times when these varieties are not available."

"One reason why sourcing by variety can be challenging," says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for Vision Import Group LLC, in River Edge, NJ, "is that each country we import from has its own major variety. For example, about 95 percent of Brazil's exports are Tommy Adkins, while 90 to 95 percent of mangos from Peru are Kent."

There is little commercial mango production in the United States. Instead, fruit is imported on a year-round basis from Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Guatemala and Haiti. The need to import from multiple growing areas can provide challenges in delivering mangos of

consistent quality, says Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer for Ciruli Brothers LLC, in Rio Rico, AZ. "This has frustrated some chefs and led them to use little fresh product on their menus, choosing an IQF (individually quick frozen) or liquid puree mango product instead."

"Chefs who do prefer to use fresh mangos buy whole mangos and train kitchen staff to cut them on site," remarks Megan McKenna, marketing manager for the NMB.

This is precisely what occurs when mangos are featured in a promotion at Chevys Fresh Mex. Skversky reports, "We'll bring in our regional buyers, chefs and general managers for a training session. Review topics include receiving — what to look for in terms of color and feel — how to judge when a mango is ripe; how to store and cut the fruit. This assures not only consistency in execution from unit to unit, but also fiscal responsibility in terms of food costs."

"Other operators," says McKenna, "utilize a commissary or pre-cut operation to bring different forms of fresh mango to multiple units such as peeled cheeks, sliced, diced, cubed and julienne or sticks."

"The big challenge for the fresh-cut

Mango Aids For Foodservice And The Blogosphere

Importers and organizations such as the Orlando, FL-based National Mango Board (NMB) offer a variety of assistance to help foodservice operators put more fresh mangos on the menu. Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer for Ciruli Brothers, in Nogales, AZ, says, "We work with a number of culinary schools and provide fresh mangos for culinary contests that encourage student-chefs to learn how to use fresh mangos in creative ways."

Megan McKenna, NMB marketing manager, says, "We offer operators menu concepts by supplying existing recipes or working with them to develop recipes they might be interested in, once we know their needs. We provide cutting, yield, storage and supplier information, along with other mango information. We have also invited foodservice professionals to our Best Handling Practices Webinar the past two years."

In an effort to engage food bloggers and provide them with the critical information they need to experiment with and write about mangos, the NMB shot videos of 34 bloggers explaining how to cut a mango while attending the BlogHer Food Conference. Ten finalists were chosen, whose videos were then posted on Facebook. The winner, who was granted the title of Mango Mentor, was also featured in the NMB's How to Cut a Mango video and was offered a regular guest blogging opportunity on the Let's Mango blog. According to McManus, "Food bloggers are creating a food revolution in this country. Many consumers, especially busy moms, are turning to food blogs for a steady stream of information and inspiration to help them feed their families. We want to make sure mangos are part of that conversation."

pb

market," according to Fairchild's Campbell, "is to find a variety that can be cut green, when it is firm enough to hold its shape, yet still has that aromatic mango flavor. This is currently spurring the global market for Keitts, which will never make a good fresh market mango at retail, and pushing plantings of this variety in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. The Keitt won't hold its position forever and may be displaced in the future with the Nam Doc Mai variety from Thailand. The question

then becomes, 'Where can this variety be grown in the west?'"

Tried And True And Something New

"One of the most common ways in which mangos now appear on menus is in salsas," says Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Brooks Tropicals LLC, in Homestead, FL.

In fact, Tony Roma's, a Dallas, TX chain with nearly 300 units, recently ran a promotion from February to May of this year in 40

locations featuring Seared Citrus Mahi Mahi with Fresh Mango Salsa. The promotion included images of the entrée in a menu insert, an in-store poster and a television commercial. During the same time period BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse, based in Huntington Beach, CA, promoted its Thai Salmon and Fresh Mango Salsa on a menu insert in 104 locations.

"One step further," adds McKenna, "is mango relish and chutney that works across the menu in shared plates, entrees and sand-

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“The next big trend will be chefs recognizing the benefits of using mature green mangos in applications such as Southeast Asian salads and slaws, where there is heat, spice and savory flavors all in the same dish.”

— Chef Allen Susser

wiches. Mangos are also incorporated into salads, desserts, sushi and beverages.”

Ciruli reports, “We’ve seen mango sorbet, mango cheesecake and fresh mangos cut into slices like a flower petal that is easy to eat.”

“In the future,” says McKenna, “there is a great opportunity to use mangos in hot applications. It’s easy to grill fresh mango. Just brush lightly with oil and place on a charbroiler. The result is beautiful and delicious. Grilled sliced mango works well in tacos, Cuban sandwiches and as accents to stir-fry. When thinking finger food/street food, combine sticks of chicken tenders or shrimp with sticks of fresh mango. The flavor profile can be tandoori, teriyaki or a spicy chipotle marinade.”

Chef Susser discloses, “The next big trend will be chefs recognizing the benefits of using mature green mangos in applications such as Southeast Asian salads and slaws where there’s heat, spice and savory flavors all in the same dish. Mangos don’t just have to be sweet to eat.” A good example of this is the Mango Kimchi with pork chops that Susser made for Fairchild Garden’s 18th Annual International Mango Festival. Other examples from chefs who participated in the Festival include Fish Tacos with Mango Slaw, Mango Red Curry Pork Tenderloin and Madras Curry Chicken with Mango, Jicama and Mango Salad.

Mango-Licious Promotions

Several innovative foodservice operators have spotlighted fresh mangos in several ways, such as limited time offers, beverage specials and in a number of dishes that span each day part.

For example, Pei Wei Asian Diner recently introduced a special promotion that featured Thai Mango Chicken, a combination of chicken, fresh mango, red bell peppers, spiced cashews and Thai basil cooked in a wok with a sauce of chili paste, lime juice and rice vinegar and topped with lime and cilantro. The dish was so popular that the chain, owned by Scottsdale, AZ-based P.F. Chang’s China Bistro, brought the dish back after its allotted time period and generated excitement for its return by giving guests who visited before the re-introduction a card

featuring a pull-off mango sticker, which offered either 25 or 50 percent off their meal or a free Thai Mango Chicken entrée the first week the dish returned to the menu.

Mango-flavored beverages are also making the rounds at foodservice outlets. For example, Mango Margaritas, Mango Lemonade and Mango Daiquiris were the focus of a seasonal promotion at Chevys Fresh Mex. Banners and table tents called out the promotion. Skversky says, “We have used fresh mangos in our repertoire for years in specials and in core menu items. The mango beverages we created this time are very popular, and in fact, have surpassed sales of fresh pineapple coconut drinks, which are also very popular.”

Customers enjoyed fresh mangos throughout the day during a recent promotion in over 800 healthcare and senior living accounts served by Morrison Management Specialists, headquartered in Atlanta, GA. Menu items, which were sold in food courts and via self-serve grab-and-go formats, ranged from breakfast to dinner, salads and desserts, and included Homemade Granola with Mango and Vanilla Yogurt, a Mango Barbecued Chicken Pizza, Roast Pork and Mango Salad and Mango Cinnamon Bread Pudding.

The promotion took approximately six weeks to develop, from the initial recipe testing to educating staff at each location. Norbert Bomm, corporate executive chef for research and development remarks, “The beauty of the promotion was that it spotlighted a fresh, healthful seasonal ingredient. In addition, the recipes are all now in our database, accessible by the individual chefs at all of our accounts, so they can bring back any of the dishes to include on the regular menu or for special catering functions.”

Due to strong volume and many varieties, summer is a great time to promote mangos on the menu. The NMB has partnered again with Gaithersburg, MD-based Sodexo to promote fresh mango menu items such as Grilled Mahi Mahi with Tropical Slaw and a Tropical Mango Roll. These limited-time offers were presented in 1,200 locations during the month of July. Sodexo used more than 80,000 pounds of fresh mangos during the promotion. **pb**

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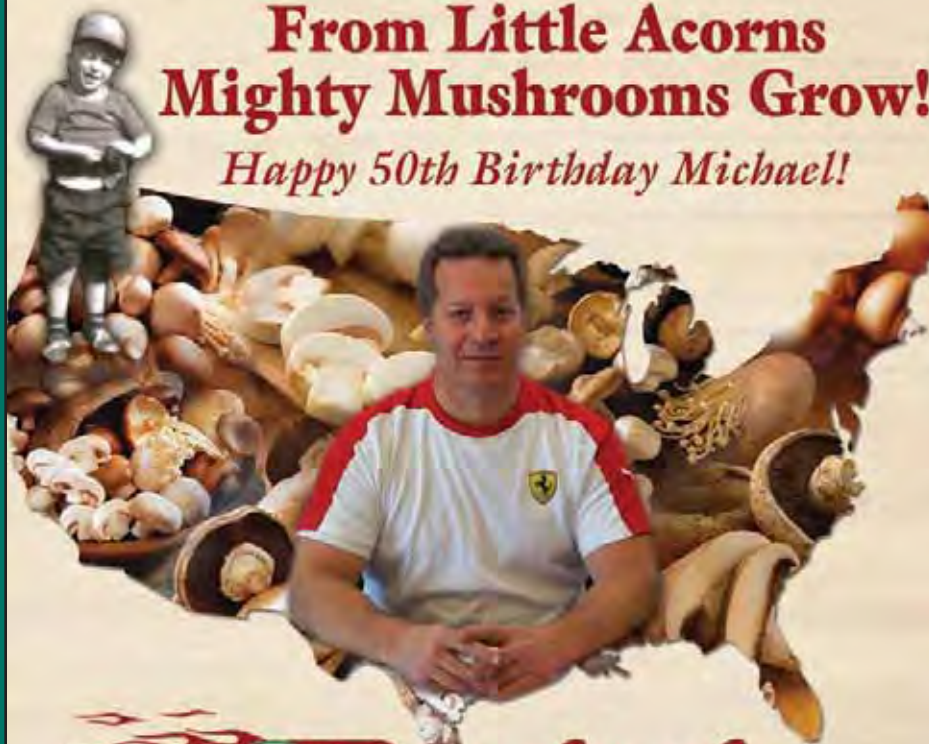
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Fifteen Tips On Merchandising Apples

SKU proliferation of this “mature” category adds complexity to maximizing profits. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW YORK APPLE ASSOCIATION

With so many varieties, sizes and packaging options, apples are among the most complex categories in the produce department.

Two decades ago, no one had heard of Honeycrisp apples. The apple category included, at most, a half-dozen varieties coming out of Washington, augmented perhaps by a few local favorites. Today, Honeycrisp is just ahead of Golden Delicious among the top six varieties, a list that is now headed not by Red Delicious but by Galas.

Even though apples are a fully mature category, the continuing introduction of new varieties and new products makes apples among the most complex and challenging categories in the produce department. “The average retailer has 12 or 13 apple varieties in the fourth quarter, and 29 unique apple SKUs when you count the sizes, or bag sizes,” reports Steve Lutz, executive vice president of The Perishables Group, in West Dundee, IL. “It’s a complex task to manage all these varieties. After packaged salads, apples have become one of the more complex categories in produce.”

The urgency of assembling and merchandising this complicated category is strong because apples are — and have been for decades — a big-ticket item at the cash register. Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt

Growers LLC, Wenatchee, WA, remarks, “I was a retailer most of my life and you have to look at the dollar volume you have. Apples are an older category and they are a big part of the produce department — they make up six percent of produce, which is huge.”

Here are 15 tips from apple industry insiders to maximize the possibilities for this vital produce department staple.

1. Promote Multiple Varieties Often

Apple sales increase with promotional offers that include numerous varieties, especially during the peak season from the late summer through the fall. “Ads for apples should feature four to five varieties at one time. Have an ‘apple-of-the-month.’ You need to promote every month, and in the fall and early winter, two or three times a month,” Pepperl advises.

Industry insiders advise some sort of apple promotion almost continuously during the peak season. “It makes sense to promote apples continuously through the fall,” says Harold Broughton, general manager of United Marketing Exchange, a grower/packer/shipper, based in Delta, CO.

There is a temptation to cut corners by

keeping the produce department well stocked, but saving energy and time on the promotions. Don’t fall into this trap. “A lot of retailers have been streamlining, where it’s just the product and taking the promotions out of it. You have to connect with your consumers and understand what they are looking for,” says Terry Braithwaite, director of marketing at Chelan Fresh Marketing, in Chelan, WA.

The bottom line with apples is promote them and they will sell. “Promote apples all the time and you’ll get better sales,” says Jim Mertz, partner and vice chairman for Symms Fruit Ranch Inc., based in Caldwell, ID.

2. Remember The Basic Varieties

A handful of leading varieties dominates apple sales, and thus should dominate shelf space and always be available. “Typically, six varieties generate 75 percent of the apple category dollars, and 10 varieties generate 90 percent of apple category dollars,” reports Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager at Yakima, WA-based Domex Super-fresh Growers LLC. “The top six, in order, are Gala, Red Delicious, Fuji, Granny Smith, Honeycrisp and Golden Delicious.”

“Honeycrisp has gained — and continues to gain — the most in share, but still remains fairly small within the total crop,” reveals Keith Horder, director of business development for L&M Companies Inc., based in Raleigh, NC. “Red Delicious has made a comeback in the last few years with consumers. Gala and Fuji are the strongest of the five main varieties and we expect them to continue their growth.”

There are constant shifts in the relative importance of the basic varieties. According to

Karin Rodriguez, executive director of the Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program, in Harrisburg, PA, “We see varieties like Gala and Fuji gaining on traditional favorites like Red Delicious, Golden Delicious and McIntosh. Honeycrisp is doing very well for a relatively new variety.”

Others have seen the recent shift toward Gala and Fuji, as well as the sudden emergence of Honeycrisp as a major variety. “People are going more for the Galas and Fujis, and less for the

Red and Golden Delicious,” Broughton says.

But even if they have fallen a bit in popularity, Red Delicious and Golden Delicious remain on the short list of mainstream varieties that drive the category. “The Red Delicious and Golden Delicious are still popular,” insists Dan Clough, assistant produce manager at Festival Food Stores, a 13-unit chain based in Vadnais Heights, MN. “People are still hungry for them.”

Globalization has made it possible to display the mainstream varieties 12 months of the year by including apples from the Southern Hemisphere during the relatively short windows when there is no domestic supply. “Apples are available year-round, and have been for at least 25 years. Current production levels and modern technology allow today’s consumers to enjoy orchard-fresh fruit even in the middle of summer,” says Kay Rentzel, a consultant and former director of the National Apple Month Program based in Dillsburg, PA, for the U.S. Apple Association (USAA), located in Vienna, VA.

When you include apples from the Southern Hemisphere, a few words of explanation about the carbon footprint might be helpful. Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing at Albert’s Organics Inc., headquartered in Bridgeport, NJ, explains, “Shoppers are becoming increasingly curious and aware about what type of carbon footprint their food leaves. How far a product has traveled is a big part of that carbon footprint. Key here, however, is to understand the nuances of what’s involved,” he continues. “For example, the energy efficiency of many of the boats that ship New Zealand product to the United States actually uses less fuel than a truck going from the Pacific Northwest to the East Coast. Most customers would just assume that the further the distance traveled, the more fuel is used. It’s important that retailers do their homework and then promote their findings to their customers.”

The Southern Hemisphere is a key piece of offering 12 months of quality apples. “Good apples are available year-round from a wide range of sources throughout the world,” says Angela Liu, CEO of Fairfield, NJ-based Crispy Green, a maker of freeze-dried fruit snacks.

Because new varieties are taking center stage, it is worth the time to track sales to see if a new variety has earned a spot on the short list that must always be available, or if there should be a shift in the relative shelf space devoted to the different mainstream varieties. “New and exciting apple varieties are being introduced

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annually,” reminds Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing at Rainier Fruit Co., based in Selah, WA. “Retailers should assign the appropriate space allocation according to each variety’s category contribution. Questions to consider when doing this include: Have Gala sales exceeded Red Delicious? If so, has the retailer adjusted the space allocation accordingly?”

3. Rotate The Optional Varieties

The number of apple varieties new and old

that attract consumer interest just keeps growing. “We grow 10 varieties in our orchards in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties in Southern California,” reports Byron Albano, sales and operations manager at Cuyama Orchards, located in North Hollywood, CA. “Customers are asking more for Honeycrisp, Pink Lady and Heirlooms. We definitely have a lot of interest in Heirlooms and we continue to work on that.”

There is such an abundance of varieties that

some of them have become a category unto themselves. “In Washington, they are known as club varieties and many growers have specific proprietary varieties. Retailers seem to support different club varieties,” Horder acknowledges. “But Honeycrisp are the most sought-after variety by retailers.”

However, there are too many popular new varieties, or popular local favorites, to include all of them in the apple department all the time. The apple department itself competes for space with a growing number of produce items from around the world. “The produce departments aren’t getting any bigger, but the number of items they carry has increased,” points out Bob Mast, vice president for marketing at CMI Corp., based in Wenatchee, WA. “It’s good to give your customers as much variety, as many choices as you can, without impacting shrink.”

“Retailers should consider offering as many varieties as possible due to the many flavor palates of the consumer,” suggests Rentzel. “The exact number will vary throughout the fall as early varieties give way to the mid- and late-season varieties. As the winter and spring months roll around, it is important to employ this same principle. Additionally, retailers should consider the difference in flavors of the same variety, grown in different regions of the country. Not all Golden Delicious apples will taste the same. Today’s consumers have very sophisticated palates, and it is important to provide a wide variety of flavor profiles to meet their needs,” Rentzel says.

But choices must be made, and it is advisable to develop a rotation that always includes the biggest sellers, and rotates in and out the seasonal local varieties and new varieties you hope to introduce. “Retailers should create plan-o-grams that allow consumers to always see something new, but not be overwhelmed,” advises Stemilt’s Pepperl. “You should always have Red Delicious, Gala, Granny Smith, Fuji and probably Golden Delicious. Everything else is regional or part of a rotation. For example, Jonagold is popular in the fall, and Pink Lady in the winter. Honeycrisp is a huge apple for fall and early winter, but it falls off in January.”

“When you put together the plan-o-gram, it is important to always include a full range on the sweet to tart chart,” notes CMI’s Mast.

4. New Varieties, In Particular, Must Be Promoted

When a new variety is added to the apple portfolio, it must be promoted properly. “There is always enough to promote, and the

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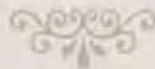
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MERCHANDISING REVIEW

volume will determine how much and in how many areas you promote,” says Jim Allen, president of Fishers-based New York Apple Association (NYAA).

L&M’s Horder remarks, “This fall through winter will be prime promotional periods. Our crop is a little later than normal, but quality is excellent and volume will be good. Mixing different flavor profiles in the same ad helps to satisfy more of the consumer desires.”

The rule of, “at least twice” applies when it comes to promoting new apple varieties. “You should carry out promotions at least two times for new varieties,” insists Stemilt’s Pepperl. “Do not pick up a new variety unless you’re willing to promote it at least that much.”

Part of the promotion process is giving new varieties significantly more space than they will receive after your customers have come to know — and love — them. “When introducing a new variety with little or no sales history, it would be foolish to allocate a small amount of space,” says Rainier’s Wolter. “In order to encourage consumer trial and acceptance, the variety should be merchandised in the most visible location within the department and



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAGE FRUIT CO.

within the category display. Additional signage and print ad space also help bring awareness of the variety to consumers.”

Sampling is always helpful, but it is vital when you bring in a variety that tastes great, but might be unfamiliar to some consumers. “It may be that your best eating apple is not your best seller,” says Albert Organics’ Weinstein. “To

remedy that, it comes back to what we discussed earlier — sampling and education.”

5. Know Your Customers

The mix of apple varieties retailers should carry depends greatly on the demographics the store serves, and the two most important demographics are the region being served and

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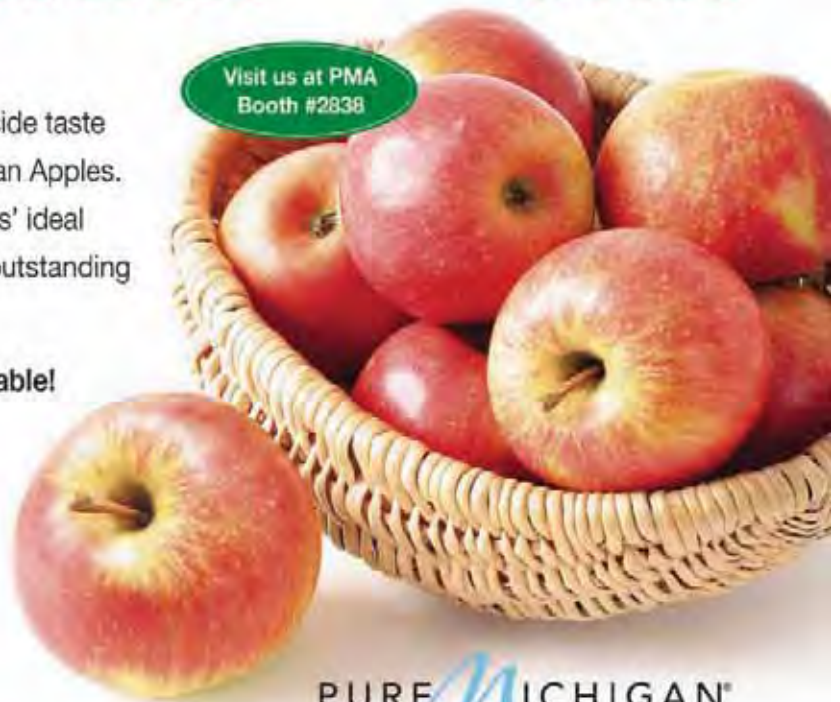
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the economic status of the customers. “The variety selection should definitely be driven by the demographics frequenting the specific retailer,” says Lutz of The Perishables Group. “There are core varieties like Red Delicious, Gala, Granny Smith, Golden Delicious, Fuji and Honeycrisp. In the Northeast and East, McIntosh would fall into that category, and possibly Empire.”

“A consumer who is financially stressed tends to go for items that are promoted, or lower priced, and those tend to be the mainline varieties,” continues Lutz, “whereas people with higher incomes may go more for varieties like Pink Lady, Ambrosia and Honeycrisp.”

Other industry insiders agree that lower income customers gravitate toward the older, more mainstream apple varieties. “A typical store should have nine bulk SKUs, two bagged and two organic,” details Queen of Domex. “Stores in upscale areas should have more varieties and more organic apple products. Lower income areas should feature more mainstream varieties.”

“The selection you should offer depends on who your clientele is — are you low-, average- or high-income? We’re doing a good

job of providing a selection of different varieties and sizes,” says Scott Swindeman, vice president at Applewood Orchards Inc., based in Deerfield, MI. Applewood recently merged sales with Michigan Fresh Marketing, an apple packing organization, which will help them target larger retailers.

The job of knowing your customers can go a long way toward making or breaking this category. “Understanding their market and what the consumer is looking for is the most important thing retailers need to consider in merchandising apples,” agrees Sandy Cohen, president of Cohen Produce Marketing, in Aspers, PA.

6. Carry And Promote Local Apples

Perhaps more than any other item in the produce department, when it comes to apples, local matters. “Locally grown is what people want,” asserts Clough from Festival Foods. “A lot of your older varieties like the Winesap and Red Romes have gone by the wayside. People are looking for Zestar and the other new local varieties.”

For some retailers, the arrival of the local harvest is cause to expand the apple section.

“The number of varieties changes by the season,” adds Clough. “We get apples from New Zealand and Chile and other countries. We put out seven at a time easily, and then a lot more when the local ones become available.”

Most producers find that retailers who emphasize their local apple program are getting good results. “Local apples have turned into a huge program,” reports Swindeman. “Galas, Fujis, Jonagold, Honeycrisp and McIntosh are the more popular varieties in Michigan, but not necessarily in that order.”

One reason for the success of this program is consumers want to support local farmers, and reduce the carbon footprint of their food. “Local is the new organic,” exclaims Cohen. “Many people’s perception is that local is better, and in many cases, it is. But we need to define ‘local.’ Everyone seems to have a different definition. Some define it by distance, some by travel time and some by geographic location; there doesn’t seem to be any consistency.”

L&M’s Horder has a good point, noting, “Apples are grown in many parts of the country and consumers like to buy locally grown produce, but most retailers will offer the



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“Understanding their market and what the consumer is looking for is the most important thing retailers need to consider in merchandising apples.”

— Sandy Cohen, *Cohen Produce Marketing*

local product along with Washington State product, again allowing the customer to make the buying decision. Surprisingly, the two can actually complement each other if merchandised and promoted wisely.”

The allure of local apples also connects with strong interests in local economic viability and food safety. “Using the region of origin in merchandising provides consumers with an idea of where the apples were produced,” explains USAA’s Rentzel. “Even more important may be the opportunity to connect consumers with the apple producer by merchandising the producer by name. This adds a layer of confidence.”

There are also local and regional differences in the varieties of apples consumers prefer.

Many apple varieties are only grown in a particular region. “Retailers in proximity to

regional apple crops may want to consider handling some regional apples when they are available in the fall,” suggests Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Sage Fruit Co. LLC, in Yakima, WA. “There are certain regional varieties that aren’t grown in Washington that may complement the category.”

Local apples are so important that when they arrive, it makes good sense, just to be sure, to have more than one source. “You should definitely carry the regional favorites if you are promoting homegrown, and then, of course, the top SKUs,” confirms the NYAA’s Allen.

The importance of local growing conditions, which was ignored for decades, has been embraced by a new wave of apple breeders, and will influence the varieties that become available in the future. “We’re getting away from the model of looking for a variety that can be

grown anywhere. A lot of the varieties being developed now are different depending on where they are grown,” says Fred Wescott, president of Honey Bear Tree Fruit Co. LLC, in Wenatchee, WA.

It is possible, with a little education, to integrate local apples into a program that also includes off-season apples from the Southern Hemisphere. “During peak season, if you’re a retailer in an area that grows apples, then of course you want to have a strong selection of local and regional apples,” remarks Weinstein of Albert’s Organics. “Of course, you’ll want to carry Northwest product, and to have early-season new crop apples you will need to look to Arizona and California. During the very late season, you’ll see crops coming from South America and New Zealand. Key to promoting them is to let your customers know that these are new crop apples.”

7. Integrate Organic With Conventional

Organic apples have gone mainstream and should be included in the selection. But they should almost always be displayed with the other apples, rather than in a separate organic produce section. “I tend to believe that integrating organic



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with conventional is the way to go,” contends Weinstein. “Typically, when you see a department that has a segregated organic section, while it can look very sharp and make it easy for a shopper to quickly assess your organic selection, it generally allows for only fairly small displays. By integrating the organic with the conventional, shoppers are able to see a side-by-side comparison of the organic vs. conventional product, both with quality and with price. Additionally, shoppers are looking for apples, they will simply assume that your complete apple selection is what they see in your designated apple section. And even though you may have several organic varieties in the organic section, they may not be shopped because the customer assumes that your available apples are in your apple section — a pretty understandable assumption.”

The only exception to this rule might be a store with an unusually impressive section of organic produce that attracts a large clientele.

“Organic is still growing rapidly. Integrated displays will always sell more unless you have a huge organic display,” Pepperl of Stemilt says.

8. Consider A Close Relative

Apple pears are not really apples. They are Asian pears, which means they also aren’t really pears. But their taste and crunch include a hint of the apple.

“It’s technically an Asian Pear, which is not a pear, and people say you can taste both apple and pear in it,” says Dan Spain, vice president of sales and marketing at Kingsburg Orchards, in Kingsburg, CA. “It’s a great kitchen solution for the Holidays because you can slice it and

put it in the refrigerator and it won’t oxidize. We have a new one called crunchy Gold.”

9. Educate Your Customers

Effective and informative signage can be a make-or-break part of merchandising apples. “There are many factors that go into merchandising apples, but we believe the single most important thing retailers need to consider is clear, correct signage that conveys price/variety/country or region of origin to the

customer,” asserts Sinks of Sage Fruit.

Part of this process is letting your customers learn about the new apple varieties. “The big thing to understand is that consumers aren’t familiar with them, so retailers need a proper mix, and they need to let the consumers know there are different uses and flavor profiles,” explains Pepperl. “The same consumers who like Fujis are not necessarily going to like Granny Smith.”

The information includes passing along the stories that come with the new apple varieties. “Over the past 10 years, there has been a flurry of activity with new varieties coming out,” remarks CMI’s Mast.

“One of the keys is when you have so many varieties out there, you must create the romance story for the new ones.”

“Information is so important,” agrees Weinstein of Albert’s Organics. “First, it should be apparent through your signage — to anyone who walks into your department — that these apples are new crop. Second, it’s important to have an apple chart available, so shoppers have a clear understanding of which apples are tart, which are sweet, which apples are great for

Effective and informative signage can be a make-or-break part of merchandising apples.



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eating out of hand and which ones hold up best for cooking.”

Every day, there are more consumers who want and expect information about their food. “We live in a time where it’s simply not enough to just put your product on the rack and hope for the best,” continues Weinstein. “Education is really the key for successful retailing in these times. Shoppers want to know as much as possible about their food — how it was grown, where it came from, and how it arrived.”

One such producer that is going the extra mile to usher the in-store education process into the wireless age is Domex Superfresh Growers. “Forty percent of cell phones are Smart phones, so we are putting QR codes on bags and clamshells to give consumers access to information on the variety, and a video on some of the farmers,” details Queen. “It puts a face to the fruit they are purchasing. Last summer, we had great success with QR codes on cherry packaging. Within three weeks we had 2,000 jumps to our website from them.”

10. Sample, Sample, Sample

Nothing sells an apple like the taste of quality fruit, and this has become even more important with the continuing introduction of new and interesting varieties that are not familiar to many customers. “I have been saying for many years, and will continue to say it: Retailers need to get their knives out and give the customer a taste,” says Lee Peters, vice president of sales and marketing at Fowler Brothers Inc., in Wolcott, NY.

In the case of apples, sampling is the way to

“Forty percent of cell phones are Smart phones, so we are putting QR codes on bags and clamshells to give consumers access to information on the variety, and a video on some of the farmers. It puts a face to the fruit they are purchasing. Last summer, we had great success with QR codes on cherry packaging.”

— Loren Queen, Domex Superfresh Growers LLC

demonstrate not just the taste, but also the crunch factor. “Nothing works better than getting the product into the mouths of your customers. Ultimately, we want to know how an apple eats. Is it crunchy, sweet? The best way to answer these questions is through sampling,” Weinstein says.

11. Display The Right Stuff

Your best salesperson in this category is a good quality apple. “A good apple is going to keep customers coming back, rather than switching to another fruit or another store,” says Jay Toohill, general manager at Chazy Orchards Inc., in Chazy, NY. “You want an apple with a good flavor, a good hard crunch to it.”

The quality of the apples begins with finding suppliers and growers who are at the top of their game, but it continues in the produce department. “Quality of the product is most important, which includes freshness, appearance, aroma and flavor,” Liu of Crispy Green says.

The appearance of the display is worth regular attention. “Have fresh attractive displays, and rotate and cull out damaged fruit daily,” NYAA’s Allen advises.

Refrigeration is a key to keeping apples fresh, and looking fresh, and grower/shippers agree on this point. “Apples on refrigeration will have longer shelf-life than non-refrigerated fruit,” Sage’s Sinks says.

The quality of the apples affects the quality of the entire eating experience. “Retailers need to provide excellent tasting apples that are appealingly displayed and properly refrigerated to preserve fruit quality and integrity for an exceptional eating experience,” USAA’s Rentzel says.

12. Emphasize The Bulk, Not The Bag

Most apples, by far, are purchased by the pound rather than by the bag. This basic truth should be remembered in deciding how much space to devote to bulk and bagged apples, and how much energy to spend promoting each. “Seventy five percent of the apples sold in the United States are bulk, and 25 percent are in bags,” reports Pepperl of Stemilt. “Bags should not be a major feature of promotions because you’re only selling to a quarter of the population. Run bags as a liner or sub feature.”

13. Set the Right Price

There is a right price for maximizing returns on apples. And it is not the lowest possible price. “Quality is the No. 1 attribute when consumers are deciding whether to buy apples, but pricing is a close second,” asserts Domex’s Queen. “Pricing is most important when consumers are deciding whether to buy a new product or variety. Research has shown that \$1.14 to \$1.29 sold nearly as many apples as 99-cents. Don’t leave money on the table.”

14. Merchandise The Super-food

Decades before anyone even used the term super-food, apples were established as the fruit



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that keeps the doctor away. “Apples are the original super-food because they are so good for you,” Pepperl says.

In a contemporary context, apples can be merchandised as a food you want in your kids’ lunch box. “Create promotions that target childhood obesity,” suggests Braithwaite of Chelan Fresh. “Apples are among the healthiest food items. I’ve really been pushing the retailers to focus on childhood obesity. We’re doing a test market on this promotion this year.”

Crunch Pak LLC, of Cashmere, WA, is launching an addition to its Disney-inspired FOODLES line with a Disney Princess edition featuring a carriage-shaped tray. The portable snack that is fit for a princess will feature packaging in the shape of a carriage and an assortment of nutritious snack food options including apples, grapes, cheese and pretzels that meet the USDA’s dietary guidelines for children and Disney’s commitment to nutritional standards for better-for-you products. “We are excited to bring the much-loved Disney Princess characters to our FOODLES line,” says Tony Freytag, managing member and vice president sales and marketing for Crunch Pak.

15. Strut That Stuff

Apples are a headliner in produce and it pays to keep them front and center, especially during the peak season. “Get the product out there. We always look for the best possible position for Pink Ladies,” says Alan Taylor, marketing director Pink Lady America LLC, in Yakima, WA. “We think of our variety as an exciting product. Our apple is the only one that is pink. Anything that shows that pink color off, like lighting, will encourage sales.”

“The more complex varieties with a stronger blend of sweet and tart are becoming more popular. A fair number of varieties are coming out that are based on Honeycrisp parentage. Before, there was five or six varieties out of Washington, but now there are so many varieties retailers have to figure out how many SKUs to carry.”

— Don Roper, Honey Bear Tree Fruit Co. LLC

Location is an important part of the display, but the apple varieties must also be clearly differentiated with color breaks and good signage. “An apple display needs to be well organized and varieties clearly marked,” asserts Sage’s Sinks. “Many times, from a distance, a Gala apple may look like a Fuji or Braeburn, so having good color breaks in the displays can eliminate confusion and create an attractive display.”

Prominent apple displays are particularly important during the apple harvest season in the late summer and fall. “Location is especially important during the peak new crop season from September to December,” contends Weinstein of Albert’s Organics. “Apples and pears should be the lead item in your produce section. It should be the very first item shoppers see as they enter your department, and the displays should be very large and abundant with a large “New Crop” banner hanging over the display,” Weinstein says.

The apple category figures to become even more exciting in the years to come as plant breeders are working on varieties that will taste

and crunch better. “Ambrosia has been a complete home-run with the consumers. We started with 300 acres and we’ve gone to 700 acres,” reports CMI’s Mast. “It has a very pleasant aroma, looks different and has a good flavor profile. It is sweeter than a Gala. Meanwhile, Kiku is about 10 percent higher Brix than Fuji. It’s practically the sweetest apple you can buy.”

The abundance of new varieties reflects greater interest in developing better tasting apples. “There are so many new varieties. The more complex varieties with a stronger blend of sweet and tart are becoming more popular,” contends Don Roper, vice president for sales and marketing at Honey Bear. “A fair number of varieties are coming out that are based on

Honeycrisp parentage. Before, there was five or six varieties out of Washington, but now there are so many varieties retailers have to figure out how many SKUs to carry.”

Honeycrisp is just the first of the new wave to challenge traditional favorite varieties for consumer preference. “A movement the last few decades was toward varieties with appearance and handle ability to the detriment of culinary qualities,” Honey Bear’s Wescott acknowledges. “The appearance of the apple is becoming less important as the culinary attributes become more important. Honeycrisp is not an apple that has particular visual attractiveness, and it is not easy to handle. But it is a good culinary apple, and you can single out texture.”

Honeycrisp was a breakthrough, but you can look forward to second and third generation varieties that will go beyond Honeycrisp in flavor. “We are looking for new varieties that have the good texture of a Honeycrisp, but are sweeter, tarter or have a better combination,” adds Wescott. “We definitely have some varieties we are in the process of commercializing.” **pb**

Singing The Praises Of Sweet Potatoes

No longer a Thanksgiving staple, sweet potatoes are emerging front-and-center in the produce department.



Sweet potato options run the gamut from bulk, bagged, fresh-cut, individually microwaveable and steamers.

For a long time, sweet potatoes were relegated to the holiday dinner table, topped with marshmallows and sugary glazes that hid their nutritional value. But now, thanks to value-added products, smart marketing and consumer education, the sweet potato is finally getting its time to shine. Consumers are realizing the health and nutritional value of sweet potatoes and learning myriad ways to prepare them, incorporating them into their daily meals.

PRODUCE BUSINESS spoke to some of the top grower/shipper/packers in the industry, including George Wooten, president, Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co., Chadbourne, NC; Elena Hernandez, marketing and communications specialist, Mann Packing Co. Inc., Salinas, CA; Mike Kemp, chief operating officer, Market Fresh Produce LLC, Springfield, MO; for insider tips and tricks on merchandising sweet potatoes and where the category is headed next.

PRODUCE BUSINESS: What new ways are sweet potatoes being sold in supermarkets (value-added, cross merchandised, etc.) that you see potential for increased sales?

George Wooten: Consumers are finally getting out of the mindset that sweet potatoes are just a holiday food, and they are looking at it as a regular option to include in healthy, home-cooked meals. I think a lot of this is thanks in part to the smart marketing at the retail level that is moving away from a simple bulk display. There continues to be an increase in demand for fresh-cut potato products, such as cubed 12-oz bags, or plastic containers in 12- and 16-oz sizes, even up to a 2-lb. size, perfect for making fall and winter stews, soups and casseroles.

We recently created a stand-alone floor shipper display unit to carry our Green Giant Fresh steamable products. They are 1.5-lb bags and are packed 12 to a case. The shipper really gets the consumers' attention and shows them there are more options than just bulk potatoes.

Point-of sale recipes also work well, and can suggest new ways to partner ingredients with sweet potatoes, as opposed to the typical brown sugar and marshmallows. Sweet onions are a great match, as are Asian items that will suggest stir-fry options to



PHOTO COURTESY OF WAYNE E. BAILEY PRODUCE

“Having a complete program, including bulk, bagged, steamables, microwaveable and fresh-cut product in impressive, well-kept and pristine displays, will work wonders for your store.”

— George Wooten, Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.

consumers, where the sweet potato can act as a rice substitute.

Elena Hernandez: Fresh-cut sweet potatoes are an emerging trend among

consumers, experiencing a growth of 13.8 percent over last year. Consumers are increasingly interested in fresh-cut sweet potatoes over frozen, since frozen products contain

multiple ingredients, and are higher in fat. Today’s consumers are looking for simple and convenient fresh foods, and fresh-cut sweet potatoes fit the bill.

Mike Kemp: It was not too awfully long ago that sweet potatoes were only promoted during three holiday time periods: Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Now, not only do nearly all retailers carry sweet potatoes year-round, but they are also showing up in promotional planners on a much more frequent basis.

To keep up with the increased consumer demand, Market Fresh Produce has developed and is marketing several new items. In addition to the product the company offers in either a high-graphic box or traditional carton, we also carry bagged product, clamshell mini sweets, and individual microwaveable sweet potatoes. We also have high graphic bins for the retailers that are looking for a drag-and-drop instant display. We have been finding luck with using our two-tiered merchandiser to cross-merchandise sweet potatoes near hams, next to displays of marshmallows and other areas of the store.

PRODUCE BUSINESS: What is the optimal display size and location for maximum sweet potato sales?

George Wooten: I have never been a huge fan of the “stack ‘em high and watch ‘em fly” theory, but larger quantities definitely get people excited and thinking sweet potatoes are plentiful and in season. When consumers see displays like this, they can’t help but think it must be the right time to buy.

I also think using 24-inch end caps is a great idea, with some graphic signage above it. Anything that calls attention to the product is going to be beneficial.

Elena Hernandez: Our products are typically displayed on-shelf, with all the other value-added vegetable products.

Mike Kemp: That really depends on the store format, size and volume. But the average store should devote at least a 2- to 3- linear-ft. display for normal business.

PRODUCE BUSINESS: What is the one most important thing retail produce executives should know about marketing sweet potatoes?

George Wooten: Shippers are constantly trying to provide our customers what they want, so help us out and keep the displays looking fresh and up-to-date. Work the displays; pay attention to them, and be sure they include a good variety of SKUs. Having



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“After trying fresh-cut sweet potatoes for the first time, 91 percent of consumers report they would purchase the product again, so driving trial and awareness is the key!”

— Elena Hernandez, Mann Packing Co. Inc.

a complete program, including bulk, bagged, steamables, microwavable and fresh-cut product in impressive, well-kept and pristine displays, will work wonders for your store.

Elena Hernandez: Consumers love sweet potatoes and are eating them in restaurants, but are not aware of fresh-cut sweet potatoes, or where to find them in-store. After trying fresh-cut sweet potatoes for the first time, 91 percent of consumers report they would purchase the product again, so driving trial and awareness is the key!

Mike Kemp: Sweet potatoes are one of the hottest SKUs in the produce department right now. Great displays that are kept fresh will drive incremental sales and margin dollars. I tell the retail produce people to just look at what new sweet potato items are coming out in the center store. That should be enough to convince you that the consumers are focused on the nutritional value of sweet potatoes.

pb



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Merchandising Kiwi For Maximum Impact

Global sourcing helps build kiwifruit category to a department staple. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**



Kiwifruit is a staple to many retailers and consumers today. Retailers, suppliers and growers have been working together globally to provide year-round availability of the popular fruit. Growers have developed improved growing techniques and new varieties. Distributors and marketers have expanded their global sourcing and retail support. Retailers have increased their kiwi offerings and merchandising efforts. A smooth transition of kiwifruit growing and marketing from different areas of the world throughout the year has benefited customers across the United States and Canada.

“Giumarra is a 12-month supplier of fruit from California, Italy, Chile and New Zealand,” says Jason Bushong, a sales associate with Giumarra of Wenatchee, a Wenatchee, WA-based division of Giumarra Companies. “We handle both the green and gold varieties. The gold variety comes from New Zealand and Italy.”

The difference in the flavor profile of the two varieties is that the green kiwifruit is tart-sweet, while the gold is more tropical-sweet with a high sugar content. The green kiwi is “furry” skinned and the gold is smooth.

The Oppenheimer Group also markets kiwifruit all year long. In addition to California, the company brings kiwifruit from New

Zealand, Chile and Italy to the market. It offers both green and gold varieties. “In fact, one in every four kiwifruit consumed in North America comes from our growers,” reports Steve Woodyear-Smith, director of kiwifruit and mango categories for The Oppenheimer Group, based in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada. “In our effort to offer the right product in the right place at the right time, we also market Summer kiwi, an early-harvest green kiwi grown in Chile. It is quite sweet and has a uniquely tender core. It’s available for a very short window in the springtime. Retailers welcome this because it bridges the end of the Northern Hemisphere season with the traditional start of the Southern Hemisphere availability with ready-to-eat fruit,” he adds.

The Oppenheimer Group has seen demand for the gold variety increase by more than a third between 2010 and 2011. The tropical-sweet flavor appeals to a different palate than the tangier green kiwi, which helps build the entire kiwifruit category.

This year’s Chilean kiwifruit season has wound down, but Chile is planting new varieties, much of them golden. They are thinking of the Far East markets and that they also will have a better portfolio of varieties, according to Tom Tjerandsen, North American managing director for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association

(CFFA), based in Sonoma, CA.

The California kiwi season starts the end of October and finishes up by May or June, depending on the size of the crop. Currently, all the kiwifruit produced and marketed is the Hayward green variety. “Due to the mild summer climate, this season’s crop has been estimated to be 7.5 to 8 million tray equivalents with good sizing and quality potential,” reports Nick Matteis, assistant manager for the Sacramento-based California Kiwifruit Commission.

“We’ve been marketing kiwifruit from New Zealand, and with stable prices, the sales have picked up,” notes Nick Pacia, vice president of A.J. Trucco Inc., in the Bronx, NY. “Our customers have been very happy. We will continue with New Zealand kiwi until the end of October and then begin handling California fruit. The Italian fruit will also be arriving about the end of October. The crop is estimated to be larger with larger sized fruit. The Italian season usually runs until April.”

Successful Kiwi Promotions Vary

“I used to go with a smaller sized kiwi, but lately I’ve gone to the larger sizes,” says Lee Reynolds, produce director for Haggen Inc., a 13-store chain based in Bellingham, WA. “I find our customers like it and think the fruit is better quality. We have a very loyal following for kiwi,

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“Our company only handles kiwi from California. The fruit is packed in 1-, 2-, 3- and 4-lb. clamshells and is in the market from early November to May,” says R.J. Deakins, business development and domestic sales manager for Sun Pacific Marketing Cooperative Inc., headquartered in Pasadena, CA. “We took a lesson from the avocado industry in the ripe and ready-to-eat program. We are now using a Ripe & Easy Kiwi program that includes a ‘spife,’ part plastic spoon and part knife, which the consumer can take home. There is an explanation on how to cut the kiwi in half and then scoop it out. People don’t want to bother to peel kiwi and this is a newer way to enjoy it. Ideally, skin pressure of the fruit would be eight pounds, then with two to three days in transit and storage it would arrive in the retail display at four to five pounds of pressure, so it is right for eating.”

“Last year, we used the California Ripe & Easy program as part of our kiwi sales promotions and it did well. We plan to use it again this year,” reports Lee Reynolds, produce director for Haggen Inc., a 28-store chain based in Bellingham, WA.

The New Zealand kiwifruit industry also has been promoting the idea of cutting the fruit in half with a knife and scooping the flesh out with a spoon provided to the consumer. “We’ve used the New Zealand knife/spoon promotion and had good success with it,” says Nick Pacia, vice president of A.J. Trucco Inc., in the Bronx, NY. **pb**

but we know they do buy by price point. As far as promotions, we run a few depending on quality and price. Usually it’s 10-for-\$5 or 10-for-\$4 and they are promoted in our weekly flyers.”

A.J. Trucco works closely with customers on the change of seasons, advising them when it is a good time to switch from one kiwi source to another. “We vary our promotions a little with the kiwifruit from different sources,” remarks Pacia. “With New Zealand, we have sampling and price point promotions. With the Italian kiwi we’ll probably do the same, plus we may use some coupons.”

Babbs Supervalu, a two-store market in Spencer, IN, carries both traditional and organic kiwifruit. Produce manager, Tony Moore, does not see much difference in the domestic and imports and doesn’t think his customers care much about the growing source. Consumers like the fact that kiwi is available any time of the year. “We display kiwi near the banana table, especially in the summer, and this really helps our sales,” he says. “The two fruits seem very compatible.”

California Emphasizes Growers As Season Begins

Promotions for California kiwifruit will include grower profiles featuring some California growers. The effort will be conducted through the Buy California Campaign as well as the website, KnowaCaliforniaFarmer.com. “The promotions are geared toward identifying local farmers and educating the consumer on how much our California growers contribute

to food security and local communities,” explains the Commission’s Matteis.

“Our California kiwifruit production is up 10 percent, and the Italian kiwi business has increased by 25 percent,” reports deciduous fruit manager Chris Kragie of Western Fresh Marketing, in Madera, CA. “To help retailers move the increased fruit volumes, we are increasing our merchandising efforts.”

Recommended Pricing Strategies Can Help Sales

The Oppenheimer business development team creates custom promotions to help build excitement for kiwifruit at retail. This includes demos, ads, contests and optimized merchandising and pricing strategies. “Recently, we have encouraged retailers to price kiwifruit ‘by the pound’ instead of ‘by the each’ with good results,” says Woodyear-Smith. “A pound of kiwifruit consists of three to five pieces, which, to a consumer, is a lot of fruit for the money.”

Retailers can make good margins at \$1.49 to \$1.99 per pound, a price similar to that of most summer fruit. They can move between sizes more easily,” he continues. “For those who prefer ‘by the each’ pricing, some retailers are trying more aggressive multiples, like 5-for-\$2. This moves more kiwi fruit per ring than the traditional 2-for-\$1.”

The California Kiwifruit Commission is currently wrapping up a research study to develop Best Practice Management for pricing kiwifruit per pound. The study includes

performance analysis of those chains that have already adopted per-pound pricing and results of a chain-wide panel test we conducted in partnership with a retail chain,” reports Matteis of the Commission.

Kiwi Health Message Attracts Customers

Giumarra works with retailers on in-store demos, sampling, POS materials and other sales promotion tools. The company has an in-house creative team to assist retailers with promotions appropriate for their goals and customer base. It also provides product information via its consumer and trade websites, and works with retailers on materials to assist consumers on selecting, storing and using kiwifruit. “Kiwifruit has a great health message to share, and we find that many consumers are receptive to it,” says the company’s Bushong.

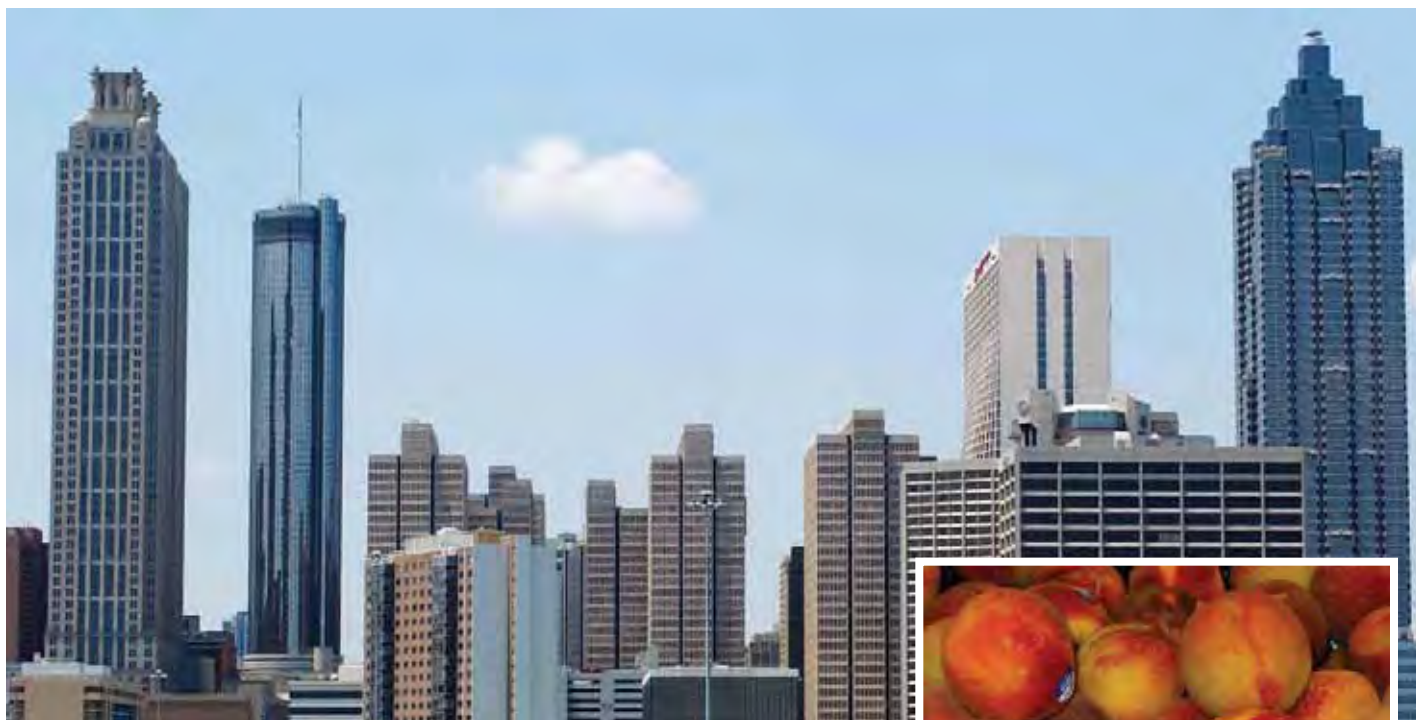
“We can supply custom header cards, tear pads, and other materials that help consumers select and enjoy kiwifruit and learn more about its noteworthy nutritional benefits,” says Oppenheimer’s Woodyear-Smith.

With interest in health foods increasing, promoting the nutrient values of the kiwifruit can help build retail sales. A study conducted by Dr. Paul Lachance of Rutgers University evaluated the nutritional value of fruits to determine ounce-for-ounce which provide the most nutrition. The study found out of the 27 most commonly consumed fruits; kiwi is the most nutrient-dense.

“Zespri Kiwifruit has conducting a very exciting promotion that entails in-store and social media components working together to combat childhood obesity,” says Oppenheimer’s Woodyear-Smith. The childhood obesity epidemic affects nearly 9 million children and is responsible for about 300,000 deaths each year in the United States, according to Get America Fit Foundation, in Rancho Santa Margarita, CA. Because of a deep commitment to children’s health and their future, Zespri Kiwifruit has teamed up with six of the leading children’s charities in every region of the United States for the Kiwifruit for Kids campaign.

A uniquely designed Facebook application allows users to earn points for the region they choose to play for. Points are earned by choosing kiwifruit characters, playing games, tweeting about the campaign, having friends from the user’s social network join gameplay and more. The region with the most points by October 21, 2011 wins \$10,000 for their corresponding charity. The second place region receives \$5,000. All the non-profits each receive \$1,500 just for playing. The campaign began August 31, 2011 and ends at midnight October 21. **pb**

Atlanta: The Produce Epicenter Of The South



Atlanta's historic position as the "capital of the South," along with its tradition of culinary excellence, creates a world-class produce city. **BY JON VANZILE**

There's a good reason Atlanta is the epicenter of the produce market for the Southeastern United States: because that's what it set out to be.

Atlanta is neither a port city nor even all that central to the major agricultural regions in the South (which tend to be further south, in Florida), but the city has nonetheless carved out a spot at the very heart of the region's produce industry. This is partly due to the city's central location — most of the Southeastern United States is within a day's truck drive along I-75 — and partly due to the city's dedicated effort to lead the industry. But it's also due to the unique character of Atlanta itself, a truly global city that goes big.

Nowhere is this effort more visible than at the Atlanta State Farmer's Market. With 150 acres of land, it is by far the largest produce hub in the South and one of the largest anywhere in the Eastern United States. The market — a unique combination of public farmer's market and wholesale distribution center — serves as a central staging area for dozens of wholesalers selling products from all over the world, as well as right from Atlanta's backyard.

"There is such a large variety of produce available in this area," says Andrew Scott, sales and procurement manager with General Produce Inc., based at the Atlanta State Farmer's Market, in Forest Park. "You've got a lot of ethnicities, a melting pot. You can find any unique item in this market and get it in and out of Atlanta easily."

Atlanta's Resurgence

Tom Murphy and his family have run a classic Atlanta restaurant for the past three decades. Located in the chic Virginia Highland neighborhood, Murphy's is a combination fine-dining restaurant, bakery and wine shop. It's menu is warm and comfortable, a combination of classic Georgia dishes made from local delicacies like north Georgia trout, Georgia sweet shrimp and contemporary American-style bistro fare. His dishes are at once deeply familiar yet interesting, like Guinness-brined beef brisket or local summer veggies with toasted barley pilaf and yuzu orange chili glaze.

When Murphy is asked what makes Atlanta a unique city, like many Southerners, he starts at the beginning, reaching more than a century back to the antebellum era that still comes alive in certain parts of the city. "The Civil War set Atlanta, and the entire state of Georgia, apart in its culinary viewpoint," Murphy explains. "We were an agrarian economy before the war and the fourth or fifth biggest city in the south, but not the biggest. Back then, the city was built around the food scene, and so much of that was food from the African American culture. After the war, Atlanta's founding fathers went to the Northeast and convinced them to invest in Atlanta. We jumped up to No. 1 after that."

With an influx of northern money and a city devastated by invading armies, Atlanta quickly set about the task of rebuilding. It quickly rose as the new capital of the south, with a new generation of affluence

remaking the city's culinary and cultural landscape. It helped that Atlanta is centrally located in the region, with access to the Atlantic shores, the fields of Georgia and north Florida, and the rich delta of the Mississippi.

Yet even as Atlanta consolidated its position as the heart of the South, the city didn't break through the top tier of America's global cities for many decades. That didn't really change until 1996, when Atlanta hosted the Olympics Games and put itself on the world map. In preparation for the games, Atlanta embarked on an aggressive program of city revitalization, razing old and decrepit neighborhoods and using the games as an opportunity to make massive investments in the city's infrastructure and physical plant. The effort paid off. After the games, a new energy and new investment flooded into the city. Along with it, came new chefs who drew on Atlanta's culinary and cultural history to revamp the city's food scene.

"There's a lot going on in the city," acknowledges Brian Young, vice president of Coosemans Atlanta Inc., in Forest Park. "The weather is a big draw and the cost of living is lower. It's one of the most affordable big cities in the country."

Murphy agrees, adding, "It's a cosmopolitan and dynamic scene in Atlanta. We're surrounded by a huge agricultural base, similar to Napa Valley. We have a very sophisticated palate."

In fact, Atlanta's access to seasonal produce has been key in defining both its culinary scene and position atop the produce industry. The city has had to earn its chops. It's never had the unique culinary heritage of New Orleans, or even Miami's access to major shipping lanes. Instead, Atlanta relies on its famous crops and local food access to reinforce its reputation, as well as the ethnic food from the many cultures that live side by side in Atlanta. The result is a cosmopolitan city with a blend of classic Southern, modern American and ethnic cuisine. And of course, it all begins at the Atlanta State Farmer's Market.

The Farmer's Market

The existence of the Atlanta State Farmer's Market is no accident or quirk of fate. In fact, the market, which encompasses 150 acres of open-air stalls and huge warehouses, is strongly supported by the city and state governments, according to Gary Black, the Georgia state commissioner of agriculture. "The state demonstrated a real commitment to farmers markets in the

"The market's not private or a co-op, like some other large farmer's markets. So when you come into the main entrance, you have the big guys and wholesalers to the east, and if you look to the west, you have the sheds. That's a farmer's market that was intended for mom-and-pop farmers."

— Brian Young, Coosemans Atlanta Inc.

1940s, '50s and '60s," he says, noting that the market is one of the few state-owned farmer's markets in the country.

"The market's not private or a co-op, like some other large farmer's markets," Young reports. "So when you come into the main entrance, you have the big guys and wholesalers to the east, and if you look to the west, you have the sheds. That's a farmer's market that was intended for mom-and-pop farmers."

The market is perfectly located as a produce hub for the whole region. It's only 15 minutes from downtown Atlanta and literally on I-75's doorstep, which makes it easy to bring produce into Atlanta from fields throughout Georgia and central Florida, as well as around the world, and then ship it virtually anywhere along the Eastern Seaboard.

According to Nickey Gregory, president and CEO of Nickey Gregory Co LLC., in Forest Park, both Miami and Pennsylvania are located within a 12-hour drive.

"We're set up to service a 200-mile radius," agrees Charlie Grizzaffe, president of the Produce Exchange of Atlanta Inc., based in Forest Park. "It's a growing city."

The retail aspect of the Atlanta State Farmer's Market is an important part of its identity. Major produce hubs elsewhere, such as Hunts Point in New York City, are purely wholesale, but the area of the Atlanta market known as "the sheds" is a true retail farmer's market. The regulations governing this area are even different, allowing smaller producers to operate without the complex regulatory burdens that wholesalers must meet.

Development at the market, including in the sheds area, is ongoing. As the produce business moved from rail to truck, the market has adapted, and the last of the rail tracks have been removed over the past few years. Today, there is little or no rail service at the farmer's market. "The Atlanta market has been able to transcend challenges because it's close to the airport and it's right on I-75," Black states. "It's uniquely positioned for

both the local and regional market."

In the future, Black hopes to continue developing the retail side of the market, attracting more of the general public, which will also benefit wholesalers by increasing traffic at the market and raising awareness of the facility.

Local Food Goes Big

Despite the stream of produce flowing into Atlanta night and day from all over the world, wholesalers and local officials are embarking on a program to increase consumption of locally grown Georgia produce, ranging from peaches to Vidalia onions (see side note) to all sorts of seasonal crops including yellow squash, zucchini, cabbage, peppers, and sweet corn.

"Local product that is prepared and seasoned right is what people want," Murphy asserts.

Hoping to encourage more sales of local produce, the Georgia Department of Agriculture is pushing the Georgia Grown label and working to highlight some of the more unusual crops that Georgia growers are offering, such as blueberries and even olives. "We've got 150 to 200 acres of olives planted, and we really think that's got some promise," Black reports. "The first commercial harvest is going on now and it's going well."

Black is quick to support the local food movement in Atlanta, but also points out that each region will interpret it in ways that make sense. "I believe the locavore movement is here to stay, and I think that's wonderful," he says. "I think there will be a variety of choices under that umbrella. Some will be organic. Some will be conventional."

Black also says his department is working to make sure the state and federal governments understand that the food supply is also a national security issue, because tainting the food supply could have dire consequences. He believes this awareness also helps bolster the locavore movement because people are becoming

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more aware of where their food comes from.

Even with the unmistakable enthusiasm from state officials, however, many wholesalers say the locavore movement in Atlanta is still in its growing phase when compared to regions like the Pacific Northwest or parts of the Northeast, where the local food movement is strongly established and locally grown produce is sold through an extensive network of farmer's markets. "I think local food is still big," Coosemans' Young says. "There's always a little bit of a traditional Southern flavor in the restaurants and country clubs. When you consider how many collard greens are sold, it's just a huge amount."

The primary local foods are instantly recognizable as Georgia classics — Vidalia onions, peaches, and pecans — but there are others coming on strong.

"We're seeing a lot more blueberries," reports Scott of General Produce. "And we're starting to see items like broccoli and strawberries. Georgia-grown is a big deal from mid-September through May, and we have a little bit of winter season."

Scott adds the state is starting to see more California-type row crop vegetables,

which should increase the variety and quantity of locally grown produce. "Although we buy and sell fruit from around the world — and this is probably 85 percent of our volume — our customers and schools are still interested in locally grown products more than ever," contends Michael J. Jardina, president and CEO of J.J. Jardina Co. Inc., in Forest Park. "We handle apple sales for Mercier Orchards in Blue Ridge, GA, and they do an outstanding job."

As the locavore movement grows, the organic local food movement continues to organize, although its growth curve is slower still. "We're still behind the times when it comes to organics," Scott admits.

Jardina echoes this sentiment. "Organics seem to be very important to those customers who have already made the decision to shop the category, but we still have not had enough customers requesting it, therefore we have not got into the organic market yet," he explains. "We will simply let our current customers tell us when we need to get into organics."

Gregory of Nickey Gregory agrees, wondering if the economy had something to do with the slow pace of organic adop-

GEORGIA'S SWEET SPOT

Ask virtually any chef what the best yellow onion is and he or she is likely to say, "Vidalia." These world-famous sweet onions are virtually synonymous with Georgia produce. As Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black remarks, "We're very proud of them. They are the state vegetable."

As it turns out, Vidalia onions started as a fluke. During the Great Depression, local farmers in southern Georgia were looking for a crop that would thrive in Georgia's sandy soil, so they tried onions. They expected the strong, slightly hot onions they were familiar with, but ended up with a sweet, mild onion that consumers immediately loved.


In those early days, local consumers snapped up Vidalias, but getting larger distribution was an issue. Fortunately for the farmers around Vidalia, a large grocery chain — Piggly Wiggly — had its headquarters in Vidalia. With local demand running high for the sweet yellow onions, Piggly Wiggly began stocking and shipping Vidalia onions first through Georgia and then the entire South. Today, Vidalia onions are available throughout the United States and Canada. They are traditionally harvested from April through mid-June.

The Vidalia name is closely monitored by the federal government, as well as the Georgia state government, which has designated an area encompassing 14 counties as the only legal producers of Vidalia onions.

But what makes them so sweet? After all, the famous Vidalia onion is a yellow Granex hybrid, a type of onion that can be easily obtained almost anywhere in the world. The secret, according to growers, is in the soil. The sandy soil and heavy rainfall leaches the soil of sulfur, and it's the sulfurous compounds that give onions their strong taste and odor. The result is a surprisingly sweet onion. **pb**

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tion in Atlanta and Georgia. "It was up and growing, but it's on a smaller scale," he notes. "The economy had a lot to do with that."

A Taste of the World

To many people, Georgia and Atlanta conjures up images of mint juleps, grits, okra and collard greens. There's no question

that these foods are all important parts of Georgia's heritage, but the modern Atlanta food scene is too global in nature to be neatly pigeonholed as a regional cuisine.

Today, metropolitan Atlanta is a thriving region of 5.2 million residents, with almost half-a-million living within the city limits. And like any large metropolitan area, this population includes ethnic enclaves that help to define the modern city.

"One contributing factor to Atlanta's uniqueness is its diversity," says Marty Turner, president of Sysco Atlanta LLC. "Diversity in our market translates into some of the most innovative restaurants in the country, where chefs are willing to successfully experiment with traditional elements and new ideas without compromising quality and execution."

Among the most important of these ethnic identities are large populations of Mexican immigrants and first- or second-generation Asian immigrants. These ethnic groups naturally influence the availability of their preferred foods. For J.J. Jardina, for example, mangos and limes are popular, both crops that are used extensively in

"One contributing factor to Atlanta's uniqueness is its diversity. Diversity in our market translates into some of the most innovative restaurants in the country, where chefs are willing to successfully experiment with traditional elements and new ideas without compromising quality and execution."

— Marty Turner, Sysco Atlanta LLC.

Asian and Mexican cooking.

"We serve American contemporary comfort food," Murphy says of his restaurant. "But can you really define American, contemporary and comfort food? Quesadillas are now considered American comfort food."

If there's one flavor profile that seems to be rising in the south — with the attendant increasing sales in produce to support it — Murphy says it's Vietnamese and Asian cuisines. Not only have large numbers of Asians migrated to the South, they have found a native range of produce and

proteins that would be familiar to anyone who has eaten Asian food. "I think the rise of Asian food is the biggest new trend," Murphy notes. "And I think we're going to see a lot more of the Asian influence."

And according to Murphy, this is a good thing. "In the Asian diet, protein is secondary to produce," he notes. "That fits our aging profile and obesity problem. We're heading away from protein and toward produce. The chefs that succeed in the new economy are the ones who will learn to bring produce to the forefront." **pb**

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Pecans: More Than A Holiday Ingredient

As consumers learn more about the nutritious values of pecans, it's prime time for retailers to take advantage of pecan merchandising. **BY TARA LYNNE GROTH**



Packages that allow consumers to see the product clearly add perceived value to their purchase.

Pecans are a staple ingredient in holiday desserts, but their festive reputation is crossing over into the mainstream. Known for typical delights like pies and turtle cookies, pecans are now becoming a healthy part of other meals in dishes like pecan-encrusted trout and as nutritious toppings for salads. Since the ancient nuts have a new life, consumers are choosing to stock up on pecans in their own lives. How are grocers taking advantage of this trend in year-round pecan popularity? As pecans continue to saturate the market into everyday meals and leave their holiday associations behind, retailers can focus on convenience, cut and health benefits.

Show More Of The Pecans

Positioning pecans in the produce section is not too difficult, and the placement pays off. Brian Gadwah, produce category manager for Delhaize America, a Salisbury, NC-based organization that provides category management for 1,600 grocery stores along the East Coast, sees a better profitability for pecans in

the produce section. "Everyone wants fresh, healthy food," says Gadwah. "And they want to see what they buy."

Gadwah, who has been working in the produce industry for almost 10 years, believes it has something to do with the packaging. When pecans are in the produce section, the packages allow consumers to see more of the product, which adds more perceived value to their purchase, and consumers can see that the pecans were packed fresh. A simple cellophane tray or clear plastic tub works better than the concealed packages typically found in the grocery aisle. There haven't been any issues with shrinkage when using this type of packaging either.

Some of the plastic tub containers also appeal to eco-conscious consumers, who make decisions based more on sustainability and choose fresh products with limited packaging, or packaging such as the clear plastic containers that they can re-use or recycle. These materials are also lightweight and cheap to ship for suppliers and retailers.

Even though clear packaging seems to be

more attractive from a profit standpoint, Robert Knight, pecan grower and owner of Knight Creek Farm in Sapulpa, OK, warns packagers about light. "Pecan oil becomes rancid after a while," Knight says. "And that is caused by light." However, if clear packages are increasing sales and moving products faster, grocers shouldn't have to be too concerned about rancid nuts.

Know Where It Grows

How do pecans get more attention in the produce section? Traceability is a steadfast trend in every industry. Consumers like to know where their food comes from. According to the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, Arizona is one of the top producers of pecans. This is where senior produce buyer, Jack Armstrong of Bashas', a Chandler, AZ-based chain of grocery stores in the Southwest, works. Even though at certain times of the year Bashas' sources its pecans from Texas, Georgia or other areas of the country, Bashas' uses "local" labels for the majority of its pecan inventory to show consumers the products are

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DRIED FRUITS AND NUTS

from the Arizona area. Consumers associate a higher value in locally sourced products. When a product purchase supports a local farmer, consumers feel connected to it on a community level.

“People are willing to pay for a quality product,” says Armstrong. With a foothold in the produce industry since 1970, Armstrong has watched pecan prices go up over the past four years, but local pecans are a commodity that people want.

The annual increase in pecan prices consistently surprises retailers when it comes to sales. Delhaize’s Gadwah agrees, “Pecan prices went up more so than any other nut.”

Pecans In Produce Equals Profit

Temperatures need to be constant for pecans to thrive. A cool temperature is ideal for the nut, but grocers find pecans are resilient and have a long shelf-life. Store location and weather can be factors though, and certain

climates require custom display strategies. Sherry Ibarra, office and store manager of San Saba Pecans, an international supplier of shelled pecans in Las Cruces, NM, has been trying to educate grocers for years about the benefits of a refrigerated area. “In our gift shop, all of the pecans are in cold storage, even in-shell nuts,” Ibarra says. She explains that the longer pecans are kept in their shell, the faster they dry out since the shell absorbs the oil.

In Mt. Olive, NC, another pecan supplier, Carolina Nut Cracker, also promotes cooling systems. “Poly plastic bags sealed in the refrigerator will keep the nuts good for a long period of time,” says co-owner Jody Britt. He stresses the importance of clear packaging, as well. “Grocery stores are our main market and pecans sell themselves,” Britt says.

Allowing customers to see the product may be difficult if the nuts are kept in a closed refrigerated case. Armstrong explains that due to temperature changes, different display setups are used depending on the store location and the season. Some stores have a refrigerator table, waterfall or spillover. Most of the time, the display is on a dry table, or built with the boxes the pecans were shipped in, he notes.

According to Gadwah, Delhaize America’s stores up and down the Eastern Seaboard, such as Food Lion and Harvey’s, have different displays depending on their region as well. “In the Northeast, pecans are a relatively dormant category,” he reports. To tap into this inconsistent market, around the holidays, Delhaize America merchandises in-shell pecans with other nuts in large 4- or 12-ft. bins throughout their grocery chains. “It is a big celebrated category,” Gadwah says. The stores typically keep the displays prominent from mid-October until year’s end.

Regardless of the steady increase in price, retailers find just having pecans in the produce section is the key for profitability. Bashas’ Armstrong says, “Over the past couple of years we’ve oversold. I was shocked. I didn’t think customers would pay that kind of money, but the need is there.” He doesn’t see sales slowing down any time soon.

People Choose Pecans

The same strong demand exists for growers as retailers. Stone Pecan Groves, a pecan grower in Thomasville, GA, has a long history with the nut. Tom Stone, owner and third generation pecan grower, is experiencing a soaring demand right now that is nearly exceeding production.

In the past, nuts had a stigma of being fattening. Stone explains research released in

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“No one has time anymore to shell their own pecans. We ship very few in-shell pecans now. Chopped or halved pecans in 12-oz. bags are the most convenient.”

— Tom Stone, Stone Pecan Groves

recent years shows the type of fat in nuts is a nutritious kind, associated with curbing appetite and assisting weight loss. They're also great sources of calcium. “Out of any type of nut, pecans have the most antioxidants and they're known to lower cholesterol,” reports Stone.

“Pecans have become the nut of choice,” recognizes Armstrong. He's seen sales increase, even when the price of pecans is relatively expensive.

“With pecan exports gaining popularity, and the shortage of water supply in some areas around the country, and some wildfires, too, crops didn't yield as much as they could have, and it is driving the prices up more,” explains Knight of Knight Creek Farm. “Marketing is not a problem, but growing is a challenge.”

With demand for pecans running up the sales charts and technological shifts taking place in American society over the past few decades, growers have changed their packaging and shipping methods. “No one has time anymore to shell their own pecans,” says Stone. “We ship very few in-shell pecans now. Chopped or halved pecans in 12-oz. bags are the most convenient.”

Armstrong agrees, “The No. 1 most popular cut is the halves.” Consumers are looking for convenience and time-saving options. When it comes time to prepare a dinner salad, it's easier to toss in a couple of halved pecans than to shell and chop them. The same convenience applies for baking, especially around the holidays.

Everything You Need In A Nut

Stone has witnessed the pecan reputation change considerably. Pecans are becoming popular in a variety of dishes, and not just desserts. He recently saw pizza offered with

pecans as one of the toppings. Because of a health-conscious society, consumers will opt for any simple way to increase the nutritional value of their meals.

“The nice thing about pecans is that they're so versatile,” says Jon Krueger, communications specialist for the National Pecan Shellers Organization (NPSO), based in Atlanta, GA. The NPSO created consumer brochures around this very theme, which are distributed to member companies to help market the nut.

Krueger says pecans can be positioned as a snack on their own.

Retailers selling pecans in the produce section are enjoying the nuts' crossover into year-round meals and snacks, especially as pecans become an increasingly familiar product to consumers. According to Delhaize's Gadwah, “Consumers know more about pecans now. Consumers are sprinkling them on cereals and salads, and many manufacturers are putting them in candies.”

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Ibarra with San Saba Pecans says now that people know how good pecans are for them, they're putting the nuts on everything. "Cookies are a given, but people are adding pecans to their yogurt — and perfect for the produce section — on their salads, too."

"Pecans are showing up more in ice creams and they are now the nut of choice at fast food stores and chain restaurants," says Stone of Stone Pecan Groves. Reminding consumers about the healthfulness of pecans on packaging

reinforces their positive reputation.

One of the first people to mention amending packages to boast the heart-healthy benefits is Duke Lane, Jr., chairman of the Atlanta-based Georgia Pecan Commission. Lane shares that the American Heart Association may soon be adding its seal of approval to packages. "Pecans beat almonds, pistachios and just about any other nut when it comes to lowering cholesterol," Lane says. "Pecans are everything that people need for heart health —

"Pecans beat almonds, pistachios and just about any other nut when it comes to lowering cholesterol. Pecans are everything that people need for heart health — especially for baby boomers."

— Tom Stone, Stone Pecan Groves

especially for baby boomers." The Georgia Pecan Commission is creating a new advisory board, which includes highly reputable registered dieticians who are selecting pecan recipes that not only taste good, but also have reduced levels of sugar and fat.

Pecans don't lack in nutrition, either. The nuts have over 19 vitamins and minerals, are full of fiber and one serving provides more heart-healthy benefits than a serving of olive oil. Stone reports that research shows the high concentration of antioxidants helps increase levels of vitamin E while decreasing levels of "bad" cholesterol. Since focusing efforts on the health benefits of pecans, he's been pleased that the consumption level is almost exceeding production.

It's not just U.S. consumers who know the right choice when it comes to nuts. Production levels are also being influenced by export demand. The past few years showed a high demand from China as well. In an April, 2011, article in *The Wall Street Journal*, it was reported China was responsible for purchasing a quarter of U.S. pecan crops. However, since so many pecans are being exported, there are less available to U.S. consumers, causing an increase in prices.

For consumers in the produce section gathering products to make a salad, a prominent display of pecans and a promotion of their health benefits make a buying decision simple. Retailers need only remind consumers of the health benefits and use packaging that promotes prime pecan visibility. And, if the pecans are locally sourced, or better yet, chopped or halved in small convenient bags, the deal is in the bag.

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Blooming QR Codes

Keeping customers informed, and retailers tuned in, QR codes are the next generation of social media. **BY TARA LYNNE GROTH**



IMAGE COURTESY OF DOS GRINGOS

The possibilities of QR codes are endless, as they can connect consumers to virtually anything on the Web.

By now, you've certainly seen them around and wondered what they could do for your business. QR (Quick Response) codes are quickly becoming New Age bar codes. They are changing the face of traditional marketing literature, floral packaging and sell sheets, eliminating verbose copy and creating more visually compelling marketing collateral and print ads. Without extensive verbiage, consumers aren't as intimidated by flyers. Stunning and eye-catching imagery draws consumers in and the QR code teases their curiosity. Does it link to a coupon for a bouquet? What's special about this plant? Where were these flowers grown? With QR codes, consumers' shopping experience turns into a learning experience.

QR code readers are as simple as a Smartphone camera and even some computer webcams. Smartphone users scan the QR code by taking a photo and an application directs them to a URL, be it a custom Website, Facebook page, video on plant care, special pricing offer, new product or an entire product catalog. They work on any flat surface, including print ads, buses, business cards, trade show material, etc. The cost of

creating a QR code? Free. Most importantly, they are on the packages of many floral items.

Endless Retail Possibilities

Debbie Loche, floral buyer merchandiser for Roche Bros, a chain of 15 stores headquartered in Wellesley Hills, MA, saw QR codes at the International Floriculture Expo (IFE) as one of the new introductions to the marketplace. Loche has worked in mass market floral for 23 years and believes QR codes are a great asset to educate customers. From plant care to common allergies, the possibilities are endless. She says, "I would really like to see QR codes linked to handling of the product, design ideas and possibly farms where the product is grown."

Marketing manager with Lansing, MI-based The John Henry Co., Brenda Vaughn is amazed at how quickly the codes are affecting Web traffic. The company started using QR codes two years ago, just prior to the Smart phone demographic burst. "We send stats to retailers for every single QR code we use," Vaughn reports. With its consumer websites, Vaughn is able to track analytics and watch the success of the company's video-focused codes, recipe links and plant care pages. With 34 years of experi-

ence under her belt, Vaughn's witnessed the evolution of the floral market. "Sometimes the floral industry is the last to take advantage of these technologies, but now we're leading the way," she says proudly.

Michael Schrader, director of floral for the Midwest's chain of Schnuck Markets Inc., in St. Louis, MO, saw some of John Henry's trade partners using the codes and decided to use them, too. Schnuck's is using the codes on more than just the plant tags. "We're using them in our departments and in our advertising," Schrader reports. "We generate some of our promo materials in-house and others come from our supplier."

"Retailers want anything that's new," says marketing director Susan Murdock of World Class Flowers, headquartered in Egg Harbor City, NJ. "We've seen an increase in our web traffic since adding QR codes to our price tags and POP signs." Murdock explains the company's codes direct buyers to fresh-cut care, design tips based on the size of the bouquet and details about the flowers' origins. When a local New Jersey farm is used, World Class Flowers showcases the farm on its website.

Although Murdock witnessed a slow start,

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the codes have taken off. The key, she says, is keeping the content fresh. This way, those who scan the code aren't seeing the same videos and information. It gives consumers reasons to return. Another great feature about QR codes is that there is no new code creation or printing involved when a new website is needed. Simply redirect the link and the same code directs to new content.

Code creation is fast, simple and free. Free QR code generators are available online, and

it takes less than 30 seconds to generate a code image for marketing use. It's difficult to imagine why any retailer wouldn't be using QR codes.

Consumers Benefit, Too

Although they appear tech-based and less personal, QR codes have the ability to humanize plants and flowers. Linking the consumer to a video of growers and their families adds a personal touch to the point-

“Retailers want anything that’s new. We’ve seen an increase in our web traffic since adding QR codes to our price tags and POP signs.”

— Susan Murdock, World Class Flowers

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of-sale experience. Shoppers go home knowing who grew the flowers they're now enjoying. Plus, as consumers learn more about the plants via QR codes, they become more comfortable with their purchase and leave the store assured with their choice. What's more, should someone receive the plant as a gift, he or she now can scan the code to learn about the care needed.

Right now retailers are taking advantage of QR codes in almost every industry, providing a story behind every product. For consumers, traceability is another added value. *Entrepreneur* magazine cited reports just three years ago and forecasted that “consumers are willing to pay a small premium for traceability, but consumers are willing to pay more for traceability attached to other valuable attributes.” Walk through the local Whole Foods and it's clear consumers are often paying up to 50 percent more for organic or certified items.

Sustainable resources are an added value in consumers' buying decisions. As organic and certified flowers gain popularity, using a QR code to educate consumers about the flowers' history and traceability could close the deal. At the very least, the codes bring consumers to retailers' websites — a specific landing page or discount — making it easy to view Web traffic statistics. President and “Chief Gringo,” Jason Levin of Dos Gringos, a Vista, CA-based grower, has witnessed web traffic spike since implementing QR codes a year and a half ago, and that's without promoting the codes at the retail level. “We saw about a 10 percent pop and it will be interesting to see where it goes,” says Levin.

For Loche at Roche Bros., whose clients are upper-income consumers, she knows they are concerned about value. Since Smart phone users read the codes, retailers know they are reaching a tech-savvy clientele. Bringing the knowledge to floral marketing,



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“The sooner we engage customers the better we are at keeping them loyal to the retail brand. Downloading an app is an engagement to do business. It just takes one or two times and the user is hooked.”

— Art Conforti, Beneva Solutions

retailers incorporate QR codes into marketing collateral, advertisements and plant tags. The codes engage a specific niche of consumers who are more aware of their options when it comes to making buying decisions. Plus, the codes pull consumers into interacting, creating an opportunity for retailers to showcase their other products and services.

It's easy to see just how influential buyers' perceptions of value are when using this high-speed mode of information delivery. But it's the staying connected with consumers that retailers are thrilled about. “With QR codes we have more interaction with the end-consumer. Any additional attention we can get the better,” says Sharon Snoei, sales manager of Homestead Growers, an exclusive grower of potted calla lilies, based in Vineland, Ontario, Canada.

Help For Retailers

Now that QR codes are becoming a staple in the floral market, code-focused services are popping up. FloréTag, a French company, specializes in tech innovations for the botanical industry. Why use this company's service if creating QR codes is free? It can mean less work for retailers if they want access to FloréTag's already established extensive floral encyclopedia. FloréTag links users to the encyclopedia with details on plant care and history. Part of the company's services is a tracking feature, which can show where and how many times the



The John Henry Co. began using QR codes two years ago, and sends stats to its retail clients for every QR code they use.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JOHN HENRY CO.

feature that dials the store. Users simply pick out a floral arrangement on their phone and instead of searching for the recipient's address, their phone automatically loads details from their contacts. Then, the user picks a time for delivery or pick-up and their order is complete.

“The sooner we engage customers, the better we are at keeping them loyal to the retail brand,” says Beneva's president, Art Conforti. FloralApp's convenience is enticing and, since the app is easily accessible, the propensity is high for consumers to be repeat clients and make orders for special occasions in the future. “Downloading an app is an engagement to do business,” he adds. “It just takes one or two times and the user is hooked.”

code was accessed. Retailers use the information to predict demand in different areas, and then amend their inventory as needed.

Outside of inventory budgets, the codes allow retailers the luxury of smaller ad sizes in magazines, since the QR code uses less space than extensive ad copy. With most retailers leaning toward educating consumers, what about connecting in a more permanent way, with an app?

Beneva Solutions, a group of floral retail marketers in Sarasota, Florida, launched floralApp only a year ago. Compatible with Android and iPhones, floralApp gives users the convenience of sending flowers from their own phone's address book, unique coupons and a one-click



PHOTO COURTESY OF BENEVA SOLUTIONS

floralApp provides users the ability to order flowers directly from their Smart phone, using their own address book and offering them unique coupons.

While plant tags may be the most obvious choice for QR codes, there are many other places retailers can promote their apps or QR codes. Another means of incorporating QR codes is in the floral space's storefront. Prime marketing space is available on a standard 'CLOSED' business sign. Floral retailers who add a QR code to their after-hours business sign can invite visitors to place an order and schedule delivery online.

Retailers can also turn the tables and put the code into the buyers' hands at checkout. When consumers purchase flowers as a gift, they can have the option of recording a personalized voice message, which can then be delivered to their loved one on the flowers' gift tag with a QR code. The voice message plays when the recipient receives the flowers and scans the code.

When customers stop in the floral section of the supermarket and have an entire shopping list distracting them, a QR code will cause them to stop, look and shop. Chances are, consumers will make their final buying decision based on price, but the codes are still a prime opportunity to deliver incentives while incorporating company and product news. QR codes are free, attract customers, deliver information in seconds and help make buying decisions as fast and easy as it is to scan the code itself.

PRODUCTIVITY'S MANY FACETS



Alan Greenspan, former Federal Reserve Bank Chairman for nearly 20 years until in 2006, was famous for economic commentary requiring a host of analysts to figure out what he was really saying. The one understandable statement referred to increases in labor productivity being a main ingredient in economic success. Recently, during a *CNBC TV* interview, he expanded

the concept to include productivity gains from the control of energy demand and the improvement of material usage.

This poses the question of where the productivity gains are in the various levels associated with the produce industry. Since labor expense has always been the largest controllable variable cost in the supermarkets, it has been management's primary focus for cost reduction during at least a half-century. This has been the squeaky wheel that always got the grease.

However, looking at all of the elements involved, there are many more providing productivity advances, many of which directly and indirectly affect operational efficiency. When the entire organization is directed into a concentration on individual components, one finds the opportunities for productivity gains. This is when category management becomes truly important. Only when category management involves every portion of the distribution chain on the same wave length can productivity gains become advantageous to more than one segment.

Produce retail displays are a case in point. Fifty years ago, commodity organizations supplied decorative material by the ton and incentive display contests to stimulate its use. Store clerks spent countless hours building attractive promotional displays to sell more products, often with the result of increased overstocks reducing the profitability to only a marginally effective program.

As retail slowly moved away from this type of endeavor, expensive display material continued flowing through the system. It's anyone's guess how much never saw the sales floor, but too many trees were cut producing it; too much energy wasted transporting it; too much recycle handling or landfill use, in addition to the unnecessary expense. After a steady decline lead us to where we are today, the evolution is nearly complete. The question remains, what took so long for it to occur? Instead of commodity groups continually force-feeding unintended material based on previous activity, the objective should always be the investigation of evolving trends to be on the curve's leading edge.

On the other hand, most, but not all, commodity groups have recognized consumer interest in purchasing more flavorful fresher fruit and

vegetables. The advancements in varietal development and improved handling and shipping techniques have been monumental. As a result, product has faster sell-through incurring less spoilage and requiring less retail handling. All of these sales gains enhance productivity advancement throughout the distribution chain.

Of course, one could enumerate the many benefits of the rapid development of information technology from the multitudinous software programs creating improved accuracy for estimating consumer demand. The more accurately produce managers predict a pre-determined level of just-in-time product flow, the more benefits trickle all the way back to distribution centers, and ultimately, to the producer/shipper level. Everyone wins, as consumers purchase more of improved quality, longer-life product. Suppliers also find more predictable markets unless faced with disruptions caused by a disruptive growing season. A prime example is this year's Vidalia onion

production selling for greatly reduced prices because of the supply overhang from producing areas that normally have more limited quantities available.

During my involvement as a Special Intelligence officer reporting to the Air Force staff at the Pentagon, only a small select group in government was privy to

highly classified worldwide information. Now, messages were Tweeted around the world about the death of Bin Laden and the Virginia earthquake seconds following the event.

One has to wonder where the Information Age will take us. Will productivity gains come from more timely contact between the production segment and retailers using technology to reduce travel and eventually replace commodity commission duplication? When will there be direct and interactive messaging from producer to consumer about supply trends, new varieties and other new developments? What will be the role of the retailer providing comparable information to customers as they browse through the produce department holding some type of Smart phone? When will consumers be able to instantly check competitive pricing as they prepare a shopping list?

The improvement in productivity can never cease. Recently, Marc Andreessen, co-founder of Netscape, and general partner of a venture capital firm, wrote an article in the *Wall Street Journal* titled, "Why Software Is Eating the World," where he notes, "Software is devouring industries from books to movies to telecom to cars, tech start-ups are finally delivering on the Web's early promise."

Productivity and marketing benefits both will be much greater when the coordination and development among the various segments within the distribution system quickly adapt to these increasingly more frequent changes.

pb

Instead of commodity groups continually force-feeding unintended material based on previous activity, the objective should always be the investigation of evolving trends to be on the curve's leading edge.

By Dave Diver

Dave Diver is the former vice president of produce at Hannaford, and a regular columnist for *PRODUCE BUSINESS*.

FRESH INSIGHT: PRODUCE EXPORTED FROM THE U.S. AND INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION



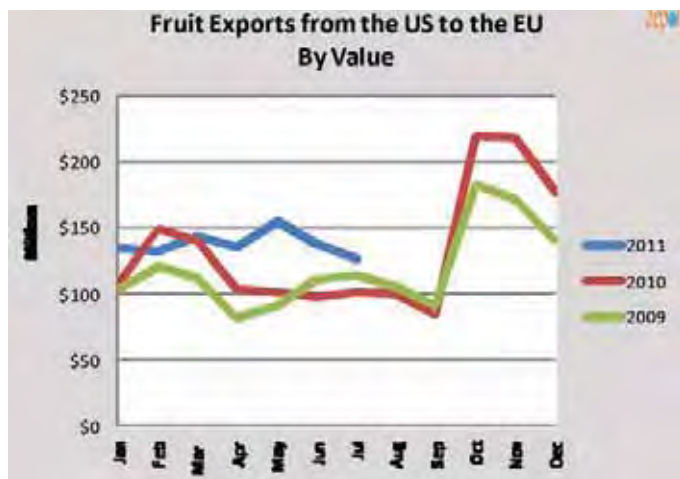
The 27 countries comprising the European Union (EU) are no strangers to importing fruits and vegetables. In fact, so far in 2011, the EU has imported over \$1 billion worth of fruit and vegetables from the United States alone. The majority of these imports are made up of fruits, while fewer than 6 percent can be attributed to vegetables.

Breakdown Of Fruits

The United States has exported over \$960 million worth of fruit to the EU from January to July of this year. Within the EU, Spain and Germany are the top destinations receiving this fruit, and show an increase this year over last of 35 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Also showing large increases in 2011 are Poland, Lithuania and Slovenia. On the opposite spectrum, Estonia and Malta have decreased their fruit imports from the U.S. by 53 and 58 percent, respectively.

The top fruit exported from the United States to the EU, by total value, is almonds. Almonds account for over half of the U.S. fruit exported to the EU. Next in line are pistachios and walnuts, with a 15 percent and 12 percent share of the total. The fruits showing the highest increase in imports to the EU when comparing this year over last are oranges, macadamia nuts and kiwis. Cashew nuts, chestnuts and plums all show large decreases in the values imported from the United States in 2011.

The general trend for fruits exported from the United States to overseas countries shows the highest values occurring between September and January.



The graph above displays the seasonal trends that occurred during 2009 through 2011. Although not shown, 2007 and 2008 show the same pattern. So far, 2011 shows above average exports from the United States to the EU for the months of March through July.

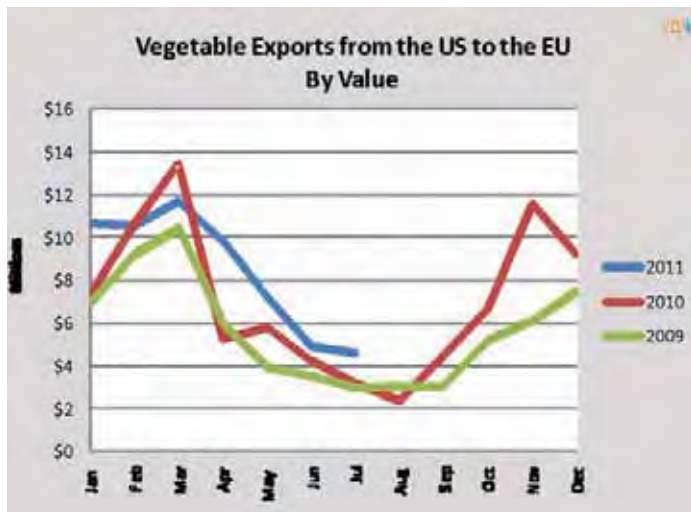
Breakdown Of Vegetables

The total value of U.S. vegetables exported into the EU through July

of this year reaches just under \$60 million. The country receiving the majority of these exports is the United Kingdom, with a 58 percent share of the total value. Belgium has seen a drastic increase this year in the value of vegetables they imported from the United States when compared to last year. Sweden, Denmark, and Luxembourg, however, show decreases of 62, 52 and 51 percent, respectively.

With 35 percent of the total value, sweet potatoes are the top vegetable exported from the United States into the EU. Onions and asparagus round out the top three, and when combined, demand a 30 percent share of the total values. Mushrooms, potatoes, and cabbage exports to the EU have dramatically increased this year over last. Conversely, demand for kale and specific peppers has decreased.

Vegetables, similar to fruit, have a noticeable trend across the years. Exports from the United States into the EU are highest during the cooler months of October through March. The graph below shows the progression of vegetable exports from 2009 through July of 2011. Both 2007 and 2008 follow the same course. Currently, 2011 has the highest vegetable values, with the exception of February.



U.S. And EU Produce Trade Balance

The United States also imports fruits and vegetables from the EU. So far this year, the country has imported over \$52 million worth of fresh fruit and over \$104 million worth of fresh vegetables. This year is shaping up to be record-setting in terms of fresh fruits and vegetables exported from the United States to the EU. Totals through July of this year amount to over \$1.022 billion. Totals through July of last year hovered at around \$853 million, a difference of over \$170 million. Numbers are expected to continue rising as the peak season lies ahead.

This article was written exclusively for PRODUCE BUSINESS by Zepol Corporation, the leading trade intelligence provider. The data in this report comes from the U.S. Census Bureau at the 10-digit level for HTS codes for fresh fruit and vegetables. It represents total values (in USD) for the products. As always, data anomalies may exist. To learn more about Zepol Corporation, visit www.zepol.com.

By Kelly Duchene

business development and marketing associate, Zepol Corp., based in Edina, MN

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How To Make Things Grow

Whatever your role in the produce industry, the key to a blossoming bottom line is knowledge. About major trends and developments, and the people behind them.... About new sales opportunities around the world.... New packaging and transportation technology.... New ideas in marketing and promotion.... New retail strategies.... New equipment and services.... New techniques for managing individual businesses, and their personnel, more efficiently.

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ARE YOU READY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY PRODUCE SHOPPER?



They may not be the Flintstones, but today's food shoppers are looking well beyond the weekly circular and a couple of other supermarkets to plan their grocery shopping. Most already shop several different types of stores for their groceries, such as drug stores, dollar stores and mass merchants, in addition to their primary supermarket — so that's not new. What is new is that their grocery shopping

is increasingly influenced by their use of technology-delivered information and services — e.g., electronic coupons, electronic circulars, product reviews and increasingly shopping online.

To help bring this to life, let's take a look at pre-planning the grocery-shopping trip in this new environment. Our shopper spends quality time thinking through what she's going to buy when she plans her stock-up trips: "My goal is to get everything I need into the house because it's a problem if I don't." Her retailer's website gives her a way to "shop the store" in advance and she finds it helpful. "Organizing the specials by aisle provides a good reminder for me to be sure I buy everything I need," she reasons.

She continues to think through it: "I'd like to spend as little time as possible in planning; now it's about 10 minutes per every stock-up trip. When I first started to use the website, I'd hoped that it would speed up my planning. It probably hasn't saved time, but I still use it because it has improved my ability to remember everything I need.

"I'd like to use the system to create a shopping list and I've tried to do it with this program, but it doesn't seem to work for me. The format is somewhat cumbersome and when I emailed it to my mobile phone, it wasn't readable. So today, we still do it the old-fashioned way and start a list on the counter."

In this new shopping environment, produce suppliers and retailers will have to compete in ways well beyond just delivering and displaying high quality attractive products. Now you must compete effectively on the basis of personalization, targeted promotions and the mobile shopper — just three of the new dimensions. This means taking your game up a notch or two, so let's look at what the "table stakes" are for these three areas.

Personalization

Personalization makes the offer more relevant for each shopper,

and therefore, of greater value. Think about the last time a sales clerk offered you something that demonstrated he or she knew what you liked and wanted to be sure you got it. Major retailers, such as Safeway, are offering personalized grocery shopping with programs like *Just for U*, where the retailer actually selects items that will appeal to a shopper based on previous shopper history.

The challenge for produce is to build accurate purchase histories so that they can allow the retailer to do a good job with personalization. This means having effective product-specific identification, as well as discipline at the checkout to accurately capture purchase by customer.

In this new shopping environment, produce suppliers and retailers will have to compete in ways well beyond just delivering and displaying high quality attractive products. Now you must compete effectively on the basis of personalization, targeted promotions and the mobile shopper.

Targeted Promotions

Targeted promotions can be part of personalization, but they bring the need to find ways to pay for these promotions. Today, many retailers turn to suppliers for co-op support. This works well in center-store, but how well does it work in produce? If it does not, produce will be underrepresented and shoppers won't be happy.

The challenge for produce is to find the dollars to support targeted promotions and to put in place buyer/seller relationships so that funds can be used effectively in targeted promotions.

Mobile Shoppers

With the growth in Smart phones and the possibility of a convenient "mobile wallet" on the horizon, we're already seeing shoppers use their phones while grocery shopping to check items off their shopping list, confirm the ingredients in a recipe, and compare prices on important purchases.

Access for mobile shoppers is easier when Apps are available. The growth of QR Codes on packages and signs has also proven to be an effective way to help mobile shoppers easily connect with promotions, product information, and a lot more.

The challenge for produce is to find easy, low-cost ways to connect with mobile shoppers and it is increasingly clear that having some control, or at least influence over that connection, is important.

Meeting and overcoming these challenges is key if you are going to win the business of 21st century produce shoppers. The marketplace is already changing; just take a look at Fresh List — a text-based marketplace for buying and selling produce in real time. **pb**

By Bill Bishop

Bill Bishop is chief architect of Brick Meets Click, an open online community where you can track and contribute to thought leadership, shaping retailer responses to 21st century shoppers. Visit the site at www.brickmeetsclick.com.



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

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of January 1 (People born after January 1, 1972).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by March 1, 2012, and fax back to 561-994-1610.

Once nominated, the candidate will receive forms from us to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

ABOUT THE NOMINEE:

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

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

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

ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:

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

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

For more information email: info@producebusiness.com

My Father's Immunotherapy

By Jim Prevor

*I dream of T-cells now.
A bag is hanging. Full.
Dripping from an IV.
Cascading through the veins.
They target. They kill.
Most important: They summon.
The body itself to cure itself.*

*The answer is within. Not external.
It is not unlike business.
The cancer tricks the immune system
Into thinking the cancer is not a problem.
Much as we can blind ourselves
To the cause of our problems.
It is the recession or the competitor or the bank.
Maybe, but waiting for an outside answer is futile.*

*We have to find our own strength.
See the enemies within.
Summon the capacity to focus and overcome.
Not just business. But life.
Our weaknesses lie not in the stars, but in ourselves.*

*Freud said Love and Work are
The cornerstones of our humanness.
Yet we are human, even if troubled.
So we can find the path to Love and Work
By seeing within, clearly.
Yet we sometimes do not.
So we sometimes need a lover or a co-worker
Or a medicine to awaken the passions within.*

*A T-cell is dripping... to announce it has found the problem,
And with Will, one can prevail.
Hemingway asked the question: Isn't it pretty to think so?*



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Louis J. Acampora Foundation	83	800-223-8070	www.LA12.org
AgroFruit	112	502-225-4129	www.watfruit.com
Albert's Organics	161	805-794-4213	www.albertsorganics.com
Alpine Fresh	152	305-594-9117	www.alpinefresh.com
Always Sweet	44	843-235-2081	www.unitedjuice.com
APEAM (Avocado Producers & Exporting Packers of Michoacan)	109		www.avocadosfrommexico.com
Apio, Inc.	100	800-454-1355	www.apioinc.com
Argentinean Blueberry Committee	123		www.argberry.com
E. Armata, Inc.	79	800-223-8070	www.emata.com
Asociacion Mexicana de Horticultura Protegida A.C.	185		www.amhpc.org
Associated Potato Growers, Inc.	149	800-437-4685	www.apgsudp.com
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	74	201-807-9292	www.auerpac.com
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	166	201-807-9292	www.auerpac.com
Ayco Farms, Inc.	152	954-788-6800	www.aycofarms.com
Babe Farms, Inc.	135	314-698-5772	www.babefarms.com
Baero North America, Inc.	206-201	344-698-2270	www.baerousa.com
Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	189	800-845-6149	www.sweetpotatoes.com
Philip Balsamo Company	56	630-575-8000	www.philipbalsamo.com
Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers	99	928-726-9191	www.naturaldelights.com
Basciani Foods, Inc.	171	610-268-3044	www.bascianifoods.com
Blue Book Services, Inc.	151	630-668-3500	www.producebluebook.com
Boncheff Greenhouses	96	416-233-6922	www.boncheffers@on.aibn.com
Booth Ranches, LLC	139	559-626-4732	www.boothranches.com
Boskovich Farms, Inc.	33	805-487-2299	www.boskovichfarms.com
Brooks Tropicals	129	800-327-4833	www.brookstropicals.com
Jack Brown Produce, Inc.	178	616-887-9568	www.jackbrownproduce.com
Buona Foods, Inc.	172	610-274-0712	www.buonafoods.com
Bushmans', Inc.	68	800-826-0200	www.bushmansinc.com
CA Enterprises	142	760-772-0535	
California Specialty Farms	96	323-587-0050	www.californiaspecialtyfarms.com
California Sun Dry Foods	41	800-395-7753	www.calsundryfoods.com
Califresh of California	56	559-875-1602	www.califruit.net
Canadian Produce Marketing Association	169	613-226-4187	www.cpm.ca
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	132	515-981-5111	www.capitalcityfruit.com
CarbAmericas	152	954-786-0000	www.carbamerica.com
Castle Rock Vineyards	135	661-721-8717	www.castlerockvineyards.com
CF Fresh	160	360-855-3192	www.vivatierra.com
Champ's Mushrooms	171	866-Champs1	www.champsmushrooms.com
Chelan Fresh Marketing	174	509-682-3854	www.chelanfresh.com
Chep USA Inc.	55	800.CHEP.USA	www.chep.com/trustedchoice
Chilean Fresh Fruit Assoc.	INSERT	916-927-1217	www.cffusa.org
Christopher Ranch	167	408-847-1100	www.christopheranch.com
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Coast To Coast Produce Co.	76	877-836-6295	www.ctcproduce.com
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Cosemans Retail	96	305-545-5516	www.rockgardenherbs.com
Copexu	121	54-11-4866-1135	
Core Farms	182	269-621-0979	
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	171	610-268-3043	www.countryfreshmushrooms.com
The Cranberry Network LLC	65	715-422-0410	www.thecranberrynetwork.com
Crowley Maritime Corp.	9	800-CROWLEY	www.customizedbrokers.net
Crystal Valley Foods	152	800-359-5631	www.crystalvalleyfoods.com
Curry & Company	119	800-929-1073	www.curyandco.com
Customized Brokers	152	305-471-8989	www.customizedbrokers.net
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York	493	800-743-8082	www.darrigobros.com
Deardoff Family Farms	73	805-200-5215	www.deardofffamilyfarms.com
Del Monte Fresh Produce	220	800-950-3683	www.freshdelmonte.com
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	39	818-879-6600	www.dole.com
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	800-333-5454	www.dole.com/saladkits
DProduce Man Software	170	888-PRODDMAN	www.dproduce.com
Duda Family Farms	131	800-342-DUDA	www.dudafresh.com
Eastern Propak, LLC	144	856-881-3553	www.easternpropak.biz
Edinburg Citrus Association	144	956-383-6619	www.txcitrus.com
Edinburg Citrus Association	70	956-383-6619	www.txcitrus.com
Eli & Alf's Organic and Specialty Produce	72	718-389-2100	www.eliandali.com
Ethylene Control, Inc.	142	800-200-1909	www.ethylenecontrol.com
European Flavors/CSO	15	39-0532-904511	www.euroflavors.eu
Farm Pak Products, Inc.	190	800-629-7999	
Farmer's Best	113	520-281-4411	www.farmersbest.com.mx
Faye Clack Marketing & Comm.	53	800-743-6282	www.ideaswithoutroots.com
Fidelity Fruit & Produce Co.	198	404-366-8445	
Joseph Fierman & Son, Inc.	75	718-893-1640	
First Fruit Marketing	183	509-853-4710	www.firstfruits.com
Florida Department of Agriculture	133	850-488-4303	www.freshfromflorida.com
Fowler Farms	176	800-836-9537	www.fowlerfarms.com
Fresh Origins, LLC	96	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com
Fresh Produce Association of the Americas	134	520-287-2707	www.freshfrommexico.com
Fresher Foods	40	817-509-0626	www.eatwholly.com
Freska Produce International, LLC	114	805-650-1040	www.freskaproduce.com
Friedman & Broussard Produce, Inc.	190	800-671-9018	
GAB Empacadora	114	462-626-2663	www.mrlucky.com.mx
Garber Farms	190	337-824-6328	www.garberfarms.com
The Garlic Company	166	661-393-4212	www.thegarliccompany.com
The Garlic Company	46	661-393-4212	www.thegarliccompany.com
Genpro Transportation Services, Inc.	78	800-243-6770	www.genproinc.com
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Giorgio Fresh Co.	59	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofoods.com
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Growers Express	35	831-751-1379	www.greengiant.com
A. Gurda Produce Farms	82	845-258-4422	
Harvest Crown Co.	152	561-496-0390	www.harvestcrown.com
Harvest Sensations	96	305-991-8173	www.harvestsensations.com
Harvest Sensations	96	305-991-8173	www.harvestsensations.com
Hendrix Produce, Inc.	67	800-752-1551	www.hendrixproduce.com
Hess Brothers Fruit Co.	135	717-656-2631	www.hessbros.com
Highline Mushrooms	172	519-326-8643	www.highlinemushrooms.com
Hollandia Produce	51	805-684-4146	www.livegourmet.com
Home Bear Tree Fruit Co.	180	800-551-6183	
I Love Produce LLC	167	610-869-4664	www.iloveproduce.com
Idaho Potato Commission	19	208-334-2350	www.idahopotato.com/retail
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Intergrow Greenhouses, Inc.	135	585-682-0052	www.intergrowgreenhouse.com
J J Jardina Company, Inc.	199	404-366-6868	www.jjardina.com
Jacobs, Malcolm & Burr, Inc.	152	415-285-0400	
Jem D International	57	510-73-2663	www.jemdfoods.com
Johnston Farms	144	661-366-3201	www.johnstonfarms.com
J.R. Kelly Company	96	888-344-4392	www.jrkelly.com
Kerian Machines, Inc.	150	800-551-5188	www.kerian.com
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	159	661-854-3156	www.kernridge.com
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	153	717-597-2112	www.keystonefruit.com
L&M Companies, Inc.	130	509-698-3881	www.lmcompanies.com
Lakeside Organic Gardens	165	831-761-8797	www.lakesideorganics.com
Tom Lange Co.	52	800-637-8051	www.tomlange.com
Laramar Foods/Garlic Expressions	166	800-683-4483	www.garlic-expressions.com
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	61	800-796-2349	www.lgssales.com
Limoneira	141	866-321-8953	www.limoneira.com
Litco International, Inc.	38	330-539-5433	www.litco.com
Locust Traxx	77	561-575-7600	www.locustraxx.com
Lynn-Ette & Sons, Inc.	130	800-473-2010	www.lynnettefarms.com
Maine Potato Board	156	207-609-5061	www.maine potatoes.com
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	103	800-884-6266	www.veggiesmadeeasy.com
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand	183	877-899-9077	www.jmarchini-marzano.com
Mariani Packing Co.	202	707-452-2800	www.mariani.com
Mariani Nut Co.	204	530-662-3311	www.marianinut.com
Marie's Dressings	191	714-257-3875	www.maries.com
Mazetti Company	93	614-846-2232	www.mazetti.com
Melissas/World Variety Produce, Inc.	164	800-468-7111	www.melissas.com
Melones International/ Apache Produce	115	520-281-2282	www.plainjaneproduce.com
Michigan Apple Committee	179	800-456-2753	www.michiganapples.com
Micky's Minis Flora Express	208	800-753-6464	www.mickyminis.org
MIXTEC Group	103	626-440-7077	www.mixtec.net
MJB Sales, Inc.	171	610-268-0444	www.mjbsales.com
Monte Package Company	802	800-673-2807	www.montepkg.com
Mooney Farms	85	530-899-2661	www.mooneyfarms.com
Mor USA	72	917-416-3768	
Mountain Valley Produce, LLC	156	719-754-2139	www.mvproduce.com
N&W Farms	191	662-682-7961	www.nandwfarms.com
N2N Global	47	407-331-5151	www.n2nglobal.com
New Jersey Department of Agriculture	21	609-292-8853	www.state.nj.us/agriculture
New York Apple Association, Inc.	177	585-924-2171	www.nyapple.org
New York Apples Sales, Inc.	183	518-477-7200	www.newyorkapplesales.com
Niagara Fresh Fruit Co.	135	716-778-7631	www.niagarafreshfruit.com
Nobles-Collier, Inc.	132	239-657-4401	
Nokota Packers, Inc.	147	701-847-2200	www.nokotapackers.com
North Bay Produce	153	231-946-1941	www.northbayproduce.com
North shore Living Herbs	96	760-397-0400	www.livingherbs.com
Northern Plains Potato Growers Assn.	148	218-773-3633	www.redpotatoes.net
Nunherm USA	87	208-674-4146	www.nunhermsusa.com
Ocean Mist Farms	25	831-633-2492	www.oceanmist.com
Pacific Organic Produce	164	415-673-5555	www.purityorganic.com
Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program	136	717-783-5418	www.pennsylvaniaapples.org
Peri & Sons Farms	38	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
The Perishable Specialist, Inc.	153	305-477-9906	www.theperishablespecialist.com
Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association	153	610-284-0326	
Phillips Mushroom Farms	50	800-722-8818	www.phillipsmushroomfarms.com
Pismo-Oceano Vegetable Exchange	136	805-489-5770	www.pove.net
Plaine Jane	115	520-281-2282	www.plainjaneproduce.com
Ponderosa Mushrooms	171	800-575-4373	www.ponderosa-mushrooms.com
Pori Porcellini Produce	81	718-893-6000	www.porcellini.com
Primavera Marketing, Inc.	135	209-931-9420	www.primavera.com
Prime Time	187	760-399-4166	www.primetimeproduce.com
Produce For Better Health Foundation	197	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Produce Marketing Association	94-95	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
Progressive Marketing Group	153	323-890-8100	www.pmgstrategic.net
Ready Pac Produce, Inc.	86	800-800-4088	www.readypac.com
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	11	805-981-1839	www.redblossom.com
Regatta Tropicals, Ltd.	136	805-473-1320	
Riveridge Produce Marketing, Inc.	136	616-887-6873	www.riveridgeproduce.com
Rosemont Farms/CH Robinson Worldwide	153	877-877-8017	www.rosemontfarms.com
Royal Rose LLC	17	831-758-1957	www.radichio.com
SAGARPA - Embassy of Mexico	116-117	202-728-1727	www.sagarpa.gob.mx
Sage Fruit Company	181	913-239-0060	www.sagefruit.com
Sandri Sales, Inc.	137	805-792-3192	www.sandri.com
O. C. Schulz & Sons, Inc.	150	701-687-2152	
Silver Creek Software	15	708-388-4555	www.silvercreek.com
Skyline Potatoes	15	708-388-4555	
Southern Produce Distributors, Inc.	151	800-688-9267	www.southern-produce.com
Southern Specialties	153	954-784-0500	www.southern-specialties.com
Spice World, Inc.	27	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Spice World, Inc.	167	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Spokely Farms	150	218-946-2825	www.spokelyfarms.com
Sun Orchard Fruit Company	182	716-778-8544	www.sunorchardapples.com
Sun Pacific	143	213-627-9544	www.californiafarms.com
Sun Pacific	193	213-627-9544	www.ripeandeasykiwi.com
Sun World International	37	661-631-4160	www.sun-world.com
Sun-Maid Growers of California	201	800-786-6243	www.sun-maid.com
Sun-Maid Figs	203	559-237-3893	www.valleyfig.com
Sunlight Intl. Sales/ Jakov P Dulcich & Sons	25	661-792-6360	www.sunlight.com
SunnyRidge Farm, Inc.	124	863-299-1894	www.sunnyridge.com
Sunview Marketing International	137	661-792-3145	www.sunviewmarketing.com
Sweet Onion Trading Company	58	800-699-3727	www.sweetoniontrading.com
Symms Fruit Ranch, Inc.	182	208-459-8064	www.symmsfruit.com
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	89	800-772-4542	www.taproduce.com
Team Produce International, Inc.	153	800-505-0665	www.teamproduce.com
Thermal Technologies, Incorporated	45	803-691-8000	www.gotarpless.com
Trinity Fruit Sales	23	559-433-3777	www.trinityfruit.com
Triple J Produce, Inc.	191	252-235-0100	www.triplejproduce.com
Uesugi Farms, Inc.	137	408-847-9403	www.uesugifarms.com
United Fresh Produce Association	66	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
United Fresh Produce Association	125	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
United Juice	44	843-235-2081	www.unitedjuice.com
The USA Bouquet Co.	209	786-43	

SUCCESS IS SWEET



It's no surprise Brent Harrison ended up running his grandfather's Nogales, AZ-based produce business, Al Harrison Co. Distributors. After all, he grew putting stickers on the many watermelons that were shipped in from Mexico. "I am definitely a child of the produce business. This is where I was born and raised," he says proudly. "Today, my sister and I run the business."

Al Harrison, Brent's grandfather, started the business in 1955, which now handles watermelons, hard-shell squash, bell peppers, cucumbers, zucchini, Roma tomatoes, corn and honeydews, much of which is grown in shadehouses in Mexico. "There have been so many changes in the produce business since my grandfather's days," says Harrison. "The business has definitely come a long way. Now there is a heightened emphasis on food safety, not to mention GAP practices, customer service, the year-round availability and varieties of products and advanced packaging. Even the product itself has changed," he adds. "We used to import seeded watermelon; now everything is seedless."

The photo above, taken in the spring of the 1960s, depicts these exact watermelons for which the company was known. An important part of guaranteeing the sweetness that consumers had come to know and love was measuring the Brix level. Al Harrison (right) sits with Safeway buyer, Eddie Reis, doing just this in Guaymas, Mexico, with the help of a refractometer. "We did a lot of business at the time with Safeway," notes Harrison. "In fact, we still do. I remember growing up we had a big Safeway 'S' in the office window, showing off to all of our customers our association with the retailer. We have quite a few pictures from that time. My grandfather always had a camera on him, and was usually just snapping away. He was that kind of guy."

Just as the business was passed down the family generations from his grandfather to his father to him, Brent hopes to do the same with for his two children. "I have a 13-year old son and a 9-year old daughter, and I would love to continue the tradition with them. In fact, their mother is a former Watermelon Queen, so we are definitely keeping it in the family!"

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail info@producebusiness.com

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OVER 54 MILLION CONSUMERS REACHED LAST YEAR.

This promotion is sure to attract crowds. Over 54 million consumers reached last year. As a destination within your produce department, Del Monte Fresh Produce "Teacher Monday" encourages consumers to Eat Healthy and Live Healthy.

The 2nd Annual "Teacher Monday" is an online contest where consumers vote for their favorite teacher and was created to support teachers and give them the tools they need to make eating healthy, fun and educational in the classroom. Winning teachers in the U.S. and Canada will receive \$750 in cash to purchase school supplies and \$250 in Del Monte Fresh Produce fruit gift certificates for classroom snacks. Winning teachers will be linked with schools in Del Monte Produce's growing regions, including Africa, Asia and Central America.

Over 30-million* on-product stickers and tags on pineapples,



bananas, fresh-cut fruits and vegetables, cantaloupe, grapes, avocados and tomatoes will alert shoppers to the promotion in-store, supported with channel strips, price cards, danglers and display signs. Del Monte Fresh Produce will also distribute recipe booklets and \$5 off coupons for fresh fruits and vegetables to consumers in 50 major markets across the U.S. and Canada. Consumers will be notified about giveaways via Twitter, Facebook and radio promotions.

Ask your Del Monte Fresh Produce representative about participating in our display contest exclusively for produce managers. Winning retailers will receive a free salad bar to be awarded to their favorite qualifying school.

Go to www.fruits.com to learn more or contact your Del Monte Fresh Produce representative to participate and help support schools in your community.

*Estimate

BE A PART OF BUILDING ON OUR SUCCESS OF LAST YEAR. 1 MILLION VOTES.



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