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WHOLESALE'S SURVIVAL GUIDE • CONSUMER PACKAGING
SALAD TRENDS • RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES
SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES • FLORIDA FALL PRODUCE
IMPORTED BERRIES • CALIFORNIA CITRUS • MEXICAN IMPORTS • APPLES
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p.58

COVER STORY

- 26 PRODUCE FINDS A HOME IN NON-TRADITIONAL OUTLETS**
 From convenience stores and gas stations to drug stores and vending machines, produce is popping up in a number of novel places.

COMMENTARY

- 12 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT**
 Florida-Mexico Tomato Battle Distracts From A Focus On Consumers
- 154 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE**
 Back To Basics
- 156 EUROPEAN MARKET**
 European Economic Crisis Transforms Shopping Behavior
- 158 VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY**
 Earth-Safe Soil: Industry Opportunity, Planet Necessity

p.85



FEATURES

- 38 WHOLESALER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE: 10 WAYS PRODUCE "MIDDLEMEN" PREVAIL**
 Wholesalers thrive by emphasizing strengths and adding new services.
- 52 CONSUMER PACKAGING: FIVE THINGS TO CONSIDER**
 With consumer and retailer requirements rising, the packaging industry is making strides to meet their needs.
- 58 SALAD CATEGORY CONTINUES TO EXPAND**
 New innovations have helped expand the packaged salad category, leading to more sales opportunities.
- 62 RED RIVER VALLEY GROWERS CONFIDENT IN PROVIDING QUALITY RED POTATOES**
 Retail promotions on the table, despite challenges from Mother Nature.
- 67 GROWERS PREDICT A SOLID SEASON FOR SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES**
 Good crop quality and increasing acreage result in good volume to meet buyer needs.
- 72 FLORIDA FALL PRODUCE SHINES**
 Florida produce adds color, flavor and nutrition to fall menus.
- 79 IMPORTED BERRIES HELP MAINTAIN A YEAR-ROUND SUPPLY**
 Once the domestic berry supply has finished, retailers can rely on high quality imports to keep consumers very happy.
- 85 CALIFORNIA CITRUS PROVIDES A SOLID RING FOR PRODUCE DEPARTMENT**
 California Navel oranges, along with Clementines and Mandarins, are some of California's most beloved fruit.

p.72



IN THIS ISSUE

- 8 THE QUIZ**
- 10 WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE**
- 14 TRADE SHOW CALENDAR**
- 16 PRODUCE WATCH**
- 24 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES**
- 25 COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS**
- 160 INFORMATION SHOWCASE**
- 162 BLAST FROM THE PAST**

p. 162



p. 91



p. 125



p. 142

DEPARTMENTS

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

125 *Apples: 15 Thoughts To Help In A Tough Year*
 Despite weather woes, apple growers/shippers around the country remain positive for future seasons.

REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE

138 *Spotlight On Detroit*
 Despite its economic hardships, the Detroit region is known for independent retailers that cater to its diverse population.

ORGANIC PRODUCE MARKETING

142 *Make The Most Of Demographic Opportunities For Organic Growth*
 The organic category continues to grow in more than pocket niches around the country.

DRIED FRUIT AND NUTS

150 *Halves Or Pieces, Pecans Sell Well In Produce*
 With dedicated merchandising efforts and a bit of consumer education, paying attention to pecans can go a long way toward boosting sales.

SPECIAL FEATURES

20 **FROM THE PAGES OF THE PERISHABLE PUNDIT**
 Putting Mango Recall Into Perspective

115 **SPOTLIGHT ON MEXICAN IMPORTS (PART II): Mexican Tomato Importers Make Appeal For Market Access**
 Tomatoes represent over \$800 million FOB and 20 to 25 percent of the value of produce brought into Nogales.

91 **FLORAL MASTERS OF MERCHANDISING**

99 **PMA AISLE BY AISLE BOOTH REVIEW**



p. 99

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



Carlos A. Ramirez
E Foods Inc.
Produce Sales Broker
Altamonte Springs, FL

As a little boy in Honduras, Carlos Ramirez used to work with his father on the family farm. "I always remember him making fresh pumpkin soup in the fields," Ramirez recollects. "Even though my father was a cartographer for the government, he also sold his fresh fruit and vegetables for extra money." For Carlos, produce was in the blood, and he went on to earn a Masters Degree in agricultural business from Florida A&M University.

As a produce sales broker for E Foods Inc., he is responsible for sales and procurement of fresh produce. "I have a number of clients from

all over the country, as well as the Caribbean and Central America," he says. "Because of my relationships with grower/shippers, I get great deals, and then am able to pass those on to my wholesaler clients."

Prior to moving to Florida five years ago, Ramirez started receiving *PRODUCE BUSINESS* when he worked as a senior buyer with BEC Corp. in Puerto Rico. "I've been reading the magazine for 15 years; it's so important to stay informed," he says. "It keeps me aware of all the different produce companies and what they are doing. It also allows me to go back to my customers and suggest better ways to merchandise their produce."

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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- 1) What is the email address for retailers to order POM Wonderful display bins? _____
- 2) What states do Paramount Citrus' grapefruits come from? _____
- 3) What is the PMA booth number for Village Farms? _____
- 4) How big is the refrigerated space at Maurice A. Auerpak Inc.? _____
- 5) Name three companies that will be at the "Fresh From Florida" pavilion at PMA Fresh Summit. _____
- 6) What is the address for Red Blossom Farms? _____

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PRESIDENT OBAMA AND GOVERNOR ROMNEY RESPOND TO UNITED FRESH

By Shelby Rajkovich, Communications Manager,
United Fresh Produce Association



United Fresh has released exclusive policy statements from the campaigns of President Obama and Governor Romney on top produce industry priorities ahead of the Washington Public Policy Conference, the produce industry's most powerful public policy event. United posed questions on behalf of the industry to both campaigns on immigration, regulation, the Farm Bill, taxes, food safety and nutrition. The statements reveal each candidate's intended path forward on agriculture policy, and mark the contrasts and similarities between the two in the final stretch to the presidential election on November 4.

"The candidates took the opportunity to specifically address the concerns of the produce industry by responding to our submitted questions," says Ray Gilmer, United Fresh vice president of communications. "These statements give members of our industry the information to make an informed decision and they underscore how important the produce industry is in this race."

Tough Talk On Immigration

The submitted questions echo the results of United Fresh's Impact Produce Policy Straw Poll, which revealed the issues that the produce industry ranks as its top priority. The poll found that 73 percent of United Fresh members rank farm labor availability as one of their Top Three concerns, so it's no surprise that the presidential candidates talked tough on the topic. In the face of an ongoing labor crisis, the fresh fruit and vegetable industry relies on a strong, stable workforce and is in need of a comprehensive immigration reform to remain viable. Both Romney and Obama agreed that the current system is "broken."

The statement from the Obama campaign read: "I believe in comprehensive reform that strengthens our economy and reflects our values as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. I support legislation — that until

recently had bipartisan support — that would invest in border security, hold employers accountable, demand responsibility from undocumented immigrants while creating a path to legal status, and reform the legal immigration system to attract the best and brightest and keep families together."

The Romney campaign focused on reforming the visa process for seasonal workers: "As president, Mitt Romney will make the system for bringing in temporary agricultural workers and other seasonal workers functional for both employers and workers. He will get rid of unnecessary requirements that delay issuance of a visa, and

THE STATEMENTS REVEAL EACH CANDIDATE'S INTENDED PATH FORWARD ON AGRICULTURE POLICY, AND MARK THE CONTRASTS AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TWO.

he will speed the processing of applications. A legal immigration system that works will provide a lawful alternative to workers who would otherwise enter illegally and employers who face the choice of either turning to illegal labor or reducing operations."

Commitment To Food Safety

Food safety also topped the poll results, with 72 percent of respondents in United's straw poll indicating it as a top priority. "The fresh produce industry has taken major steps in the past few years to ensure that we're providing the safest product to consumers," remarks Robert Guenther, United's senior vice president of public policy. "As we look forward to the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization

Act, the next administration will set the tone for how we move forward, and the industry is definitely watching closely."

The Obama response highlighted the steps his administration has taken to reform the nation's food safety laws, including bolstering the FDA's resources, authority and tools. "Effectively managing risk is important to all producers, and having an acceptable food safety program is in the best interest of consumers, buyers, and the farmers themselves," said the statement. "And I am committed to working to ensuring that food safety regulations do not place an unreasonable burden on the food industry."

The Romney campaign is advocating for preventative food safety practices which are "best developed by growers, handlers, processors and others in the supply chain," according to the statement. "Governor Romney believes the FDA must collaborate with industry, in cooperation with state agencies and academia, to develop specific guidance for the commodities most often associated with food-borne illness outbreaks. A Romney Administration will prioritize this type of cooperation and collaboration with industry on the part of all agencies charged with protecting public health."

Clash Of Nutrition Policies

The campaigns also tackled nutrition, an area where perhaps the starkest contrast between the two candidates emerged. The Obama statement touted improvements to child nutrition programs, notably the reauthorization of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act and First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools Initiative*, of which United is a founding partner. The Romney campaign admitted that obesity is a "public health crisis," but also seemed to offer a more hands-off approach, saying, "The federal government should not dictate what every American eats."

The candidates' full responses on immigration, agriculture regulation, the Farm Bill, taxes and nutrition can be found online at www.unitedfresh.org.



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FLORIDA-MEXICO TOMATO BATTLE DISTRACTS FROM A FOCUS ON CONSUMERS

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief



The dispute between Florida and Mexican tomato growers, along with their importers, has turned into something of a brawl. Unfortunately, the way the issue has been framed is confusing the situation, not clarifying the issues.

Florida started by asking to terminate the suspension agreement, which has governed the sales of tomatoes for the past 16 years. To an outsider, this implies that the Florida

growers do not want the government dictating minimum prices. So they come off as pro free trade.

In contrast, the Mexicans opposed ending the suspension agreement. Since the agreement restricts the Mexicans from selling into the United States at prices below those approved by the Department of Commerce, an outsider would assume that the Mexicans are opposed to free trade.

The reality is that the situation is the opposite. The Florida growers are intending to file a new anti-dumping complaint as soon as possible. If they win, and they probably will, the U.S. government would impose heavy duties on Mexican tomato imports.

Well, if the Florida growers would win, doesn't that mean the Mexicans are doing something wrong? Perhaps in terms of legal niceties, but it is important to understand that the anti-dumping statutes do not require a showing of anything substantively wrong. Under the law, the definition of dumping is simple: Either an item must be sold in the United States for less than the cost of production, or it must be sold for less than it is being sold in the market where it is produced.

It is notable that the standards for dumping do not include any finding that the seller is receiving government subsidies or anything of that nature.

Under any circumstances, anti-dumping laws are suspect. After all, selling cheaper products benefits consumers. It is not 100 percent clear why protecting producers should be more important than helping consumers.

The standards, of course, make no sense at all when it comes to fresh produce or perishables in general. The idea that someone shouldn't sell at below the cost of production might make some sense if one is speaking of an item that can be easily warehoused.

The issue is how to maximize returns. Very often, taking a small loss right away is more useful than taking a large loss later. Almost all produce vendors sometimes sell at a loss, so this concept is not very helpful when applied to fresh produce.

Equally, weather and environmental factors dictate where produce

is grown, not where it is consumed. A large Chilean shipper will design a program involving millions of cases of fruit and will allocate quantities to Europe, North America, Japan, the Middle East, etc., long before the season even starts. Much of this fruit will be sold on a straight commission basis. Although some adjustments will be made during the season based on market prices, these changes are limited by the need to stay in markets for the long term and the fact that each market has limited capacity. It is great news for producers that the market is strong in Scandinavia, but relatively small additional shipments will make it weak.

Many countries grow produce or specific products for the purpose of export. The domestic market on many of these products is simply inconsequential. So to compare domestic prices to prices in the United States is meaningless.

The political battle is interesting. In the aftermath of the failed talks to merge United and PMA, one sees the great difficulty for any national trade association to always represent the diverse grower base. After all, Florida tomato shippers are pushing for the government to impose high

duties on tomatoes imported from Mexico, but others, say Washington apple shippers, are more concerned with keeping Mexican markets open for their shipments.

But beyond politics, the shame for the industry is that the whole controversy distracts from the economic imperative of the produce industry: To produce products that consumers wish to buy at prices they can afford, yet are still profitable for the producers.

Part of the problem is that producers still define themselves too narrowly. By my count, there is only one — count it, one — Florida producer who actually owns assets in Mexico, despite the fact that the Mexican deal has been growing for decades. This has to do with self-identification as a Florida farmer, rather than looking to the consumer and self-identifying as a supplier to those consumers. Legal efforts to impose duties may buy a few years but, in the end, they are a distraction from the imperative of flavor, quality and service.

Products have to be produced by those who can win markets. Florida is right; of course, the suspension agreement should be set aside. But proceeding with a new anti-dumping case is unlikely to serve the industry long-term. This is America, and anyone who wants to sell tomatoes should be able to do so at the price they wish to sell at.

Shakespeare wrote, "First, let's kill all the lawyers." In this case, the sentiment means that all these dumping and anti-dumping disputes will not increase produce consumption — only exceptional product, delivered with incredible service and at a great price is likely to do that.

All these negotiations, filings and requests to the government are thus distractions from the truly important work at hand.

pb

Legal efforts to impose duties may buy a few years but, in the end, they are a distraction from the imperative of flavor, quality and service.

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Phone: 914-421-3346 • **Fax:** 914-948-6197

Email: customerrelations@glmshows.com

Website: www.ihmrs.com

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Conference Management: Western Growers Association, Newport Beach, CA

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Website: www.wga.com

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Email: cwalker12@bellsouth.net

Website: www.sweetpotatousa.org

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

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January 29 - 31, 2013**HOTEL, MOTEL & RESTAURANT SUPPLY SHOW SE**

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

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Conference Management: Messe Berlin GmbH, Berlin, Germany

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Email: berlin@exhibitpro.com

Website: www.fruitlogistica.com

February 10-13, 2013**N.G.A. Supermarket Synergy Showcase**

The National Grocers Association is the national trade association representing the retail and wholesale grocers that comprise the independent sector of the food distribution industry.

Conference Venue: Mirage Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, NV

Conference Management: National Grocers Association, Arlington, VA

Phone: 703-516-0700 • **Fax:** 703-516-0115

Email: info@nationalgrocers.org

Website: www.nationalgrocers.org

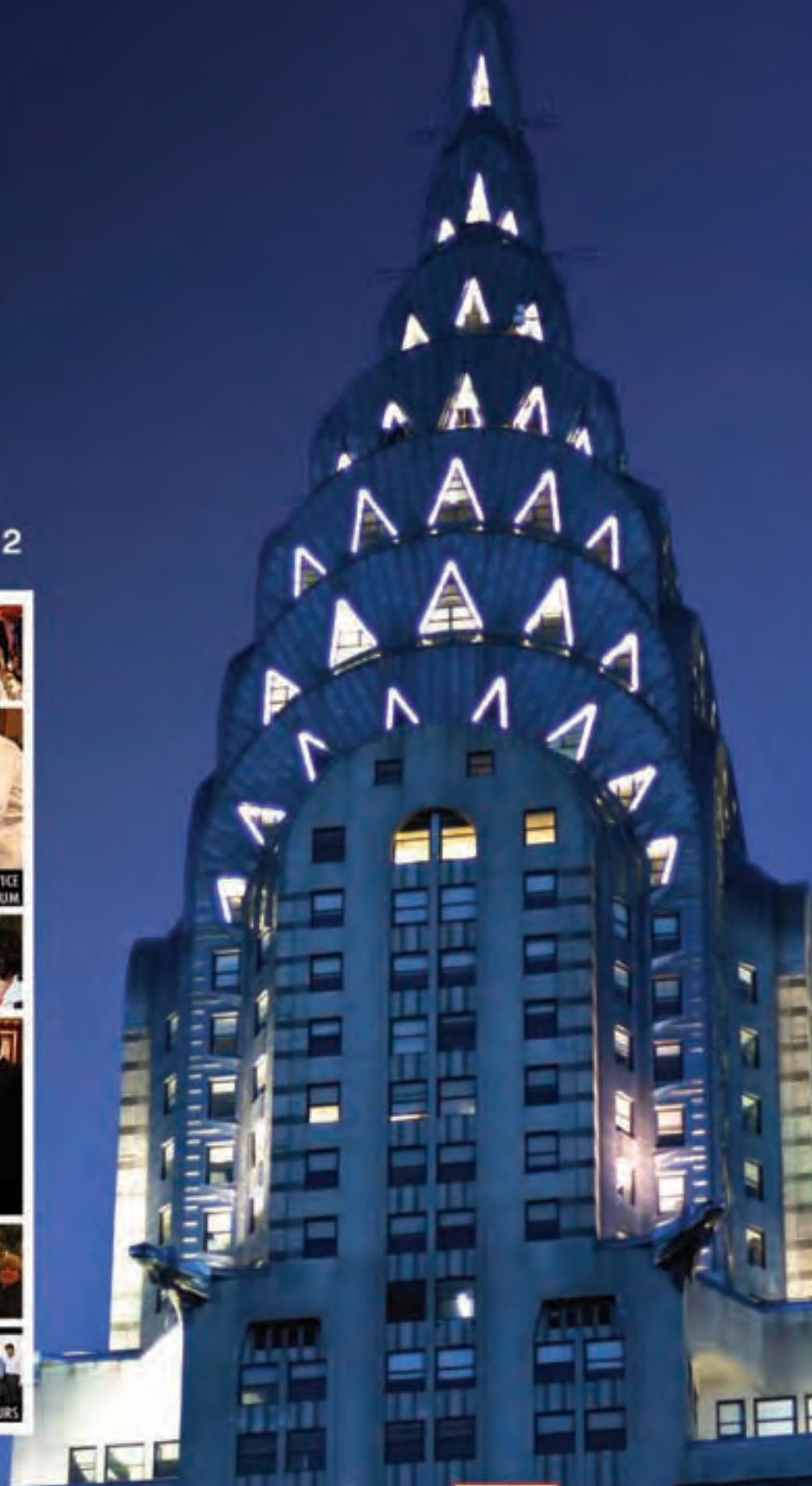
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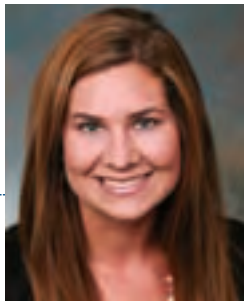
TRANSITIONS

MANN PACKING CO. INC. SALINAS, CA

Megan Grim joins the company's marketing department as the new packaging coordinator. Grim is a recent graduate of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with a degree in agricultural business and a concentration in marketing. While attending Cal Poly, she served as a marketing intern at Mann for the past four years. This is a new position for Mann Packing, and Grim will report to Christine Keller, director of marketing innovations.



Danny Goforth joins the customer solutions/sales team as a sales executive. Goforth graduated from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in 2010, with a degree in agricultural business. He worked previously in commodity and value-added sales, product management and business development as a sales/business development manager with Colorful Harvest in Salinas, CA.



FOX SOLUTIONS MCALLEN, TX

Paul Jackewicz has joined the company as East Coast Representative for its packaging and equipment sales team. He will be responsible for all sales related to Fox Solution's extensive line of produce-handling equipment, as well as the development and maintenance of value-added products that enhance operations across the country.



GIUMARRA NOGALES LOS ANGELES, CA

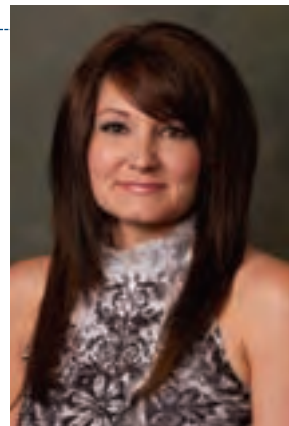
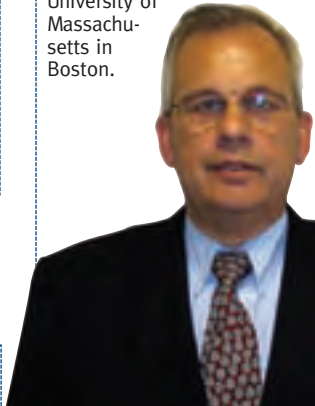
Giumarra Nogales has expanded its sales team with **Ernest Valencia**, a graduate of Arizona State University, where he received a degree in business. Most recently, Valencia worked in sales for Nogales, AZ-based Farmer's Best International. He specializes in the dry fruit and vegetable category and will be responsible for selling the company's full line of vegetables and Fair Trade-Certified melons grown in Mexico, including a line of USDA Certified Organic products.

Giumarra Nogales has added **Tom Frudden** to the sales team. He most recently served as sales manager for Red Rooster Sales, based in Firebaugh, CA. Frudden has extensive experience in the tomato category. He received a crop science degree from California Polytechnic University.



PEAR BUREAU NORTHWEST PORTLAND, OR

Bob Catinella has joined the company as the regional marketing manager responsible for the Mid-Atlantic/Northeastern U.S. territory. Catinella brings a 27-year history of retail marketing and sales experience to PBN, having worked for companies like Advantage Sales and Marketing and Entenmann's. He studied business management and computer science at the University of Massachusetts in Boston.



THE UNITED STATES POTATO BOARD DENVER, CO

Alexandra Imhof has been promoted to the position of USPB industry communications and policy manager. Imhof has been with the USPB since August, 2003, when she was hired in the finance department. In October, 2006, Imhof transferred into the newly created industry communications and policy (ICP) department. With her promotion, Imhof will be undertaking the added responsibilities of maintaining the USPB's website and the creation and delivery of e-newsletters to the industry.

THE GIUMARRA COMPANIES LOS ANGELES, CA

James Paul has joined the team's West Coast avocado and asparagus sales staff. He will be dealing with Midwest and East Coast customers to implement programs designed to create incremental sales for asparagus and avocados. He will also be coordinating efforts with Giumarra's global supply to provide a seamless continuity of fresh Nature's Partner asparagus throughout the year.



SOUTHERN SPECIALTIES INC. POMPANO BEACH, FL

Southern Specialties, Inc. welcomes **Brad Bailey** as director of sales. Bailey has experience in sales and procurement in both the grower/shipper and retail sectors of the industry. Most recently, he held the position of executive director of procurement for Pero Family Farms in Delray Beach, FL. Bailey has also held several positions with Supervalu. His duties will involve managing daily sales operations and acting as liaison with the company's procurement division.



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

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TRANSITIONS



THE IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION EAGLE, ID

The Idaho Potato Commission (IPC) has hired **Travis Blacker** as industry relations director. He will work out of the IPC's Eastern Idaho office and will focus on building and developing relationships between the IPC and all industry

members including growers, shippers and processors. Blacker brings more than 19 years of Idaho potato industry experience to his new role.

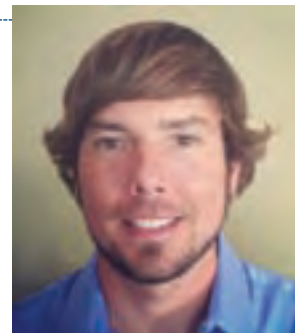
ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWER GRAND FORKS, ND

Foodservice industry veteran **Steven Grod** has recently joined the sales staff. Grod has worked with foodservice companies for the past 25 years, most recently with Maglio & Co., in Glendale, WI, with a sales territory spanning from Wisconsin to Kentucky. Previously, he was employed by US Foods in Menomonee Falls, WI.



ALPINE FRESH MIAMI, FL

Alpine Fresh has hired **Stacy Spivey** as domestic berry program director. Spivey, having significant industry experience and having been a blueberry grower himself, is the ideal person to expand the program. Part of Spivey's responsibilities include building long-term relationships with domestic growers.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRODUCE PRO SOFTWARE OPENS NEW LOS ANGELES OFFICE

In response to the continuous growth of its customer base and the addition of several new team members, Produce Pro Software has moved its Los Angeles office to Commerce, CA. The new space includes both a large conference room and private offices. The additional workspace will allow Produce Pro Software to conduct on-site customer meetings and training sessions. The LA office staff will continue to be available to work at customer locations from their new office location.



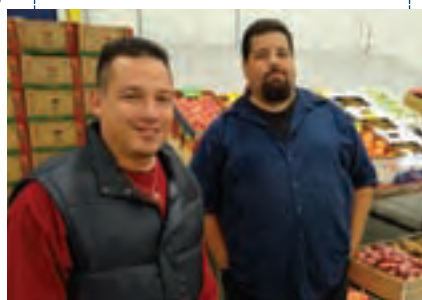
MANN PACKING TO PARTICIPATE IN ROCK 'N' ROLL MARATHON SERIES

Mann Packing Co. Inc., Salinas, CA, is teaming up with the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon Series® to feature its award-winning Stringless Sugar Snap Peas at two major race events this fall in Virginia Beach, VA, and San Antonio, TX. The Series is the world's largest running series and a charity fundraising event that raised more than \$256 million in 2011. In addition to Sugar Snap Pea sampling, Mann will distribute future-purchase coupons to more than 35,000 attendees, and conduct grassroots marketing about the benefits of Mann's product line.



PHILLY PRODUCE LLC OPENS ON PHILADELPHIA WHOLESALE PRODUCE MARKET

A new wholesale produce distributor, Philly Produce LLC, has opened on the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market. Philly Produce offers a full line of fresh fruits and vegetables, with a specialty in tropical products. This includes diverse pre-cut fruits and vegetables, which are shipped fresh daily. Philly Produce is staffed by salesmen Jim Canterino and Jose "Blue" Flores (below). The firm is a subsidiary of Wuhl Shafman Lieberman Corp., based in Newark, NJ.



BARD VALLEY MEDJOOL DATE GROWERS EXPECT 30 PERCENT CROP INCREASE

The Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers Association (BVMDGA), Bard Valley, CA, is projecting a near 30 percent crop increase for the 2012/2013 season, with total production as high as 15 million pounds, up from 11 million pounds this year. To accommodate the larger crop, Datepac, owned by BVMDGA members, installed additional new, state-of-the-art conditioning rooms at its headquarters and packing plant in Yuma, AZ, earlier this year. The new controlled-environment facilities significantly boost the company's annual Medjool date conditioning and production capacity.



MISIONERO ANNOUNCES NEW CARTON DESIGN

Misionero Vegetables, Gonzales, CA, has a new carton design. The design marks a new direction for



Misionero as it aligns its corporate Misionero brand with its Earth Greens Organics and Garden Life™ brands. Each branded carton is now represented by a color block. The Misionero-branded carton, used for foodservice items, has a green color that ties into its corporate logo. Each Earth Greens Organics carton can be identified by red and the Garden Life conventional carton is black.

ZESPRI LAUNCHES

KIWIFRUIT FOR KIDS 2012

ZESPRI Kiwifruit, one of the world's largest kiwifruit marketers, has announced its second annual *Kiwifruit for Kids* campaign. The campaign, which enjoyed huge success last year, has chosen six children's health charities to represent the six regions of the United States to help raise awareness for childhood obesity including Treeswing, Chicago Run, I Can Foundation, Play Rugby USA, Louie's Kids, and Live Well Colorado. Each charity's mission is aligned with ZESPRI's Kiwifruit for Kids campaign objective: to educate America's youth on how to eat well and live active lifestyles.



2011 MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS

- The Avocado Producers And Exporting Packers Association of Michoacan (APEAM)
- California Avocado Commission
- Columbia Marketing International Corp.
- Concord Foods
- Crunch Pac
- Idaho Potato Commission
- National Mango Board
- Network for a Healthy California/
Harvest of the Month
- Ocean Mist Farms
- Sage Fruit Co.
- Stemilt Growers LLC
- Sunkist Growers
- Sunlight International
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- Vidalia Onion Committee

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Right now, and on through June 7, 2013, we're taking entries for the **25th Annual Marketing Excellence Awards Program**, presented by **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. The awards recognize excellence in marketing in each of six categories: retailers, restaurants, wholesalers, shippers, commodity organizations and allied service/product providers. Print, broadcast and other media are eligible to win.

To participate, send us the following for each entry:

1. Your name, company, address and phone.

2. Type of business.

3. Names and dates of promotion (must have taken place between June 1, 2012 and June 1, 2013).

4. Promotion objectives.

5. Description of promotion.

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

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

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

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Deadline for entries is June 7, 2013

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Putting Mango Recall Into Perspective

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 09.20.2012

Our piece, *Without Clear Proof, Industry Suffers From Mango Recall And Is Left To Defend Itself*, featured a letter from Dave Westendorf of Bay Area Produce, in San Clemente, California. He is trying very hard to look at the Splendid mango situation and find solutions that might help the industry in the future. He was kind enough to share his thoughts with us once more:

Thank you very much for publishing my letter regarding the Splendid mango recall and for your thoughtful response. I have had many people call or email their thoughts, and I'm coming away with several observations:

1. Given the fact that foodborne illnesses are extremely hard to trace and that our food safety agencies' main responsibilities lie in protecting the public, some insurance mechanism must be made available to companies like Splendid to cover their losses resulting from a recall. Product liability insurance is readily available, yet in most, if not all situations, it does not cover the expense of actually taking the product out of the supply chain. Perhaps United Fresh or Western Growers could underwrite such policies. While I'm not a fan of expanding our government, how about some mechanism through PACA? After all, the USDA subsidizes crop insurance for farmers. Why not recall insurance for produce distributors?

2. Health agencies should not be allowed to publicly implicate a specific grower's product without definitive proof of contamination. Nothing more than a general warning should be issued, and even then, other possibilities should be thoroughly researched and eliminated before a product is implicated. Early in this investigation, a California health official told me that California was only following Canada's lead and could not tie the California outbreak to any specific mango label. Who is to say that the 125 people who were infected with Salmonella Braenderup consumed it in a mango salsa containing items like green onions, cilantro, chili peppers, or orange juice? After all, those who will remember the salmonella Saintpaul tomato contamination will recall that tomatoes were never the carrier, and the ultimate source was eventually proven to be chili peppers. The collateral damage done to the tomato industry was incalculable, yet tomatoes were never the culprit. Perhaps the same thing will be proven in the mango situation, albeit a little too late for Splendid's sake.

3. Sad as it may be, Splendid might not be facing the losses that they are currently incurring if they had not issued a "voluntary" recall and had waited until a recall was mandated by one of the state or federal health agencies. Splendid did the morally right thing, but will pay dearly for its integrity and moral code. Some other mango shippers have proudly announced that their product is not contaminated and therefore will not be recalled. Splendid could have also pointed to every independent analysis of their product to date and said the same thing. Companies need to think twice about issuing a voluntary recall unless their product is specifically proven to be contaminated with the suspect bacteria.

4. All companies involved in the distribution of fresh produce need to look at their individual business models to determine where changes need to be made to protect themselves from a Splendid Products-type of situation. Grower and retail supply contracts need to be modified to account for recall liability and placing it where it belongs, at the proven source of contamination whether that be the grower, distributor, wholesaler, purveyor, or retail level.

5. In discussing this recall situation about Splendid, a shipper friend of mine suggested that perhaps there should be a protocol implemented by the FDA/CDC whereby when a product like mangos or tomatoes is suspected in a salmonella/listeria/etc., contamination that a "stop sell" order be issued where one or more shipper/grower(s) who "may be" a source of the contamination would quit selling, advise their customers to also quit and hold the product until testing can confirm or deny contamination. When the contamination or lack thereof, becomes certain, then either sales could resume, or a recall notice would be implemented.

I appreciate the work that the health agencies do, however when a contamination source is not verified and a shipper/grower is forced into a "voluntary" recall, he suffers serious financial penalties through possibly no fault of his own. If no contamination is ultimately proven, or another source is found, the shipper/grower is left holding the bag with no recourse against the government agency that falsely accused him of handling contaminated product.

I'm sure we haven't seen the end of this saga, but hopefully lessons will be learned and some good things might come from it.

— Dave Westendorf, Bay Area Produce, San Clemente, CA

We certainly feel the angst that Dave is expressing and appreciate his efforts to think through to a solution. We think he raises points well worth thinking about:

1) Insurance On Recalls

The need for this is obvious, and efforts have been made to get private companies to do this and to see if the government would get involved. Recall insurance is sold. But in many cases, it is inadequate — covering expenses such as stamps to mail out recall notices but not fees charged by retailers to remove product from the shelves — or triggered by events, say the finding of a pathogen on a product that often don't apply. Since recall insurance is often not triggered by a recall, but by a condition such as the finding of a pathogen, recall insurance, even when one has it, often won't pay.

It is a tough thing to make happen. From a public policy point of view, what you don't want to do is create a situation where companies want to wait for a government-ordered recall. Yet, if you don't do that, then you are insuring against a "choice" that a company makes, and this creates the fear that if the cost of recalls can be shifted to a third party, there will be a lot more recalls.

For that matter, even if such insurance only worked in the event of a government-ordered recall, what constrains the government from ordering recalls but aggressive efforts by the companies

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luscious and that is Roma
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Greenhouse Grown

Inspiration Meet Equivocal Without
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Sweetly Sweet Campan Delectable TOV
Heavenly Villagio Marzano luscious Roma

implicated to prove the recall unjustified and the knowledge of government officials that their acts can crush companies and cost jobs. If these were no longer concerns, government officials might well order many more recalls and companies might well acquiesce. Also many of these costs are retail dictates; as it is, many shippers think them excessive. Well, what would hold down these costs if retailers knew an insurance company was going to pay them?

On the government side, the thought is that one who suffers from bad weather is blameless. So flood insurance or insurance against crop failures is acceptable. Neither the government nor the citizenry are at the point of yet saying that pathogen distribution is also without blame. Correctly or incorrectly, officials look at situations such as the Jensen Farms cantaloupe matter and see the producer at fault. They don't want to subsidize his recalls; they want to make a recall as threatening as possible to his business so he will be incented to do everything possible to avoid a business-threatening disaster such as a recall.

2) Ban On Implicating Specific Grower Without Proof

Here the industry needs to be careful about what it wishes for — it just might get it. The primary goal of public health authorities is to minimize illness among the population. If it believes a foodborne pathogen is threatening the population, the public health authorities will, of course, want to warn the population. So the question then becomes: Should the FDA make a general warning — “Don't eat spinach” — or a specific warning — “Don't eat a specific brand or lot.”

There is little question that the interests of the industry lie in making the announcements as specific as possible. This was the lesson of the spinach crisis and, during the salmonella Saintpaul crisis, the big effort was to continuously get the FDA to limit its area of interest.

There exists some question as to the effectiveness of this. During the Jensen farms cantaloupe incident, sales collapsed for cantaloupe in general, despite the FDA being very specific in its announcements. Still, it seems logical that more limited announcements are better for the industry than broader announcements. Indeed the entire Produce Traceability Initiative was founded in this belief.

If anything, the goal should be that instead of implicating Splendid, we could define a series of lot numbers that meaningfully distinguish between lots and

Other than not having pathogens to begin with, the ability to identify breaking points in production or processing so that we can say that lots differ meaningfully is probably the best way to limit the impact of recalls.

just recall those lots. We have addressed the issue of before. The problem is that if lot numbers simply signify some quantity run on a belt, they are meaningless for food safety purposes. We need to know that lot 100 is differentiated from lot 99 and lot 101 by some procedure of significance to food safety — say a sanitization of the line. Otherwise, being able to identify problems with specific lots is of little value. It is significant that when Splendid Products issued its recall, it did not list specific lot numbers, just PLU numbers. In fact, it is not clear why it listed PLU numbers at all since they are not specific to the mangos being recalled.

Other than not having pathogens to begin with, the ability to identify breaking points in production or processing so that we can say that lots differ meaningfully is probably the best way to limit the impact of recalls.

3) Limiting Voluntary Recalls

From a business perspective, delaying might well save money — although only at the season end or if the lots are meaningful and one can say that the new product is definitively not contaminated.

If the season is ongoing and the lots not meaningful, one would just have to recall the presently available product.

Of course, if there is a real risk, then failing to recall could have financial consequences when one gets sued because someone dies. It could have reputational consequences if retailers think you are the company that won't do the right thing.

4) Supply Contract Modification

There is little question that everyone should review their business and consider what would happen in the event of a food safety problem. Although having liability placed at “the proven source of contamination” sounds like a great idea — in the vast majority of cases the cause of contamination is never “proven” — plus such clauses would likely lead to endless litigation as people tried to get a court to declare who was at fault. Plus, perhaps fault is sometimes shared. A pathogen is always unacceptable but may have less impact if the cold chain is always perfectly maintained. A farm may be the “cause,” but the washing

facility may have failed to remove it.

Besides, most vendors have little choice but to sign what customers demand and then pray they don't get called on to have to execute.

5) “Stop Sell” Orders

It is an interesting idea, but testing cannot confirm or deny the existence of a pathogen on a wide basis. Otherwise, every shipper could do test and hold, and we would never have a food safety outbreak. We dealt with this issue in an interview titled *A Closer Look At Finished Product Testing*.

The problem is that pathogen contamination is often seemingly random. It is too expensive to do statistically significant testing — and even statistically significant testing is no protection against Black Swan events.

This is all beside the point that logistically, doing such testing in thousands of stores, warehouses etc., would be difficult and unfair to consumers and trade buyers who would be left losing shelf-life and providing warehousing while waiting for results.

Over the years, we have felt that many things could be done to make it less likely that government would cause damage, include crushing businesses and loss of jobs by erroneously fingering particular businesses or commodities. We also thought that steps could be taken to reduce the impact of even correct advice.

For example, government epidemiologists could have to submit their case before a panel of independent epidemiologists for a review, and be required to publicly sign such recall orders so their reputation is on the line.

Instead of declaring that there is a risk and a recall is required, or declaring a recommendation not to consume, any risk could be put in perspective. If the FDA was to announce that there is a .00056 percent chance that one's fruit or vegetable is contaminated with a pathogen, and a .000021 percent chance one might get ill from eating this crop, consumers might view such announcements in perspective.

Many thanks to Dave for trying to think through a better way.

One instance where you really
should think inside the box.



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Athletes Benefit From Bananas

BY DAVID C. NIEMAN, DRPH, FACSM, DIRECTOR, HUMAN PERFORMANCE LAB, NORTH CAROLINA RESEARCH CAMPUS; PROFESSOR, APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY (BOONE, NC).

A newly published study in the prestigious journal, *PLoS ONE* [a peer-reviewed, open-access online resource reporting scientific studies from all disciplines], confirms that bananas are an effective and healthy energy source for athletes. My research group from the Kannapolis-based Appalachian State University Human Performance Laboratory at the North Carolina Research Campus used a new technology called metabolomics and

27 grams of carbohydrate (half as sugars), 105 calories and is a good source of potassium and vitamin B6. Potassium is an important electrolyte during exercise, and the sugars in bananas are a mixture of glucose, fructose and sucrose, similar to what is found in sports drinks. The glycemic index of bananas is 51 (low-to-medium rating), meaning the sugars in a banana are not released too fast or too slow, an important potential benefit for the exercising athlete. The antioxidant value of bananas is higher than most athletes perceive, and is equal to levels found in kiwi fruit and orange juice. Thus, as hypothesized, bananas appear to be a unique mixture of carbohydrates, nutrients and antioxidants that may provide good nutrition support during prolonged and intensive exercise.

Trained cyclists from the Charlotte, NC, metropolitan area were recruited and agreed to engage in two 75-kilometer cycling race trials in the Human Performance Lab. In randomized order, cyclists either ingested specified quantities of a sports drink or bananas. Results from this study support the perception of athletes that bananas are a healthy alternative to sports drinks. We had trained cyclists race 75 kilometers on their bicycles on CompuTrainers (RacerMate, Seattle, WA) in the lab. In randomized order, subjects exercised once while drinking about one cup of sports beverage every 15 minutes or a second time while consuming one-half banana every 15 minutes with water. An in-depth metabolomics analysis of blood samples obtained from the athletes showed that bananas provided all of the fuel needed for intense exercise, and equaled the rate of the sports drink.

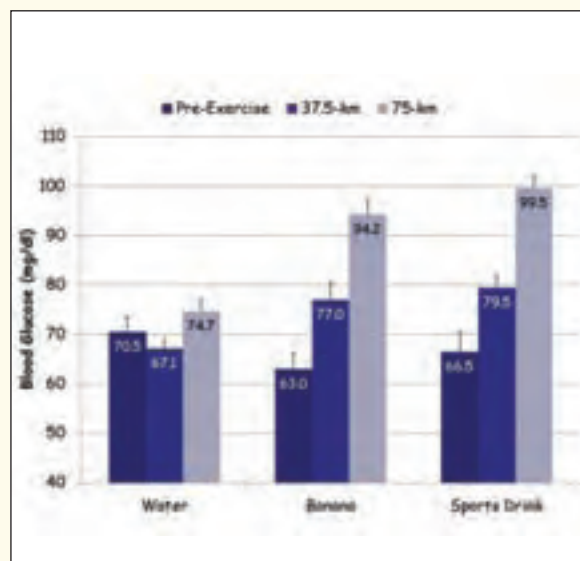


CHART COURTESY OF APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY HUMAN PERFORMANCE LABORATORY

The data from this study supports the growing trend of athletes to use fresh and dried fruit as substitutes for sugar-laden sports drinks.

showed that bananas provided fuel to the working muscles just as well as a popular sports drink. Metabolomics using mass spectrometry-based techniques to measure the shift in hundreds of metabolites, or small molecules in the body that occur in response to nutrition and exercise interventions.

Bananas are common at road race events because they are a cost-effective energy source for athletes, and contain high amounts of the sweat electrolyte potassium. A direct comparison of bananas with sports drinks as a fuel source during exercise had not yet been investigated. In the *PLoS ONE* publication, we theorized that bananas offered several unique advantages for athletes. One medium banana contains about

The typical increase in inflammation and oxidative stress following intense exercise was attenuated to a similar degree by bananas and the sports drink, significantly below levels experienced when just water was consumed. Bananas also provided added nutritional benefits including a boost in antioxidant capacity, and significant potassium and vitamin B6.

We concluded that ingestion of bananas before and during prolonged and intensive exercise is an effective strategy, both in terms of fuel substrate utilization and cost, for supporting performance. Most athletes are health-conscious, and try to consume nutrient-dense diets to support their heavy training. The data from this study supports the growing trend of athletes to use fresh and dried fruit as substitutes for sugar-laden sports drinks. We are currently conducting similar studies using watermelon slurry, a blended fruit and vegetable juice, and selected flavonoids from blueberries and green tea to determine their efficacy in helping the athlete meet the physiologic demands of prolonged and intensive exercise.



The Human Performance Laboratory at Appalachian State University in Kannapolis, NC, investigates the influence of unique plant molecules on age-related loss of muscle mass, muscle mitochondrial biogenesis, and exercise-induced changes in immune function, oxidative stress, and inflammation.

Marketing Push Needed

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

The question of how produce ought to be promoted continues to vex the industry. The effort to launch a national generic promotion program, similar to those for beef, milk and other industries, collapsed due to little enthusiasm by those who were expected to pay the bill. The Produce for Better Health Foundation, which led the national *5-a-Day* campaign and now heralds the *Fruits & Veggies: More Matters* campaign, certainly has earned leadership, but there is just not a lot of evidence that broad-based health marketing on this scale boosts produce consumption.

One way of addressing this dilemma is to move away from health-based marketing. We championed this position in the July, 2012 issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS* when we wrote a column titled *Two Cheers For Bacon*.

Another approach is to identify the health benefits of specific produce items or the health benefits of use under specific circumstances and promote in a more focused manner. As we have written before, the key point to keep in mind is that it is impossible to increase produce consumption generally unless we increase the consumption of specific produce items at specific times of the day and in specific places.

This research is intriguing because it points to that type of opportunity for bananas. What's more, the opportunity identified — having runners consume bananas instead of commercial sports drinks — is associated with a healthy activity, running. This means that succeeding in boosting banana consumption at athletic events would not only have specific effects but, also, would provide a kind of halo effect on bananas that would probably translate into higher consumption at different times and in other places.

The opportunity is one in which sharp marketers always seek out. In 1916, Nathan and Ida Handwerker launched a hot dog stand on Surf and Stillwell Avenue in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn. In those days, before the establishment of many food safety regulations, hot dogs — with the uncertainty of what was actually put in them — were particularly suspect. The bril-

liant marketing idea was to go to the nearby hospital and offer the residents, interns and doctors free food and drinks on one condition — they had to wear their white doctor's coats to the hot dog stand. The doctors thought it was a form of ID — to prove they were entitled to the promotion — but it was actually a brilliant form of marketing to associate Nathan's hot dogs with people who the public identified as experts in health. If it was good enough for all these doctors, well, then, surely it was good enough for me. Thus was born Nathan's Famous, now a New York institution.

Similarly, the win here is not just an opportunity to sell bananas to athletes, but also to associate bananas more closely with healthful activity and healthy people.

All over the country, in athletic events ranging from peewee soccer to professional sports, athletes consume massive amounts of sports drinks, such as Gatorade and Powerade. This research is saying they could just as well go for a banana. The research holds the prospect that the same is true for other fruits.

What really drives this? It is hard to believe that a few electrolytes are so inherently valuable that athletes at all levels flock to the products because they enhance their athletic performance and recovery after athletic work. When you really look at the subject, it seems that water is the best source for hydration, and the trick with sports drinks is that the typical sweet/tart flavor doesn't quench thirst and so people keep drinking after they would have stopped with water.

This points to a need for further research. It may be true that bananas, when consumed in set quantities at set times, have benefits that equal or exceed sports drinks. What is uncertain is whether athletes, free to choose what and when to eat and drink, would in fact choose to eat bananas on such a schedule where these benefits would be realized.

Gatorade was developed on the football field at the University of Florida, so perhaps there are real benefits for athletes working at that intensity level. Of course, if the benefit of sports drinks is actually quite modest, what

The win here is not just an opportunity to sell bananas to athletes but also to associate bananas more closely with healthful activity and healthy people.

accounts for their wild success? Well, sports drinks have a legitimate story on hydration and electrolytes, and they have the flavor profile that increases the propensity to stay hydrated.

It is, however, a fairly modest story. Of course, Gatorade alone — just one brand — spends around \$200 million a year on advertising. It is everywhere, from product placement in video games to the Super Bowl and, most important, Gatorade has a large number of endorsers of the highest caliber including Peyton Manning, Serena Williams, Michael Jordan, Dwyane Wade and Misty May-Treanor, among many others. This points to the big draw for Gatorade — it is not the electrolytes; it is the wish fulfillment.

Perhaps this is the biggest issue for the produce industry. There are many studies showing lots of benefits to consumption of different items. Marketing takes that kernel of a benefit and turns it into a dream that one can relate to. Bananas need a marketing push so that peewee athletes don't just think that bananas are good for them. They should think that if they eat bananas, they will be the next Michael Jordan. If we don't focus on that, studies about the benefits of eating one thing or another in one circumstance or another are likely to have only modest effects on consumption.



Produce Finds A Home In NON-TRADITIONAL OUTLETS

From convenience stores and gas stations to drug stores and vending machines, produce is popping up in a number of novel places. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

No longer is fresh produce retailed predominantly in supermarkets. Drug stores, convenience stores and vending machines are among the newest frontiers. In fact, the ardent hunger with which Americans are avidly buying their fresh fruits and vegetables from these non-traditional formats has become what one industry analyst has called a “10-year overnight success.”

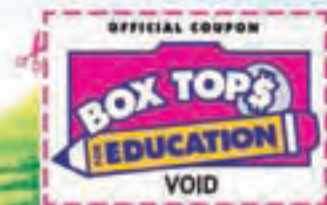
Why? The demand for fresh produce and healthy alternatives for meal-making and snacking is growing. According to July 16, 2012-released research by Mintel, a Chicago, IL-based market research company, over two-thirds (67 percent) of Americans of all ages are actively seeking healthier foods.

When it comes to health and wellness, social consciousness isn't the only motivator for companies to add a highly perishable product like fresh produce to their mix, especially one that requires investment in sourcing, distribution, marketing and merchandising much different from the non-perishable products typi-

cally sold in these outlets. Sam Magari, produce manager/buyer for Nice N Easy Grocery Shoppes, a 78-unit convenience store chain based in Canastota, NY, acknowledges, “There are many advantages to carrying fresh produce. First, it generates sales and profit dollars. Second, our customers have come to depend on us for certain items, whether it is a banana, an apple or a fruit cup for snack, a cucumber, tomatoes and a head of lettuce for dinner. Third, it helps to generate more traffic in the stores.”

Non-traditional retailers are indeed picking up on produce rather than other products because fresh fruits and vegetables are staple, affordable, high-impulse items that can make up for lost profits in other areas. Robert Hoefs, a former produce category manager at Safeway and the current marketing director for fresh foods at Core-Mark International Inc., a South San Francisco, CA-based broadline distributor whose clients include drug and convenience stores, says, “The lines between grocery, convenience and drug channels are blurring. Drug retailers are challenged by competition

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from online pharmacies while convenience stores are facing reduced fuel margins and declining cigarette sales. To compensate, they are adding sandwiches, salads, juices, cut fruit and fresh desserts.”

“For others,” adds Jeff Lenard, vice president of industry advocacy for the National Association for Convenience & Fuel Retailing (NACS), which represents the 148,000-plus stores across the country, “fresh produce is a way to differentiate themselves.”

A good example of this is Kwik Trip Inc., a 425-unit convenience store chain based in La Crosse, WI. John McHugh, manager of corporate communications, says, “We surveyed a representative sample of 5 million of our customers to find out for what they knew us best. The answer was bananas. We sell some 850,000 pounds of bananas per week 52-weeks a year at 38-cents per pound.”

Non-traditional retailers are also filling a niche where fresh produce wasn't previously available for sale. Magari explains, “In some locations, we're the closest thing to a grocery store for miles, and customers have asked for more variety to meet their requirements. Twenty-six of our stores have an expanded line of fresh produce.”

Similarly, Deerfield, IL-based Walgreens, the largest drug retailing chain in the United States with over 8,300 stores nationwide, has hundreds of stores throughout the Chicago area, many of which are located in communities that qualify as “food deserts.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF KWIK TRIP INC.

Kwik Trip sells 850,000 pounds of bananas weekly.

As a result of talks with former Chicago mayor Richard Daley about how to provide these residents with access to healthy food options at affordable prices, in August, 2010, Walgreens began to offer to 750 new food items including fresh fruits and vegetables in 10 redesigned stores on Chicago's South and West sides.

Jim Jensen, Walgreen's divisional merchandise manager, reports, “Since that time, our company has pledged to convert or open 1,000 ‘food oasis’ stores in designated food desert neighborhoods in conjunction with First Lady Michelle Obama and the Partnership for a Healthier America. Here, customers will find convenient and healthy food options such as quick, simple breakfast items for on-the-go shoppers, ready-to-eat lunch options, and quick and easy-to-heat/cook meals to grab for dinner.”

Schools, hospitals, office buildings, gyms, health clubs and similar locations with captive audiences might not sound like food deserts in the traditional sense, yet the ability to find a fresh produce snack in these environs can be limited. That is where vending comes in. Sean Kelly, CEO at HUMAN Healthy Vending, headquartered in Culver City, CA, explains, “Cost isn't the reason why people don't choose healthy snacks such as fresh produce; it's convenience. We look at vending as the epitome of convenience. So far, it's resonating with our customers, although bringing produce to the people has been more of a marathon than a sprint. We currently have 1,500 vending machines, a 200 percent increase over the year before, and plan to place 10,000 machines by 2015.”

Beyond Bananas

Fresh produce's foray into non-traditional retail formats may have started with a bunch of bananas on the counter next to the cash register. Yet the assortment today has gone far beyond this best-selling fruit. In one direction, there's been a proliferation of single-serve. Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce North America Inc., headquartered in Coral Gables, FL, which supplies fresh and fresh-cut produce in channels such as foodservice, cafeterias, vending machines, convenience stores and gas stations, says, “The items that are most successful are those with the longest shelf-life and products that are available in single-serving sizes.”

The core produce assortment at

Fit Pick Identifies Healthful Vending Fare

NOT ALL SELECTIONS in vending machines are created equal as far as good nutrition is concerned. In an effort to help stem the rising tide of obesity in America, in 2008, the Chicago, IL-based National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA) created Fit Pick, a nutrition rating program designed to educate consumers about better-for-you choices in vending machines. Jackie Clark, NAMA director of public relations, explains, “We worked with a Registered Dietitian to set nutrition standards of 35 percent fat, 10 percent saturated fat and 35 percent sugar by weight. Then, we canvassed a number of manufacturers' product lines, identified the products that fit this criteria and created a list. These products are then identified to vending customers with a Fit Pick-logo sticker on the tray of that item.”

Produce items on this list include Del Monte Fruit Cups, Dole Fruit Bowls and a number of dried fruit and nut products. Operators enrolled in the Fit Pick program can choose as many of these items as they want — five, 20 or the whole machine. This allows operators to vary the mix, choosing more or less of healthful products based on their customer demographic.

The success of the program is evident. Currently, Fit Pick is used by 175 government organizations including all branches of the military, 105 school systems, 247 work sites and 573 vending companies. **pb**

Walgreens is centered on single-serve fruits such as bananas, apples and oranges and vegetables, as well as chilled produce, including ready-made salads and fruit cups, says Jensen. “Our expanded product assortment has successfully resonated with customers as the frequency of their trips has increased to meet demand for on-the-go consumption and fill-in trips for those “what's-for-dinner-tonight” moments. Currently, you can find our fresh assortment in select stores in Chicago, Indianapolis, New York, and San Francisco.”

Fresh-cut fruit cups are a favorite at Kwik Trip, says produce buyer, Dale Gruntzel. “We stock at least seven different types. One of the best sellers is a combination of straw-



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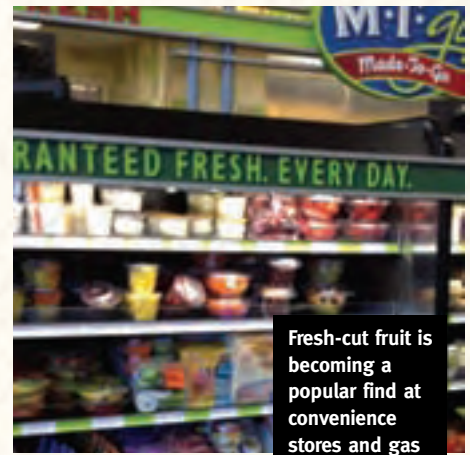
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berries, blueberries and kiwifruit.”

According to Dan Negroni, president and CEO of San Diego, CA-based Fresh Healthy Vending, which operates 2,000 machines placed in all U.S. states plus Puerto Rico and the Bahamas, it is single-serve sliced apples, baby carrots with ranch dip and yogurt parfaits with blueberries and strawberries that are popular vending items. “Packaging is important,” he adds. “It needs to be something that can fit in a sleeve, although we do have

the ability to sell whole pieces of produce like apples, oranges and bananas in our machines.”

Gil Sanchez, founder and CEO of Annapolis, MD-headquartered Vend Natural Inc., which has placed more than 600 of its refrigerated vending machines in 22 states, says, “Five years ago, we could find barely enough packaged and single-serve produce to fill the machines. That’s easier now and sales of fruit alone are growing at over 10 percent annually. We’re moving as fast as



Fresh-cut fruit is becoming a popular find at convenience stores and gas stations.

produce suppliers are willing to create single-serve products.”

Top sellers in vending for Ready Pac Foods Inc., an Irwindale, CA-based processor of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables that supplies a variety of alternative channels, are Ready Pac Bistro bowl salads, Salad Singles, Ready Snax snack packs and fresh-cut fruit cups. Tristan Simpson, director of marketing, explains, “All items are packaged for convenience, and have the shelf-life needed to be successful in alternative formats. In addition, our product offerings are conducive to all day parts, allowing consumers to eat healthfully throughout the day.”

Beyond fresh-cut packaged product, whole pieces of fruit are a popular offering at Latitudes, a Rio Rancho, NM, single-store concept that owner and president, Ron Brown, calls a cross between an upscale version of Fresh & Easy and Whole Foods Bistro with 24 gas pumps. “We have a scale in the deli, but not up by the cash register, so we decided to sell fruit like apples, plums and peaches by the each,” he says. “We quickly found out that to sell this way, we had to buy the biggest pieces of fruit available in order for customers to feel like they were getting a value.”

In the opposite direction, the desire to offer customers even more staples led Kwik Trip to branch out from bananas and sell Wisconsin potatoes and onions. Then, since Gruntzel was already sourcing tomatoes for the sandwich-making staff to slice for the condiment bar, he started bringing in extra to merchandise whole next to the potatoes and onions. “Today, we carry more than 50 different items throughout the year, and over 35 items on a daily basis such as red cherries, peaches, nectarines, six different varieties of apples, pears, oranges, baby carrots, lemon and limes, mini sweet

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“We surveyed a representative sample of 5 million of our customers to find out for what they knew us best. The answer was bananas. We sell some 850,000 pounds of bananas per week 52-weeks a year at 38-cents per pound.” — JOHN MCHUGH, KWIK TRIP INC.

peppers, strawberries and blueberries,” says Gruntzel. “I’m always looking for something new. We just added 12-oz. packages of fresh green beans and 8-oz. packages of sugar snap peas.”

Like Kwik Trip, Papa’s Healthy Food & Fuel, a one-store operation located in East Otis, MA, in the heart of the Berkshire Mountains, has gradually added to and expanded its produce selections in both normal and novel ways. Rowena Sullivan, manager, shares, “We started with staples like onions and potatoes. Now we carry more than 50 items and just added Olivia’s organic spring mix and avocados this year. We’ll stock up on Fridays for the weekend vacationers. Weekends are also when we host a local farmer’s market outside. From May through October, there

will be up to eight farmers at once depending on what’s in season. We use these same farmers to supply us through the week with items like corn, blueberries, strawberries and peaches.”

Going To The Source

“The sourcing of fresh produce for these alternative formats is really a mixed bag,” says Don Goodwin, founder and president of Golden Sun Marketing, in Minnetrista, MN. “I think a lot of it is being managed by independent wholesalers. As these formats grow and gain scale, they will seek more competitive, lower cost goods.”

Purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables to sell through vending machines can be as simple as a trip to the supermarket, says Fresh Healthy Vending’s Negroni. “Each local



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRESH HEALTH VENDING

There are currently more than 1,500 HUMAN Healthy vending machines with plans to place 10,000 more by 2015.

operator typically has 10 to 15 machines and will buy their produce at stores like Costco. Fresh produce typically represents only about 10 percent of vending sales, so it’s not a large quantity,” he says.

HUMAN Healthy Vending’s Kelly agrees. “We control what goes into our machines from the top and give operators over 1,000 food and drink products from which to choose. We do encourage sourcing as

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locally as possible, what we call the Farm to Vending movement. For some operators, this means local farmers, for others a local produce distributor and for still others, it's shopping at Wegmans and selling the item in vending at a 40 to 50 percent gross margin."

Convenience stores that have a foodservice operation already source items like lettuce, tomato and onions and will use these same suppliers to expand variety and volume for retail sale. Drug stores like Walgreens also partner with a variety of respected industry suppliers to source high quality produce, says the company's Jensen. "We work with our suppliers to source locally where and when possible and continually focus on seasonal relevancy, packing efficiency and product quality."

Camp Hill, PA-based Rite-Aid Corp., the largest drug retailer on the East Coast with 4,700-plus locations, entered into a licensing agreement in 2010 with Save-A-Lot, a subsidiary of Eden Prairie, MN-based Supervalu, to add the discount, limited-assortment grocery store concept to 10 existing Rite Aid stores in the Greenville, SC, market, thus providing its pharmacy shoppers with high-quality groceries at up to 40 percent less in cost than traditional grocers. Eric Harkreader, public relations specialist for Rite-Aid, details, "In these 10 stores, fresh produce is primarily staple items such as bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, squash/zucchini, apples and oranges."

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Kwik Trip buys its own bananas direct from companies such as Chiquita, Del Monte or Dole. "They come from Guatemala to Galveston where we bring them to our ripening facility in La Cross, WI," explains Gruntzel. "We have eight ripening rooms that hold 2,016 boxes per room. We deliver bananas to our stores seven days a week, 365 days a year, within 12 hours or less. They are displayed on the top two rows of a large end-cap display in a two-color program, some ready to eat today and others in a couple of days for the convenience of our shoppers. We'll also display them by the cash registers. Vertical integration is key to making this work," he details.

Solving The Perishability Puzzle

The conventional mindset in retail venues such as convenience and drug stores that handle non-perishable product is to get as much as possible on a truck, assuring less frequent deliveries, and thus,

a more profitable operation. This model certainly doesn't work with fresh produce that has perishability and shelf-life issues. Nice N Easy has solved this problem by depending on produce wholesalers and distributors in its marketing area to source, purchase and distribute produce to its stores as the chain does not have its own distribution center. Magari explains, "We provide them the list of items we want to carry — at times we request certain labels — and given the time of year, purchase produce from local growers. Our stores

Produce On Wheels

ON A SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON, three school children were waiting in line at the neighborhood ice cream truck. Less than a playground away, 20 students, with another 10 times this amount on their way, were eager to get in the doors of the Fresh Moves Produce Market, a mobile fresh fruit and vegetable store built in a converted Chicago Transit Authority bus. Dara Cooper, senior project manager at Fresh Moves, says, "We partner with farmers and produce wholesalers to get organic and affordable fresh produce. We stock the bus each morning on Tuesday through Friday and display up to 50 different types of fruits and vegetables such as snack fruit like grapes, apples and bananas and meal ingredients like kale and Swiss chard in specially designed baskets that hold the produce securely while the bus is moving. We don't have refrigeration, but we do have coolers for items like greens, plus we keep the bus at 65 degrees."

Customers, who number 400 to 500 in three neighborhoods on Chicago's South side, walk onto the bus to make their selections and a cashier travels aboard to ring up orders, which the non-profit organizations tries to keep comparable to a conventional grocery store. The Fresh Moves team spreads the word by partnering with community-based organizations, and pulling up to venues with ready-populations such as schools and senior homes. The overall success has been great. Cooper remarks, "It's been a lot of work on many different levels, but the communities have really been welcoming. We're gradually countering the myth that healthy foods cost more and that kids don't like fruits and vegetables."

pb

“Cost isn’t the reason why people don’t choose healthy snacks such as fresh produce; it’s convenience. We look at vending as the epitome of convenience... We currently have 1,500 vending machines, a 200 percent increase over the year before, and plan to place 10,000 machines by 2015.” — SEAN KELLY, HUMAN HEALTHY VENDING

receive two to four produce deliveries a week depending on their volume.”

High frequency ordering, as well as cold chain logistics, also proved to be a challenge for Walgreens. “We knew going into this that part of our current and future success comes from our strategic planning and solutions in both of these areas,” admits Jensen. “For example, we have developed a customized cold chain distribution network that enables frequent store delivery to provide our customers with the highest quality products at affordable prices. All the fresh food items available are packaged minimally, and, when applicable, utilize display-ready containers, thereby reducing shipping waste. Since

launching the program in September, 2010, we have learned a tremendous amount, and we are continually improving on offer, value and execution.”

Another major challenge Nice N Easy faced was a lack of refrigerated equipment. “As we build new stores, island-type tables have been added and self-contained refrigerated tables or cases are being added to older stores,” says Magari. “Space has been an issue.”

Tony Freytag, director of marketing and managing member for Crunch Pak, a Cashmere, WA-based fresh-cut processor of apples, says, “Many or most have invested in coolers just like what we see at the chain level. They are smaller and hold fewer SKUs,

but are very good at maintaining the cold chain. That is crucial.” He adds, “I know there are some major distributors that, to get convenience stores to take fresh items, they purchase coolers and put them in the stores under contract.”

“Yet another challenge,” says Nice N Easy’s Magari, “was to develop a staff of trained produce coordinators. We started from scratch as produce was a new venture and it took a while. Today, our produce coordinators are responsible for receiving produce in good condition, for handling and merchandising, for checking code dates and temperatures. They are also responsible for culling any off condition produce.”

Convenience stores with foodservice operations have evolved novel ways to keep shrink low. For example, Latitudes’ Brown acknowledges, “It’s been a blessing that the bistro is attached for screw ups. Let’s just say we’ve made lots of banana bread since we opened in January,” he jokes.

Papa’s Healthy Food & Fuel’s Sullivan agrees and adds, “Waste is such a big issue. Therefore, we’ve developed recipes for almost every type of produce we carry.

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For example, we added avocados last year and they didn't sell that well. Now we also use them sliced on sandwiches."

In vending, remote monitoring is the way to assure fresh produce stays fresh. HUMAN's Kelly says, "Our operators can set perishability dates with a three-day notification and access this information remotely by Web-based wireless technology. Vending machine technology is also such that we can automatically not allow a consumer to buy something that has expired."

Marketing And Merchandising

"The addition of fresh produce isn't simply about supplementing SKUs," says Bill Bishop, chairman and president of Willard Bishop Consulting Ltd., in Barrington, IL. "When you add cut fruit or apples or bananas to the typical convenience store fare of hot dogs and pretzels, customers think about the store differently. It's a strategy designed to pursue new shopping occasions." This strategy boils down to going after a new demographic of consumers for these retailers. Until recently, most consumers wouldn't think of being able to buy fresh fruits and vegetables in a convenience store or pharmacy. Marketers are out to alter this perception in a variety of ways.

Core-Mark's Hoefs says, "It varies by retailer, but the items we offer are in-store and outside POS materials such as shelf-wobblers, ceiling danglers, window clings and pump-toppers. We also provide punch cards that offer customers a free salad once purchasing five, and promotional flyers that might feature a salad, bottle of water and banana for \$4.99. One drug retailer that had a store across from freshman dorms at a local college did a guerilla campaign where they sent out flyers to let new students and their parents know that fresh meal items and produce was available and offered a 10 percent discount with a student ID."

At Nice N Easy, Magari explains, "The marketing of fresh produce is through monthly ad plans using colorful 7x11-inch signs, having eye appealing displays, and being consistent with quality and product availability."

Walgreens utilizes traditional advertising vehicles to highlight fresh food and produce items. Jensen details, "This includes radio, television and print advertisements, as well as local flyers and coupons. Additionally, in-store sampling events have called attention to our enhanced produce selection."



PHOTO COURTESY OF NACS

“To attract the attention of health-conscious consumers who don’t normally purchase from a vending machine, colorful models have been introduced,” says Phil Masters, vice president of national accounts for the Wittern Group, a Des Moines, IA-based global leader in the vending industry. “It’s not the traditional black machines anymore. There are colorful images of healthful products on the outside and healthy product on the inside that are highly visible and delivered with an elevator system that doesn’t bruise or damage items like fresh fruits. In addition, our machines maintain product at 38 to 40 degrees, are energy-star efficient and have LED lighting to enhance the look of the product.”

The vending machines offered by HUMAN Healthy Vending have 23-inch HD Video Screens capable of displaying video ads, produce information and nutrition advice designed to catch prospective customers’ attention. The company will launch touch-screen interfaces with games and loyalty programs in early 2013. Cashless systems based on debit-like cards or even a scan of an iPhone will be the next evolution. The company’s Kelly notes, “We also require our operators to conduct educational sampling events at least once per quarter. This helps dispel consumer concerns about buying fresh foods from a vending machine.”

Finally, alternate formats are reaching out to the holy grail of supermarket shoppers — women. Latitude’s Brown explains, “We conducted focus groups when planning Latitudes and found that 85 percent of women don’t like to go into convenience stores when they get gas. Reasons for this included dirty stores, unfriendly staff, safety concerns and an undesirable product selection. So we designed the store with a

chef-staffed bistro instead of fast food; a Starbucks-like patio; an extra-large bathroom; in-store seating; uniformed employees; high-end coffee from a local roaster; fresh baked goods; and 300 to 400 square feet of fresh produce. We even had the ladies focus group help pick the color of our floor tiles. As a result,” Brown continues, “we’ve hit success with about a 50/50 ratio of male and female shoppers. Now we see soccer moms walking the aisles with their handcars.”

Beyond vending, drug and convenience stores, new formats selling fresh produce include Dollar Stores, DIY Home Improvement Stores and Mobile Trucks. “Future ways to sell fresh produce are nearly limitless,” says Lorna Christie, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association. “Beyond brick and mortar, we’re now seeing online ordering of fruits and vegetables in the Subways of Asia and Europe, and it’s even being tested in Philadelphia. **pb**

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Wholesalers pride themselves on having what their customers need, when they need it.

Wholesaler's Survival Guide: 10 Ways Produce "Middlemen" Prevail

Wholesalers thrive by emphasizing strengths and adding new services. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

In today's world of direct buying and fierce competition, wholesalers manage to survive and thrive by concentrating on what they've always done well and adding value to their services. "In the produce industry, there is an enhanced place for wholesalers to assist any size customer because of the uncertainty of supply created by weather conditions and the perishable nature of our product," says Matthew D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo Bros. of New York Inc., in the Bronx, NY. "Customers have to balance having enough but not having too much, and a wholesaler provides valuable assistance in this."

For a wholesaler, service and an ear to the customer are everything. "That's where a wholesaler survives," states Bob Corey, CEO of Corey Bros. Inc., based in Charleston, WV. "A wholesaler knows or finds out the customers' needs by making inquiry. Then we design a program not by what we want, but by what the customer needs."

Service and product availability are crucial. "Consistent service and availability

means my customers can rely on me for having what they need when they need it," says Paul Auerbach, president of Maurice A. Auerbach Inc., in Secaucus, NJ. "This allows them to make a relatively short but predictable buying decision. We always have the product, whether the market is short or not. In fact, we thrive in a tight market."

The family-run traditional produce wholesaler offers flexibility. "We offer the ability to change more quickly than big conglomerate wholesale operations," says Scott Danner, CEO of Kansas City, KS-based Liberty Fruit Co. Inc. "Independent retailers, especially, don't want to be a cookie-cutter operation. They want customers to know they have something different from the guy down the street. Flexibility is rewarded in this market and many of the big retailers are not going to market with much flexibility. This is a great time for independents to shine and wholesalers help retailers and foodservice operators to this."

"As a wholesaler, we have a range of

customers in many channels so we see fairly regular movement across all channels," says John Vena Jr., president of John Vena Inc., headquartered in Philadelphia, PA. "This allows us to maintain supplies of fresh product ready for immediate delivery to cover any gaps in customers' supply, or in some cases, to manage the inventory of an item or product line for the customer."

"I don't find being a middleman a curse, but rather a plus," states Auerbach. "In our industry, you cannot only survive but thrive if you 'get it.' You provide a service and you fill a need for both your customer and shipper base. If you're doing your job right, you're doing it for both. We want our customers to know they can count on us to do our homework and have the right product, price and delivery for them. We give them peace-of-mind when they know they can count on us."

1. Power Of A Label

Many wholesalers offer their own brands or private label. For example, D'Arrigo New York



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Indianapolis Fruit holds two annual events where both vendors and customers can benefit.

has had the Andy Boy brand for decades, and Liberty packs under Mary's Pride. "Private label differentiates a retailer from the competitor and gives us exclusivity," explains Danner. "We're mainly working with private label and our own Mary's Pride repack operation."

Auerbach packs under Auerpak, its own regional brand. "Both produce buyers as well as consumers have known our brand for many years and have come to trust it," reports Auerbach. "We do private labeling for some stores and foodservice and we do some name brand labeling. For example, we are a Northeast distributor for at least two national brand names and we pack and sell under their labels, which we've been doing for about 20 to 25 years."

Indianapolis Fruit Co., based in Indianapolis, IN, offers private label products in retail processed fruit and vegetables, organic pre-packaged products and the tomato category. "The vast majority of our business is dedicated to growing the independent retailer business," states John Cunningham, director of sales and marketing. "Our private label product line gives our customers categories and product lines that are different and unique to the larger chain retailer product lines. Because we package and produce in-house, it gives us the flexibility to expand the item selections almost immediately as products become available."

Vena has long offered private brands to its foodservice customers for several lines of custom-packed product. "In some cases we do custom packs for retailers, but these are in commodity items and would best be described as generic and not branded," says Vena.

Wholesaler brands offer a quality control link. "A loyal customer values a product if the

store is willing to put its name on it, but private label is only as good as the product," says Liberty Fruit's Danner. "If we put the retailer label on it, we ensure the product warrants it so consumers maintain confidence. If the product isn't at the highest standard — if it's just acceptable — then we won't affix the retailer label. We talk with the retailer about this and make decisions on daily basis."

2. Exclusive Relationships

Wholesalers are expanding exclusive alliances with growers. "Forging alliances with shipper brands is big right now in wholesale, but it's not a new thing," says Stefanie Katzman, executive manager for S. Katzman Produce and Katzman Berry Corp. at the Hunts Point Terminal Market, in the Bronx, NY. "Every house in the market is pretty much aligned with specific brands they carry consistently. This is for many reasons including taking care of the growers, giving the customer consistent familiar brands and inventory considerations."

"By partnering with growers and guaranteeing a mutual sale agreement, you can be more at ease that the product will be good quality, at a good price," explains Angela Bader, marketing coordinator for Testa Produce Inc., in Chicago, IL. "The more you can trust a vendor, the more likely you're going to get a great product at a reasonable price."

Vena has long enjoyed "exclusive" arrangements with key suppliers. "This allows us to develop particular labels or items in our trading area," he remarks. "It is important if a brand or product line is going to be perceived as having value and not just as a commodity.

For example, our strongest allies right now are West Pak Avocado Inc. for Hass avocados and The Greenery, our partner on much of our greenhouse product lines."

"Exclusive relationships help stabilize prices a little," adds Katzman. "Also, farmers need consistency from wholesalers. If they're only dealing with one wholesaler, the farmers can count on the wholesaler to take product, and in turn, the wholesaler counts on the farmer to supply product."

Some wholesalers are also increasing relationships with grower-partners to act as forward distributors. "If you have the space for it, forward distribution can be a terrific tool for the wholesaler," states Vena. "It deepens the relationship with a shipper, and if properly managed, allows for access to inventory that can be offered to customers without having to commit in advance to the product."

3. Promotion Expertise

Select wholesalers are building on merchandising expertise, from offering promotions to employing staff merchandisers. Liberty Fruit has nine merchandisers on staff. "Often, the independents don't want merchandising help on a day-to-day basis so we offer more select merchandising assistance," explains Danner. "Stores prefer more support with seasonal changes or demo-ing products. We just did a pluot demo, and the numbers are staggering when you compare the tonnage selling now with last year."

Indianapolis Fruit maintains an experienced merchandising staff to help with seasonal promotions and merchandising. "We have many vendor-managed programs," reports Cunningham. "In these, we merchandise, price, supply and write the promotional schedule for the entire department or specific categories within the produce department. This has been a benefit to growing our private label product lines."

Utilizing merchandising assistance from a wholesaler helps trim retail budgets. "Everybody's looking to cut cost, and having resources available from a wholesaler helps," says Danner. "Also, the family-run business is willing to do more out-of-the-box thinking and activities. We can make decisions in minutes and tailor programs to individual stores."

Corey Bros. has created special promotions to endear themselves to independent grocers. For example, The Great American Petting Zoo Supermarket Tour brings a petting zoo of up to 30 animals to the retailer location. "Attendance estimates exceeded 40,000 over the

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“If you have the space for it, forward distribution can be a terrific tool for the wholesaler. It deepens the relationship with the shipper, and if properly managed, allows for access to inventory that can be offered to customers without having to commit in advance to the product.”

— John Vena, John Vena Inc.

19-day tour in 2012,” reports Corey. “We work with media to provide coverage of the event, which is offered to specific retailers in certain areas. We also encourage the stores to add cook outs, clowns and balloons, demos and sampling, hot dog sales, and charity bake sales. This is a phenomenal promotion and customers love it.”

Corey Bros. also offers an OSO Sweet Onion campaign twice a year on a co-op ad budget created with OSO Sweet Onions. “We lay out the campaign to all our stores two months in advance including newspaper, radio, and TV,” explains Corey. “The customers know what will be coming and we pre-book mass displays to tie in with the ad plan and feature ads. There are full-color POP cards for all displays and 4-ft. full-color banners for 10-case displays or larger. Stores are included in advertising — a statewide 4-color newspaper ad. We’ve been doing this since 1990 and it has become a tradition in our marketplace.”

4. Increasing Product Lines

Most wholesalers are evolving product lines to better serve customers. “Wholesalers used to be very commodity-specific and only handled a few items,” says Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. “Over the years, customers have begun looking more for one-stop shopping and farmers have expanded their product line. This has all forced wholesalers to expand what they carry.”

Testa provides customers a wide array of product lines. “We carry fresh and frozen produce, dry goods, decorative items, appetizers, desserts and beyond,” says Bader. “Being able to provide a one-stop shop for customers has allowed us to satisfy the needs of our customers much more effectively.”

“We see more of the customer base asking the produce wholesaler to carry dairy or frozen food,” concurs Liberty Fruit’s Danner. “They’re trying to find more one-stop-shopping opportunities.”

Corey Bros. offers a fresh value-added program, pre-cut and deli salad program and floral bookings and counseling, as well as focusing on mature, flavorful products. “We make a distinction in concentrating on pre-ripened or pre-conditioned stone fruit, vine-ripened melons, pineapples and tomatoes versus greener product,” says Corey. “The taste difference is dramatic.”

Wholesalers are also increasingly offering hard-to-find products. Testa has an entire section of its warehouse reserved for these unique items. “The items come in on a daily basis and are

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always evolving,” reports Bader. “We pride ourselves on being able to offer our customers product they can’t find anywhere else.”

In the specialty produce business for almost 30 years, Vena lives and breathes hard-to-find items. “As the demand grows for the kind of items we like to handle, they become easier to source, and customers learn to use more of them,” says Vena. “This really benefits everyone in the industry as it allows our customers to match items to their own demographics. A good example is fresh herbs. We were basically alone in the market 15 years

ago with year-round supplies of high quality product. Overall consumption is certainly up, but we still carry a premium line and our sales have not dropped.”

Wholesalers may take a loss to satisfy a customer. “Customers ask for hard-to-find items and often it’s something we don’t make money on,” reports Auerbach of Auerbach. “They can’t get, but they need it and it’s important to them, so we carry it — for example, black garlic.”

Foodservice operations are looking more for specialties. “We are carrying more

specialty items for our foodservice customers,” reports Danner. “They’re trying to differentiate. We can help fill a need or change an item with greater flexibility and in shorter time frames.”

5. Economy And Efficiency

A more competitive market can play to a wholesaler’s strengths and more are offering additional transportation and logistics services. “Especially given how much freight charges have increased over the past years, logistics have made it very expensive to do multiple pickups,” explains Katzman Produce’s Katzman. “If you can’t fill up a 26-pallet truck in one or two stops, then you pay significantly extra for the truck, and that’s only if you can find a truck willing to take the order. As wholesalers, we buy in bulk, which enables us to pass the economy along to our customers. They benefit from price, selection and the logistics of putting together many items from different farms on one truck to deliver to their store.”

Cross-docking is increasing as companies look to improve efficiency and cut costs. “Cross-docking with certain companies to extend product lines for customers and standardizing split items to make it more convenient to purchase more manageable quantities are just two of many features we offer customers,” says Bader of Testa Produce.

“Liberty Fruit serves far reaching areas that other competitors or suppliers aren’t,” says the company’s Danner. “We’re increasingly helping our neighbors by cross-docking. For example, one of our larger foodservice customers used to deliver every day to a specific operation, but when they realized we’re going there six days a week, they decided to work with us to make those deliveries.”

“We continue to grow our backhaul business throughout our distribution region,” states Indianapolis’ Cunningham. “This is a current and future priority to help control costs to our retailers. Currently over 22 percent of our produce business is cross-dock — up over 13 percent in the past five years. It is very important that we continue to look for partners to help us extend our produce. Teaming with large grocery distributors has helped grow our reach to smaller retailers in the Midwest that we would not have normally been able to service.”

Local and regional delivery services are also in higher demand. “Customer service includes a lot of things, but one of the biggest in our business with the cost of fuel is delivery service,” says Katzman. “A lot of wholesale



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“Consistent service and availability means my customers can rely on me for having what they need when they need it. This allows them to make a relatively short but predictable buying decision. We always have the product, whether the market is short or not. In fact, we thrive in a tight market.”

— Paul Auerbach, Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.

companies have put on their own fleet of trucks just to service their customers.”

“Though we’ve been doing it for 20 years, we’ve been getting more and more into the delivery business recently,” reports D’Arrigo Bros’ D’Arrigo. “It is a growing service.”

Some wholesalers, such as Testa and Auerbach, have built new facilities to set them apart from the competition. “Our new facility makes us state-of-the art in food safety, packing areas, docks, and other infrastructure and puts us in a position to be a valuable trading partner to both customers and growers,” says Auerbach. “We’re able to offer a variety of services at a high level.”

“Our building is state-of-the-art based on the advanced green, sustainable technologies

incorporated into the operations of the facility,” says Bader. “Many features, including our free-standing wind turbine, solar trees, methanol fuel cells, and LED office lighting are the first of their kind, especially in the City of Chicago. Testa is the First LEED Platinum Refrigerated Foodservice facility in the nation, and that title helps us to stay ahead of the competition.”

Of course, Vena’s company benefits by being among the wholesalers sharing space on the new state-of-the-art Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market.

6. Customer And Channel Diversity

Diversifying into new channels including schools, institutions and tourism, along with

offering ripening services, is another method of expansion. “Wholesalers are always looking to expand their customer base,” says Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. “We have been selling school programs, foodservice and offering pre-ripened fruit for years now.”

“If we are to survive, we need to consider all the competition we face,” says Vena of John Vena Inc. “Fresh produce is being offered in many new ways and venues. We have no choice but to consider all kinds of new services and distribution channels. In response to this, we built ripening facilities in partnership with our avocado supplier, West Pak Avocado Inc. We are confident these facilities will allow us to deepen our customer relationships.”

New business can be developed in many areas. Corey of Corey Bros. explains, “We are positioned to back-up a chain store versus delivery to a warehouse and to service independent retail stores, independent restaurants, chain restaurants, hospitals, prisons, schools, country clubs and resort hotels.”

“We are doing more with schools now than in the past,” adds Liberty’s Danner.

7. Vital Information

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tion on a timely basis. “Communication is how buyers get the most from their wholesalers,” says Auerbach. “We try to maintain a high level of communication with our customers to let them know if weather conditions, regulations, or other factors might affect a particular item. We’re constantly monitoring these things.”

“We do all the research for customers and

keep them in the loop on what items they should go on sale with; what items are going to go up or down in supply and price; and what items are going to be good quality-wise and why,” says Katzman. “We are in direct communication all day long with our farmers. We know about production volumes today; what they’re expecting over the next couple of days; weather on the farms and

how it may affect the product, etc. We have the inside scoop.”

“We’re experts on what’s coming on, what labels to go to and what’s the right fit for a buyer,” adds D’Arrigo. “We manage vital information on crops and market supply — that’s how we tick.”

Wholesalers including Testa and Liberty offer weekly market updates to keep customers informed. “The report is full of product information, industry market changes, weather patterns, and price predictions,” says Testa’s Bader. “We also keep customers up-to-date regarding food safety recalls, quality issues, and what’s new and in season. Open communication with customers helps us let our customers know what to expect and helps our buyers better predict availability and pricing of their purchasing.”

“Liberty issues a weekly market update to every one of our customers,” reports Danner. “We help buyers understand and respond to market changes. We’re also a leader at being in front of recalls.”

Corey Bros. offers market price surveys, retail purchase summaries, and analysis to help customers understand how to better manage shrink. “We work with customers to

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maximize the produce department,” says Corey. “This includes determining best product mix for the store; the best combination of gross profit and distribution that can be achieved for the specific store/area; providing an on-going program of increased product awareness and in-store assistance to help achieve overall sales; and setting merchandising, profit and customer satisfaction goals.”

The flexibility and directness of the wholesale business may mean quicker access to information. “We can often have a quicker response and correction of an issue,” states Corey. “Service does not necessarily always mean more frequent and timely delivery, but how quickly you can react to correct a problem or find a solution.”

“One of the most valuable things we offer is accessibility to personnel,” adds Danner of Liberty Fruit. If any one of our customers wants to talk to our strawberry buyer, they have a direct link. A retailer thinking about doing strawberries in two weeks can talk directly with our buyer to find out more about what the market is going to be like then.”

“We are particularly good at alerting our

“Forging alliances with shipper brands is big right now in wholesale, but it’s not a new thing. Every house in the market is pretty much aligned with specific brands they carry consistently. This is for many reasons including taking care of the growers, giving the customer consistent familiar brands and inventory considerations.”

— Stefanie Katzman, S. Katzman Produce

customers to last minute opportunities or what some might call ‘sizzlers,’” says Vena of John Vena.

8. Making A Show

Wholesalers are also creating events where vendors and customers can benefit. Indianapolis Fruit currently holds two events a year. “Our first event in the early spring is to educate our retailers on the hottest topics for the year such as food safety, organic, locally grown sales growth and category management training,” explains Cunningham. “The second is geared to help the supplier showcase their new products to

our retailers.”

Indianapolis Fruit is also actively involved in social media and website tools. “Our newest and most exciting venture is our new consumer blog called *The Produce Mom*, which has helped educate consumers across the nation,” says Cunningham.

Additionally, wholesalers take advantage of industry shows to promote business. “PMA’s Fresh Summit has always been a great food show to link farmers, wholesalers, and retailers together,” relates Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. “For two years now, The New York Produce Show and Conference has given local wholesalers like us the ability to

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reach out even more because the show is very personal and tight-knit.”

9. Packaging And Repacking

Packaging and repackaging is a growing service for wholesalers. “With all the food safety issues, I think we’re going to see a resurgence of overwrapped product,” suggests Danner. “More overwrapped and pre-wrapped product will warrant more regional repacking to ensure the quality of the product.”

“Packaging and repacking is the wave of the future,” agrees Katzman. “Everyone is heading in that direction because it is easier for the consumer.”

However, packing and re-packing is a tricky issue. “In some areas, this type of service is limited since many market conditions prevent HACCP-certification,” explains Katzman. “Buyers want strict food safety standards for all their packaged or repackaged items.”

10. Strength In Cooperation

Wholesalers both on and off markets rely on each other for sourcing. “We sell each other, but we’re not piggybacking orders,” says Danner. “For example, if our competitor is short 50 spring mix, he’ll call us up and we’ll sell to him and the same holds true in reverse.”

Vena has long considered competitors in the Philadelphia Market as a source of inventory. “We buy all day, every day from them,” reports Vena. “It smoothes out the wrinkles in our inventory and provides a service to customers if they are short. In the past couple of years, we have developed two-way trading relationships with companies outside of the Philadelphia Market and the city itself. In cases where there is reliable transportation, we have found this to be a way to offer even more diverse lines and brands to our customers.”

Though Testa is off the terminal market, it relies on the Chicago produce market to help fill orders. Bader states, “It’s more convenient for the on-terminal guys to trade among themselves since they are all right there, but it’s not uncommon for off-terminal entities to get into the mix as well.” **pb**

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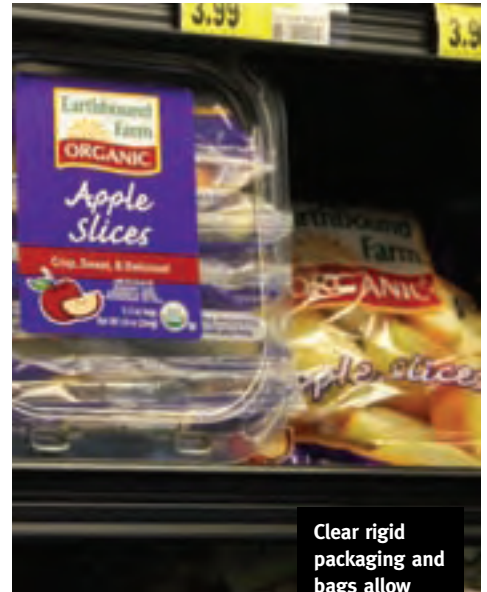
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Consumer Packaging: Five Things To Consider

With consumer and retailer requirements rising, the packaging industry is making strides to meet their needs. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

Packaging is becoming more and more pervasive throughout the produce department. Lettuce, and its many cousins with exotic sounding names, is routinely merchandised in clear rigid plastic. Strawberries are so widely presented in snap-closed clamshells that green plastic baskets have become a memory, and tomatoes are now more widely sold in rigid clear plastic. And then there's the growing popularity of fresh-cut fruit, which has to be in plastic, or the juices will end up everywhere.

As consumer packaging continues to become a more important part of the produce trade, here are five questions to ask when evaluating packaging.

1. Does The Packaging Provide A Window To The Produce?

Packaging creates a barrier between the consumer and the produce, but it can still allow consumers to see the product. "The trend has been toward more upscale rigid, clear plastic containers that promote more attractive product merchandising and highlights the

quality of the food contents," explains Jack Tilley, market research analyst at Inline Plastics Corp., based in Shelton, CT. "Our two newest product lines, Visibly Fresh and Crystal Fresh, were introduced to meet these needs.

The key is packaging that lets the consumers feast their eyes on the produce. Tristan Simpson, director of marketing at Ready Pac Foods Inc., headquartered in Irwindale, CA, remarks, "Consumers purchase fresh-cut produce with their eyes, and 'freshness' is the No.1 reason for selecting a particular package. Providing a clear view into a package is important for consumers to be able to make an informed choice at the shelf. Ready Pac's fruit, vegetable, snack and salad rigid containers are all made with clear PET and carry the recycle symbol."

Ready Pac offers a salad bowl that snaps tight, but is transparent to allow a view of the salad. "Our proprietary Single Seal Technology, which we use for our Ready Pac Bistro Bowl Salads, is the newest technology," continues Simpson. "It allows us to use minimal packaging so consumers can see all the fresh ingredients inside the bowl and the topper tray,

and it keeps everything fresh from the time consumers purchase the salads over the weekend until they use them for a brown bag lunch later in the week. For retailers, there is a 'foot' on the Ready Pac Bistro Bowl Salad package, which facilitates easy upright merchandising of the bowls without a springload. The upright merchandising showcases the fresh, value-add ingredients in each bowl, which ultimately attracts more consumers to the shelf."

The ability to see the product clearly is important to produce suppliers, especially to those who believe they offer something that is a cut above. "We currently use clear plastic; we're proud of our product and want people to be able to see it," says David Nelson, vice president of sales at Bard Valley Medjool Dates, located in Yuma, AZ. If the produce looks good, it helps if the package does, too.

The importance of letting produce make a visual impact is making clear packaging the wave of the present. According to Carol Zweep, manager of packaging and food labeling services at Guelph Food Technologies, located in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, "Clear packaging

“When it comes to the best visual appeal, I can say without a doubt that the package that clearly shows off the contents is the best way to go when it comes to fresh. That’s why clear plastic bags, clear stand up pouches and clamshells have been the preferred method for retailing.”

— Roy Ferguson, Chantler Packaging Inc.

offers the best visual appeal for fresh produce consumers to see the quality of the product. Clamshells and bags offer new ways to pack fresh produce instead of an open basket. You can see the product from all sides; the product is protected; and the PET material is recyclable,” she details.

Some packaging can even effectively incorporate graphics, which helps the product sell itself. “Consumers are attracted to images that tap into their passion, be it with nostalgic or visual cues; appeals to their senses, such as scented packaging; and interactive packaging, like those with QR codes,” Zweep details.

If graphics are used on the package, it is important to also leave enough clear space to see the product. “Apio offers its Eat Smart and

GreenLine branded fresh-cut vegetables in a variety of packaging formats including film bags and trays,” shares Cali Tanguay, director of marketing and technology at Apio Inc., headquartered in Guadalupe, CA. Eye-catching designs with crisp, clean printing and clear visibility of the product for maximum focus on vegetable quality helps to grab the consumers’ attention. Each package is designed for maximum visual appeal, as well as function.”

Other packaging suppliers agree that graphics should be designed to leave enough space to offer a window to the produce. Ready Pac’s Simpson emphasizes, “For bagged salads, seeing the fresh lettuces inside is equally as important in making a selection. Our graphics

are specifically designed to leave a wide open, clear window on all our bagged salads so consumers can view the lettuces and make an informed choice.”

Clear bags, clamshells and other rigid packages have the edge because they let produce show its freshness. “When it comes to the best visual appeal, I can say without a doubt that the package that clearly shows off the contents is the best way to go when it comes to fresh,” asserts Roy Ferguson, CEO of Chantler Packaging Inc., in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. “That’s why clear plastic bags, clear stand up pouches and clamshells have been the preferred method for retailing.”

Mesh packaging is another option that provides both convenience and a good look at the produce. “Visual appeal is always going to be a factor when you’re talking about retail sales; I still think the best visual appeal for produce is mesh packaging,” says Aaron Fox, executive vice president of Fox Packaging Co., located in McAllen, TX.

2. Will The Packaging Help The Produce Last?

The amount of food that is grown, harvested and shipped, only to be thrown out

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The advertisement features a variety of produce packaging including cardboard boxes, plastic bags, and clamshells. A large wooden barrel is also visible. In the background, a vintage car is shown with people loading crates. Payment logos for VISA, MasterCard, Discover, and American Express are displayed on the left.

is a seldom-discussed tragedy of the world food supply system. “The most important issue being faced by every country in the world is that of rampant food waste,” contends Ferguson. “It is, by far, the biggest consumer packaging challenge. Currently, 50 percent of the food we purchase goes into the trash; we can no longer afford such waste in an ever-growing world. According to statistics, between five and nine percent of the produce at store level goes into the dumpster, resulting in millions of dollars a day in waste.” Chantler’s

line of packaging, Prime Pro, extends produce life by removing ethylene gas.

To help reduce this scandalous waste, good packaging protects and preserves the product both on the way to the store and in consumers’ kitchens. “A clear package will undoubtedly prompt purchasing of fresh produce items, but this is only one part of the equation,” says Ferguson. “The package must protect the item as it travels to the store. It has to be in a format so it can be retail-ready and displayable. Ideally, the package should afford the consumer some

convenience when it comes to multi-pull use or convenience of preparation.”

Most consumers and producers have found that recloseable rigid plastic containers do better than bags when it comes to keeping produce items like leafy greens fresher longer. Steve Langdon, vice president for sales at Precision Packaging Products, in Holley, NY, says, “We make sure the product is protected, and we continue to expand the shelf-life. We hear from the industry — from the big producers like Dole and Fresh Express — that consumers get a longer-lasting product in the rigid plastic than in the bag.”

It’s important to consider that many produce items need to be able to breathe in order to maintain their freshness. “On certain items, shelf-life has to do with the amount of ventilation to allow gases to escape,” says Kurt Zuhlke Jr., president and CEO of Kurt Zuhlke & Associates, headquartered Bangor, PA.

Shelf-life, and the reduction of waste, can be related to packaging that makes the produce more convenient to use at home. “GreenLine and Eat Smart offer steam-in-the-bag convenience for 10- and 12-oz. ounce packages, while larger Eat Smart bags and trays utilize Apio’s own BreatheWay technology in order to naturally extend shelf-life,” explains the company’s Tanguay. “Exceptional value is provided to retailers as well as consumers by providing fresh vegetables in packaging that is appealing on the shelf and convenient for consumers to utilize after purchase,” Tanguay says.

3. Does The Packaging Make It Easy For The Consumer To Purchase, Transport And Store The Produce?

As more people believe they have less time every day, convenience continues to be a mega trend and produce packaging must follow. Zuhlke pintpoints, “The trend in produce packaging is convenience, shelf-life and sustainability.”

The need for convenience is behind much of the increase in packaging in the produce department. “When consumers need to purchase an item, they need a package that makes it easier for them,” continues Zuhlke. “Take a four-pack tomato container. It makes it easier to put the tomatoes in the cart without having to handle each one; easier to take home without damaging them; and easier to put them on the shelf in the kitchen rather than in the refrigerator.”

Microwaveable packaging is one response to the need for more convenience. “Ready Pac offers its mature Spinach in a microwaveable bag, providing consumers with the ease of

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cooking and serving straight from the bag,” Simpson says.

Steam packaging leads the way when it comes to offering produce in a ready-to-cook package, and yet, Ferguson admits, “I am not aware of any recent developments when it comes to steam packaging. It’s a lamination, and in some cases, the package has a steam venting system.”

Nonetheless, it is the venting that makes steamable packaging possible that is finding more uses. “There is nothing new in the way of steam packaging, but self-venting packaging for pouches is becoming more popular,” says Guelph’s Zweep.

Convenience in transport and home storage is helping to increase the popularity of rigid plastic packaging. “The continuing growing trend is that consumers like the convenience of rigid plastic packaging,” says Precision Packaging’s Langdon. “It travels, stores and displays well. Cut fruit needs a container, and they are a natural for clear plastic. It is primarily PET, but there is some corn-based.”

Another convenience on the horizon is single-serving packages of produce that is ready to eat. According to Jim Scattini, vice president of sales and marketing at Sambrailo Packaging, based in Watsonville, CA. “They are both for people on the go and kids’ lunch boxes. To that end, they are perfect for blueberries and strawberries.”

The individual-serving packaging is still in the testing stage, so stay tuned. “Things are still in the development stage for both the production and marketing sides of individual packaging,” reports Scattini. “We’ve got to get to the right price point. We’re testing that now and the jury is still out.”

At the other end of the spectrum, there is also movement toward more of the club-sized packages in supermarkets. “You’re seeing a push for different sizes of packaging for blueberries, strawberries, blackberries and raspberries,” adds Scattini. “There are definitely more of the club store sizes at retail. The acreage, yield and tonnage are all increasing, so supermarkets are sometimes using club sizes since that’s a way to move more product.” These club-sized packages hold up to four pounds of strawberries, or up to two pounds of blueberries.

4. Does The Package Make The Food Safe And Enhance Consumers’ Perception Of Safety?

Food safety is another crucial issue, and packaging plays a major role in making

produce appear to be safer. Scattini advises, “Make sure you have a firm button lock, so the package doesn’t pop open in the store.”

There are new technologies that will revolutionize packaging that is sealed for protection, but can easily be opened and resealed at home. “The latest technology entering the market now is designed to eliminate rigid lids and shrink bands, reduce package weight, provide tamper evidence and recloseability,” details Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer at Clear Lam Packaging,

located in Elk Grove, IL. “The new ‘peel/reseal’ technologies allow produce processors to apply a lidding film to a tray that incorporates an intuitive opening and closing feature. It can be used with a variety of cut fruits, vegetables and leafy greens. The peel reseal film is automatically applied on tray-sealing equipment. It can be used in conjunction with modified atmosphere packaging to help in extending the freshness of the produce being packaged,” he continues. “Consumers understand how to use it without lengthy directions. By eliminating



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“In the future, we will be seeing flexible packaging that retains many attributes of rigid packaging. The goal is to create a lighter package that is stackable, rather than a stand-up pouch. The new packaging would provide enhanced visibility and would protect the product inside.”

— Roman Forowycz, Clear Lam Packaging

pre-formed rigid plastic lids and shrink bands, the industry can reduce weight, truck shipments and carbon footprint to create a more efficient supply chain.”

Tamper-evident packaging has to be the norm for fresh-cut produce, because consumers are not going to take the produce home and wash it before they eat it. “Ready-to-eat produce like cut fruit and washed lettuce need to be secured so consumers know they have not been tampered with,” asserts Precision Packaging’s Langdon. “New tamper-evident packaging offers an alternative to PVC shrink bands that is more cost-effective. With ours, the food processor welds the lid to the package, and we provide a tear strip.” With PVC shrink

bands, the packaging must be heated, which undermines the cold chain, adds Langdon.

Inline Packaging also has its own line of tamper-evident packaging. “Our Safe-T-Fresh line has been on the market since 2006,” says Tilly. “Now, Inline is extending the Safe-T-Fresh line to additional packaging, such as Sandwich Wedges and grab-and-go Snack Cup containers.”

There are numerous ways the package can guarantee that the contents have not been tampered with. Simpson notes, “All of Ready Pac’s packages are tamper-evident, either by using a shrink band around the lid, as on our fresh-cut fruit bowls; a ‘freshness seal,’ as on our organic rigid containers; or the use of our

Single Seal Technology, as on our Ready Pac Bistro bowl salads. We fit the tamper-evident solution to the product and the package.”

Consumers also want the security that comes from knowing where their food was grown. “From consumer’s point of view, they’re looking for the PTI, to be able to trace the produce back to the field and have that information right on the package,” says Kathryn Maher, vice president for business development at Innoseal Systems Inc., located in Charlotte, NC. “I’m seeing more date-coding, PTI information and more private labels on the packages than before. People are doing more private label even if they are fairly small because it’s so competitive out there.”

There are economic reasons for private label packaging, but it also offers an opportunity to make a visual impact. “Stores are going more private label, and trying to give it a look that reflects the store,” says Fox of Fox Packaging.

The need for economy is also fueling more use of bags to merchandise produce. Maher reports, “I see three-count lettuce in bags, and avocados, too, where I used to see them loose in a box. I’m seeing bananas in bags, too. I think there may be a food safety component; people may feel the food is safe if it is in a bag.

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5. Is It Sustainable?

Sustainability is not a fad. It has stood the test of time and become another important component of the produce industry that is here to stay. Many consumers do not know what they mean by sustainability, but they know it when they see it. And they want to see it. “Sustainability is a big concern among consumers,” recognizes Zuhlke of Zuhlke & Associates. PET can be recycled and used again and again. There is growing interest in packaging made with recycled PET.”

Recycled material for packaging has become so popular, in fact, there is not enough of it to meet the demand. “The demand for post-consumer recycled is exceeding somewhat the supply,” reports Precision Packaging’s Langdon. “A significant percentage of clear plastic includes post-consumer recycled material. More than 25 percent of the packaging used in marketing cut fruit, leafy greens, vegetable trays and strawberries has some level of post-consumer recycled content. We can vary from zero to 100 percent post-consumer



PHOTO COURTESY OF PWP PACKAGING

recycled content.”

Another step toward sustainability is packaging that uses less material from inception. “In the future, we will be seeing flexible packaging that retains many attributes of rigid packaging,” remarks Clear Lam’s Forowycz. “The goal is to create a lighter package that is

stackable, rather than a stand-up pouch. The new packaging would provide enhanced visibility and would protect the product inside.”

A smaller step in the direction of reducing materials used in packaging is to more efficiently design rigid plastic packaging. “Rigid plastic packaging has historically provided maximum visibility for fresh produce,” notes Forowycz. “Smooth, rounded squares or rectangles typically are most effective. By eliminating ribs, consumers can have a clearer view of the product inside the container. By using smooth rectangles or squares versus rounds, the shipping and merchandising space is better utilized.”

Part of sustainability is making the packaging look sustainable. “There’s a trend to try to make the packaging look less involved, to make it look more environmentally concerned,” Fox says.

The whole question of packaging, unfortunately, insists on getting more complicated. Consumers want produce that is safe, and appears to be safe, and they want convenience in transporting and storing their food. But there is still something attractive about being able to touch and smell our produce before we buy it. **pb**

A photograph of David Krause, Chairman of United Fresh, smiling. He is wearing a green and white striped button-down shirt. The background is a blurred produce market. A yellow box in the bottom right corner contains text and the United Fresh logo.

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The packaged salad category fills consumers' needs of health and convenience.

Salad Category Continues To Expand

New innovations have helped expand the packaged salad category, leading to more sales opportunities. **BY LISA WHITE**

During the beginning of the recession, it seemed that the packaged salad category could be headed either toward stagnation or a major overhaul. An increasing number of consumers switched to lower-priced bulk lettuce and salad toppings to save money, looking at pre-made salads as an unnecessary convenience. Now the tide has turned, and though some consumers continue to focus on price, many have become aware of value and are drawn to the variety of packaged salads now in the marketplace.

According to John Burge, vice president of sales and marketing for Watsonville, CA-based Classic Salads LLC, "From 2008 to 2010, the entire category was flat. Now, with a recovery going on, people are willing to spend more on convenience."

Sales reflect this point of view. In the 52 weeks ending July 8, 2012, dollar sales of packaged salads totaled close to \$3 billion, according to Symphony IRI, a Chicago, IL-based market research firm. This was almost a 3 percent increase from the prior year.

The focus on convenience and eating healthier has had the greatest impact on the packaged salad segment. "Both organic salad

options and complete kits are driving the growth in this category," says Burge.

Another benefit is the pricing of these salads, which has been declining at the retail level in the past few years, remarks Craig Hope, chief customer officer at San Juan Bautista, CA-based Earthbound Farm.

The recent success in this segment also is due to a number of packaged salad subcategories that have emerged and expanded.

Increased Interest In Natural And Organic

Nearly 75 percent of consumers purchase organic products, and 41 percent of shoppers are buying organics more than they were a year ago, according to the Organic Trade Association's *2011 Organic Industry Survey*. What's more, the growth of organic food as a whole has helped increase sales of organic packaged salads. Sales of organic salads are growing at 13 percent, while conventional salad sales are down about 1 percent, according to Nielsen/Perishables Group, a research firm based in West Dundee, IL. "The exciting thing is the organic segment has the consumer momentum, as many consumers are reaching for healthy food options at all levels," Hope says.

"A growing number of consumers have a strong desire to support companies that have conscientious business models and farming practices that support a better world."

"Organic is now a mainstream segment within the packaged salad category and is readily available," says Tristan Simpson, director of marketing at Ready Pac Foods Inc., in Irwindale, CA. In response to increasing consumer interest in organics, the company is launching a line of Ready Pac Bistro organic bowl salads with varieties such as Orange Ginger Tofu, Zesty Harvest Grains, and Honey Mustard Spinach with 100 percent organic ingredients.

In addition to organic, all-natural packaged salad lines also are expanding, due to increasing consumer interest. In 2010, Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc., in Monterey, CA, reformulated its salad kits with all-natural ingredients in response to research showing that many salad consumers were skeptical about the wholesomeness of some toppings and dressings. The new line contains no artificial colors, flavors or preservatives.

Growing Specialty Salads

Specialty salads/tender leaf greens now represent the biggest share of the salad category at 30.3 percent. Romaine- and iceberg-based



PHOTO COURTESY OF DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES INC.

Dole's Endless Summer salad kit includes new additions like roasted sunflower kernels, artisan croutons and two kinds of cheese.

salads represent 18.6 percent and 16.8 of sales, respectively in the last 52 weeks ending June 23, 2012, according to Nielsen.

Manufacturers also are noting a growing preference of salads with vegetable toppings. "Increasingly, salad users prefer the varied taste and texture of salads with vegetables over those consisting of lettuce blends alone," says Chris Mayhew, director of marketing for Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc. "Beyond simply having an affinity for salads brimming with vegetables, these enthusiasts cite personal health and wellness goals, including increasing their daily servings of fruits and vegetables, as the main reasons behind the trend."

Dole's research has also found that while salad users are passionate in their preference for more vegetables in their salads, they are equally adamant about the loss of crunch and flavor that often distinguishes lettuce and produce mixed in the same bag. Faced with the inconvenience of buying, washing and prepping vegetables separately, as well as the risk of preparing too much produce for a single serving, many users forgo adding vegetables to their salads altogether. This led to the launch of Dole Extra Veggie Salads earlier this year. This new line combines blends of lettuces with up to two cups of fresh vegetables per bag, aimed at satisfying the USDA's daily vegetable requirement. "We're always looking for new taste and ingredient combinations to inspire consumers to new heights of salad creativity and experimentation," Mayhew says. "We're investigating ways to help consumers turn our salads into salad meals — either through compelling new recipes that pair our products with lean protein, or by working with our chefs and product development experts to explore adding protein directly to our bags in the future."

Healthier Greens

There has been increasing interest in packaged salads containing darker, healthier greens that further enhance nutritional profiles. Both the organic and conventional spinach categories are reporting strong growth, up 27 and 9 percent, respectively, in the 52 weeks ending July 14, 2012, according to Nielsen.

"Spinach is the No. 1 selling salad blend and is also the fastest growing," reports Ready Pac's Simpson.

Spinach also is the biggest selling item at Earthbound Farm. "Spinach is a great, nutri-

tionally dense, tender leaf green that consumers can't get enough of organically right now," reveals Hope. "We are seeing great trends across all retailers with what we are starting to define as Power Green components packed with nutritional benefits."

Spinach and spinach-based salads have remained a mainstay of Dole's packaged salad line. One of the company's most successful recent introductions, the Spinach Cherry Almond Bleu All Natural Kit, launched in late 2010, combines baby spinach leaves with blue cheese crumbles, dried whole cherries, sliced



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLASSIC SALADS LLC

Spinach, arugula and other dark greens are growing in popularity with salad-lovers.

almonds and White Balsamic Vinaigrette dressing. Also in 2011, Dole introduced an arugula blend for consumers looking for a tangier, bolder taste experience. “Like our spinach blends, arugula satisfies a unique consumer niche, and allows us to capitalize on the growth of the lettuce variety in restaurants,” explains Mayhew.

“In the up-and-coming category, we’re also seeing some real excitement around the hardier greens like mixed baby kales and our Power Greens pack that include kale, spinach and chard blends,” reports Earthbound Farm’s Hope. “These greens in their baby form are tender and sweet enough for salads, while also standing up to cooking. Consumers appreciate the flavor, versatility and nutrition.” Spinach, kale, red and green chards and beet tops have become more popular not only because of the nutritional benefits, but also due to the attractive colors these salad ingredients provide.

Convenient Kits

Approaching the economic downturn, a lack of innovation, reduction in promotion and an increase in retail price put traditional packaged salad kits in a vulnerable position. In fact, until recently, the salad kit segment was experiencing double-digit sales declines. This is no longer the case, and overall, sales of salad kits are up 6.9 percent in the 52 weeks ending June 23, 2012, according to Nielsen.

Earthbound Farm’s kit sales have more than doubled over the past year since the introduction of its new PowerMeal salads. Positioned as a complete meal, the line includes vegetarian proteins, like quinoa and legumes, in addition to bold flavors. Varieties include Blueberry & Quinoa with Spinach, Wheatberry/Bulgur & Cranberries with Spring Mix, and Tomatillo Black Bean with Corn Salsa and Baby Lettuces. “I think the only way salad kits will really succeed is to offer consumers meals that aren’t simple for them to make themselves at home and something that delivers additional nutri-

tional value with the combination of ingredients,” contends Hope.

Due to new introductions and innovations, Dole’s All Natural Salad Kit sales continue to grow annually. In 2011, the company introduced two new kits that became its most popular. The Endless Summer All Natural Kit includes romaine lettuce blended with shredded carrots and red cabbage, in addition to shredded Swiss and Gruyere cheeses, roasted sunflower kernels, artisan-style croutons and herb seasoning, topped with Summer Vinaigrette, which is a white balsamic-flavored dressing. Dole’s product-development emphasis on salad kits will continue with several product offerings to be announced later this year. “The reformulation of our kits to all-natural ingredients in 2010 also helped fuel the consumer popularity of our kits line,” Mayhew says. “This growth proves that salad lovers want not just the lettuces and vegetables, but also the nuts, croutons, cheeses, seasonings and dressings to be all-natural.”

Manufacturers have focused on further innovation in salad kits, which now offer a number of condiment and dressing flavors, the addition of dried fruit, a variety of nuts and different cheeses. “There also are more proteins as part of the salad kit category,” says Classic Salad’s Burge. “It’s easier to provide consumers with unique toppings within this format.”

Through market research, Ready Pac Produce discovered that consumers have regional flavor profiles and look for restaurant-inspired ingredients as an indicator that the kit is a premium offering. The use of meats beyond chicken and the addition of fresh fruit bring a restaurant-inspired element to Ready Pac’s Premium Salad Kits. Varieties include Apple, Blue Cheese Pecan, Southwest, Supreme Caesar, Royal Parisian, Italian and Waldorf.

Additionally, Ready Pac recently launched three new varieties, including Asian Style Chicken, Mediterranean and Caesar Lite. Its line also

includes Chef Salad, Chicken Caesar, Santé Fe Style Salad, Turkey Cobb and Bacon Salad, Cranberry Walnut, Spinach Dijon, Italian and Smokehouse BBQ. The salad toppings are packaged separately from the lettuce in a topper tray.

Private Label Potential

Within packaged salad, private label is the second largest brand accounting for 28 dollar share points of total packaged salads. In the 52 weeks ending July 14, 2012, dollar share of these products rose 3.5 share points versus a year ago, according to Nielsen.

As a point of reference, within the fresh produce department, private label accounts for 20 percent of total sales, according to the 2011 report *Private Brands U.S. Outlook: Flash in the Pan or the Real Deal?* The economy has helped private label sales by stimulating consumer interest and directing retailers’ focus on store brands. In a recent Nielsen study, 75 percent of consumers viewed private label as a good alternative to branded, and nearly 60 percent felt the quality was even better than the national brand.

“Private label gives retailers the opportunity to create a point of difference from its market competitors by offering unique blends of lettuces and recipes that can only be found at their store,” reasons Ready Pac’s Simpson.

Private label is growing in stores where retailers are committed and making the promotional and item investment to attract and keep the consumers in the format. “If private label is just an item selection and pricing process, then we are seeing very different — or poorer — results versus retailers that are supporting organic private label decisions with shelving strategies, placement gains, space for aggressive sales advancements, promotional plans, partnership, etc., and implementing good solid merchandising standards,” Simpson says.

According to Burge, many of the major national supermarket chains have begun carrying organic private label clamshell salads, due to the sales potential of private label packaged salads. “Private label is really growing, although the numbers are difficult to break down,” he says. “Nine out of the Top 10 major supermarket trends offer private label salads because this helps differentiate their offerings.”

With the growing potential of packaged salads through innovations in subcategories, including organic and natural products, salad kits, healthier mixes, specialty salads and private label brands, this segment continues on an upward path. The appeal of these products to consumers seeking both value and convenience will result in increased sales in the coming years.

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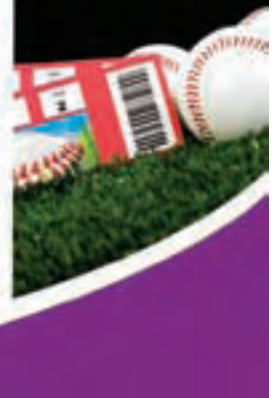
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Red River Valley Growers Confident In Providing Quality Red Potatoes

Retail promotions on the table, despite challenges from Mother Nature. **BY BILL MARTIN**



TOP ROW (L-R): KIMBERLY BJORNSTAD, ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWERS; PAUL DOLAN, ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWERS; RANDY BOUSHEY, A&L POTATO CO.; STEVE JOHNSON, NOKOTA PACKERS; STEVE TWEETEN, NOKOTA PACKERS. **MIDDLE ROW (L-R):** GREG HALL, J.G. HALL & SONS; GREG HOLTMAN, APG; JAMES KERIAN, KERIAN MACHINES; JIM LEQUIRE, ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWERS; MIKE RERNICK, NOKOTA PACKERS. **BOTTOM ROW (L-R):** CHUCK GUNNERSON AND TED KREIS, NORTHERN PLAINS POTATO GROWERS ASSOCIATION; GREG GROVEN, BLACK GOLD; RICK HOGAN, HUGO'S; DAVE & ANDY MOQUIST, O.C. SCHULZ & SONS.

It has been one of those years in the Red River Valley with hotter weather and less rain than many growers and shippers would like, but overall, there is a confidence among the trade in this North Dakota/Minnesota production region a near-normal crop is providing quality red potatoes. This is leading to some attractive retail promotions, some of which are occurring early in the season.

Vito Caputo is the owner of Palatine, IL-

based Joe Caputo & Sons Produce Inc., with three Chicago area supermarkets. He kicked off the new red potato season over the Labor Day weekend with a promotion on reds out of Minnesota, which are grown in the Big Lake and Long Prairie areas. The price: 25 cents per pound! The Minnesota red potatoes are typically available a few weeks ahead of Red River Valley potatoes, although valley shippers market some of those reds. However, Caputo is already looking forward to promoting red

potatoes from the Red River Valley.

The Red River Valley annually plants about 24,000 acres of fresh potatoes. Besides fresh market potatoes, the valley offers the country's largest non-irrigated chip-producing area, plus has sizeable crops of spuds for seed and processing.

Paul Dolan is the manager of Associated Potato Growers Inc., based in Grand Forks, ND. The cooperative is one of the largest shippers of fresh potatoes from the valley. Dolan

NEW LOGO FOR RED RIVER VALLEY

Retailers will have access to a new logo available to the 13 fresh potato shippers in the Red River Valley this season, according to Ted Kreis, marketing and communications director for the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association, located in East Grand Forks, MN. He credits NPPGA chairman, Carl Hoverson, with the idea for updating the logo to provide a more unified brand identity for Red River Valley potatoes. With the region's red potato shippers using their own little known brands, potatoes were lacking an identity. As a result of ideas shared between the association's Advertising and Promotions Committee, Valley Bag & Supply Co. of East Grand Forks, MN, as well as a Minneapolis marketing firm and valley wash plant operators, a new brand or logo was created.

The artwork depicts two separate potato fields, one in North Dakota and the other in Minnesota, with the Red River (the boundary for the two states) in between. The dark dirt between potato rows represents the rich black loam soil found in the unique, huge glacial lake of the valley. The phrase "Nature's Flavor" is part of the logo used to relate the message valley red spuds are grown without irrigation, using natural rainfall, which packs more flavor.



pb

continues to see a trend among retail buyers wanting their own private label. During a recent visit by PRODUCE BUSINESS to a Hugo's supermarket in Grand Forks, ND, private labeled red potatoes were on display. Rick

Hogan, who manages the 9-store Grand Forks, ND-based produce departments, offers its Hugo's label on red potatoes in 10-lb., clear poly bags. "Ninety percent of our potato sales are with red potatoes, while eight percent are

with russets, and the remainder is with other varieties of potatoes," Hogan states, as he notes the pride area residents take in supporting their locally grown products.

"Absolutely," is the firm response by Steve Tweten when asked if there will be promotional opportunities for valley potatoes with retailers. The president and CEO of NoKota Packers Inc., of Buxton, ND, agrees there are more retailers taking smaller sized packages.

He also notes a trend toward more potato packs designed for easy preparation in a microwave. "We are involved with steamable potatoes through Fresh Solutions Network, LLC, a Loveland, OH-based company with which Nokota is partnering to offer its customers a "complete potato category assortment." Continuing, Tweten says, "There seems to be more microwavable packages available, even an 18- or 24-oz. pack. The packs are designed to provide for one meal, so tomorrow, consumers will return to the store to buy a different one," he notes.

Randy Boushey, president of A&L Potato Co. of East Grand Forks, MN, says there seems to be more "action" from retailers than ever before in regards to consumer packs. Part of the reason, he surmises, is retailers who deal

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directly with shippers get a better price on potatoes, rather than going through a conventional repacker, "where the price is marked up." He sees this contributing to heavier demand for consumer packs, especially in the 5-lb. bags.

At J.G. Hall and Sons of Hoople, ND, principal Greg Hall notes his growing/shipping operation did more business last season with repackers, but is looking to increase partnerships with retailers this season.

Another grower/shipper doing a lot of business with repackers and wholesalers is Crystal, ND-based O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc. President Dave Moquist sees more orders for potatoes being consolidated because retailers are consolidating their buying operations. "Some retailers who had regional buyers have centralized their buying operations, so they are buying everything from one place and setting up long-term buying plans," he explains.

While this is true with some retail operations, Caputo of Joe Caputo & Sons IGA relies heavily on Chicago-area wholesalers for his produce, including potatoes. The formula is working, as the small chain has a store in Des Plaines, IL, another in Palentine, IL, and its latest supermarket is in Algonquin, IL. "We started with a 10,000 square-foot store, then came a 60,000-square-foot and now we have the 75,000-square-foot store in Algonquin," Caputo notes. "Fruits and vegetables are our main focus, although we do have grocery, deli, fresh meats, bakery, wine and beer."

He sources most of his potatoes from City Wide Produce Distributors Inc., Anthony Marano Co. and Strube Celery & Vegetable Co., all headquartered in Chicago, IL. Caputo's most popular potato pack is the 10-lb. bag of Idaho potatoes, although the small chain also does well with 5-lb. packs of red and Yukon potatoes. The company also offers a 70-count spud in bulk displays. "The red-skinned potatoes are a good summertime fit in potato salads," says Caputo. "The red potatoes work fairly well for us versus the white potatoes."

Potato sales at Caputo are pretty well balanced between the packaged product and the bulk displays. The retailer says it is part of providing customers with the convenience of both types of offerings.

Hugo's Hogan offers a unique packaging of red potatoes from the Red River Valley in a 5-lb. brown paper sack with a handle, which makes for an attractive display of the product on the retail shelf. It is affordably priced at 98 cents per pound.

At Associated Potato Growers, Dolan is seeing more retail interest in 4-, 5- and 8-lb. packages of potatoes. He believes part of it is one retail operation looking to distinguish

itself from the competition and being used as a marketing device.

Boushey at A&L Potato is noticing some lower pricing on potatoes, which he believes will drive up movement and sales. "With the summer heat gone and the kids being back in school, I think people are getting back into the cooking mode," Boushey says. "I am looking forward to a heavy demand for potatoes because of the lower retail prices."

More attractive pricing at retail is being driven by "market pressure," Boushey adds. "Potatoes are costing retailers less to buy and it is bringing down prices. Some stores are running some aggressive ads. We've had some really good ads in the past three weeks from retailers that have offered some good promotional prices."

At O.C. Schulz, Moquist sees it a little differently. He believes, as a grower/shipper, it is more difficult to have an effect on the market. "If we have a large crop, it seems harder to get a retailer to lower the retail price to move the volume," he remarks. "[Retailers] are independent, just like farmers are independent. It is harder to communicate what needs to be done, at least from our point of view."

Red Potato Retail Promotions

Despite an unusually hot growing season and less rain than many growers prefer, the Red River Valley potato trade overall sees a near-normal volume crop, with retail promotions in place. Opinions may vary whether the valley fresh potato crop will be a little above or below average. Much of this thinking is due to some areas and fields in the valley receiving adequate rainfall, while other areas are not as fortunate.

Dolan at Associated Potato notes some timely rains will help the sizing on red potatoes. Some areas are needing more rain to make digging of the crop easier, which result in less skin-scarring of the product.

Hall at J.G. Hall reports his own crop is down five to eight percent this season, and he believes the valley as a whole will produce a normal sized red potato crop "at best, if not below normal."

Mike Rernick, vice president of sales and marketing at NoKota Packers, says he is letting customers know some of their growers started harvest right after Labor Day, about two weeks later than normal, due to dry soil. But some significant rainfall improved the situation for harvesting, plus cooler weather is arriving. "I see the yields being average to a little above average," he remarks. "That is surprising since we didn't get a lot of rain this summer."

Tweten at NoKota points out some growers further north in the valley have received more

UNITED POTATO GROWERS OF AMERICA

In 2004, the United Potato Growers of America was formed as a cooperative under provisions of the Capper-Volstead Act of 1922. The Idaho Falls, ID-based organization is formed to combat depressed potato markets in North America. It has a goal of addressing over-production problems, which many in the potato industry believe is created by the Idaho potato growers themselves.

In 2008, the Red River Valley became the 10th potato region to join the United cooperative. How has the United co-op performed in the opinion of the Red River Valley potato trade? Opinions vary.

Paul Dolan, manager of Associated Potato Growers Inc., based in Grand Forks, ND, says the cooperative is “still very much functioning,” but may not be as outspoken as it was at one time, referring to an anti-trust lawsuit filed in 2010 by a New York wholesaler. The co-op denies any wrongdoing, stating it operates legally under Capper-Volstead.

At O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc. of Crystal, ND, president Dave Moquist contends, “Since its inception, the cooperative has done a terrific job of informing the growers as to supply and demand and basically charting how our suppliers fit into the market at different times.” He describes the organization as an “invaluable tool” for the trade. While United is not a “catch-all” for everything, it has done a good job, he adds.

Randy Boushey, president of East Grand Forks, MN-based A&L Potato Co., however, is not as enthusiastic. He knows one valley grower who stopped attending UPGA meetings altogether, “because he didn’t think they were effective.” As for Boushey, he questions whether United really accomplishes anything, but then adds the dialogue between the growers from different competing regions “may cut down on the lying” about production, quality and other issues.

However, Boushey does not see the work of UPGA translating into increased potato markets. “It seems to have very little effect in reducing acres planted,” he states, noting there has been over-production industry-wide both last season and this season.

pb

rains than growers further south in the valley. “We are hoping for overall average tonnage,” Tweten says.

“We are already getting promotions in October, and some retailers are looking at November,” states Tweten at press time in September.

Lonnie Spokely of Spokely Farms of Nielsville, MN, has had several years of good, if not nearly perfect growing conditions, while other parts of the valley did not fare as well. Unfortunately, the tables have turned a bit this

year. Spokely has dryer soil conditions than many other growers in the valley and believes his production will be down about 20 percent. “I would be surprised if the valley as a whole has a normal crop this year because it has been hotter and dryer than normal. Some fields have had more rain than others in the valley, especially the fields up north,” Spokely relates.

Moquist at O.C. Schulz is one of the growers in the northern end of the Red River Valley. His earlier red potatoes could have used more rain, but later planted crops fare better

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WHAT'S NEW IN THE RED RIVER VALLEY?

A&L POTATO CO.: The potato shipper adds to its storage and now has 300,000 cwt. of potato storage. It also adds two sizing machines to increase its packing capabilities.

ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWERS: The cooperative adds 60,000 cwt. of storage for this season, pushing its total storage capabilities to a Red River Valley-leading 1.25 million cwt.

BLACK GOLD POTATO SALES INC.: Last year was the company's first season to grow fresh potatoes in the Red River Valley with 150 acres. This season, between the company and one other grower, it will have 900 acres of potatoes in the valley. Unlike other valley operations, Black Gold does not have a wash plant in the valley. Instead, it ships its red potatoes to its

wash plant in Missouri. Black Gold also grows potatoes in Georgia, North Carolina, Florida and Texas, which are shipped to the Missouri operation for washing. The company is over 80 years old, but initially entered the fresh potato deal in 2008.

KERIAN MACHINES INC.: The Grafton, ND-based company developed a new roller for a sizer machine for the Granex variety of sweet onions. Perhaps the best known of the flat shaped onion is the Vidalia onion. Company president, James Kerian, says the company is planning to test the new rollers in the field before placing it on the market. On an economic note, Kerian relates the firm's domestic business, which suffered 2008-09, has "really come back." Its export business to Europe, South America and Asia remains strong and he is

optimistic about 2013.

NOKOTA PACKERS INC.: The shipper announced in August it is joining forces with Fresh Solutions Network LLC of Loveland, OH, to drive profitable category growth through innovative market, category management and operational solutions. NoKota president and CEO, Steve Tweten, says, "Now, in addition to providing our customers with high-quality red potatoes from the Red River Valley, growers dedicated to our packing and sales operations can offer a complete potato category assortment that will satisfy shoppers on a year-round basis."

O.C. SCHULZ & SONS: The grower/shipper adds 85,000 cwt of storage in a new building that is 90 x 200 feet, and includes a work area. **pb**

with moisture, which is good for his late storage potatoes. "Some fields that caught some rain at the right time will probably be above average," he says. "But I guess we'll have

an average crop at best."

Keith Groven, a sales associate with Black Gold Potato Sales Inc., headquartered in Grand Forks, ND, agrees the valley's potato

crop will be "no bin buster, but we are confident we have a quality crop." However, he sees yields being down with a shorter crop compared to a year ago. **pb**

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Growers Predict A Solid Season For San Luis Valley Potatoes

Good crop quality and increasing acreage result in good volume to meet buyer needs.

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

As harvest and distribution gains momentum throughout the San Luis Valley potato production region in southwest Colorado, growers and shippers are predicting that demand will continue to improve through the fall and winter months. With a slight increase in planted acreage and a crop quality that has been described as one of the best in recent years, buyers can look forward to ample supplies of good quality potatoes throughout the 2012/2013 shipping season.

According to Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Monte Vista-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC), planted potato acreage in the San Luis Valley is at 55,100, up from about 54,000 in 2011. This figure reflects the first increase in several years in a region that had been showing an ongoing acreage decline from a peak of 72,000-planted acres in 2002. Ehrlich points out a lot of heat in June, some spotty hail that damaged a few fields, and a water shortage may reduce overall supplies, but overall conditions were favorable for a good crop with consistent volume.

Harvest began ahead of normal because of the heat, with some growers starting up to two weeks ahead of schedule in August. The ongoing, unusually hot weather had put more pressure on available water supplies. "Water is a huge issue here," Ehrlich stresses. "We have only about 50 percent of our normal snow pack. We have a diminishing aquifer, and all of the increasing costs to irrigate are causing additional pressures on the growers."

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

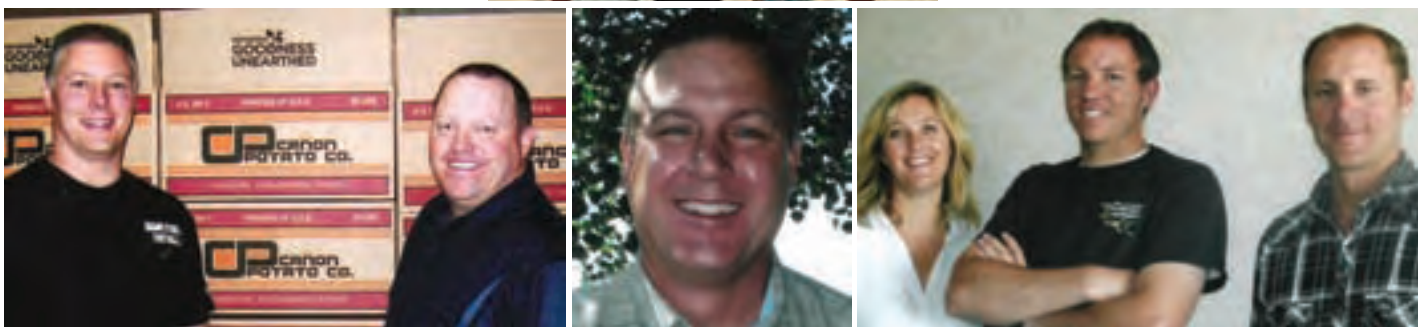
in organic, fresh potato production.

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 that buyers and consumers desire. Purple potatoes, pink-skinned varieties, and unusually shaped potatoes are gaining the attention of consumers, from executive chefs and foodies to the creative home cooks who are seeking new, imaginative ideas for their families or for entertaining guests.

"And Fingerlings are capturing more attention as well," he adds. These elongated, thin shape and assorted colors of Fingerlings are now being offered by a few San Luis Valley shippers in a mixed variety consumer pack. "Since the USDA has changed its standards, allowing mixed varieties to be packed together, this creates a lot of opportunities for shippers and more options for buyers," Ehrlich explains.

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Above: Roger Christensen, Angela Diera and Rob Bache of Skyline Potato Co.

Below: Matt Glowczeski and David Tonso, Canon Potato Co.; Randy Bache, Skyline Potato Co.; Michele Peterson, Ryan Haynie and Jed Ellithorpe, Aspen Produce LLC.

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WHAT'S NEW IN THE VALLEY?

Aspen Produce LLC, Center, CO: “We’re implementing some new technology that puts us more in touch with the consumer,” reports salesman Jed Ellithorpe. Consumers will be able to use their Smart Phones to scan the bar code that Aspen Produce has added to the company packaging which, when downloaded, will show some general information about Aspen Produce. “It will help us gather more analytical data about the consumers, and it is also designed to bring more consumer awareness to the farming aspect of our business.”

Canon Potato Co., Center, CO: President and CEO, David Tonso, remains active in the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee as the chairman of the marketing committee.

Back at the Canon Potato facilities, Tonso reports, “With a special focus on food safety and sanitation, we’ve made key upgrades in our warehouse. Now we are perfectly positioned to answer the constantly evolving needs of the potato industry.”

Farm Fresh Direct LLC, Monte Vista, CO: The grower-owned sales and marketing organization rolled out four new microwaveable potato products in the spring as a part of its Jubilee line. Dave Yeager, vice president of sales and business development, reports that Farm Fresh has added yellow, white, and red creamers as well as small sweet potatoes to the line.

These microwavable products complement the full-sized Russets and sweet potatoes that have been marketed since 2003, sold under the “Express-bake PotatOH!” label. Microwaveable PotatOH! Fingerlings were the first in the Jubilee line and were introduced last year. The Jubilee products are packaged in 14-oz. trays and are washed and ready to put in the microwave. Yeager emphasizes that the tray is organic and compostable, and the film is BPA-free.

Spud Seller LLC, Monte Vista, CO: RPE Inc. has entered into a partnership with

Lynn and Jeffery McCullough, the father-and-son team who own Lynn McCullough Farms LLC, Spud Grower Farms LLC, and the Spud Seller LLC. Based in Bancroft, WI, RPE will serve as the exclusive marketer for Spud Grower Farms, the growing operations, and the Spud Seller, the packing and shipping company.

A \$4 million expansion to the grading line at Spud Seller was completed, making it “one of the more modern potato-packing facilities in the San Luis Valley,” according to Lynn McCullough. Spud Seller offers its customers cartons and consumer-sized packs in all sizes, packs, and ranges. The facility is third-party certified by Scientific Certification Systems.

The Spud Grower farming operations grows Russet Norkotahs, Canelas, and Rio Grandes totaling just over 1,500 acres. The partnership will provide RPE with more than 2 million 50-lb. units of potatoes to market from Spud Grower Farms and other Colorado-based growers.

Skyline Potato Co., Center, CO: The company has completed expansions at two of its packing facilities in the San Luis Valley, according to chief operations officer and general manager Randy Bache. The addition at the Horizon packinghouse, located a few miles south of the headquarters, expands the building’s size over 30 percent. New loading docks were also completed.

At Skyline’s organic potato packing facility, Purely Organics, a 5,200-square-foot addition was completed for processing business, product storage and shipping. A third loading dock was also constructed.

Skyline Potato operates a total of three sheds “to fully meet our customers’ needs for one-stop shopping,” notes Roger Christensen, general manager of sales. Additional convenience is also offered through Skyline’s sister trucking company, P.S. Connections. Skyline expects to ship about 2 million cwt. from Colorado this season. Including all products available through the different businesses, the organization predicts it will ship over 3.4 million cwt. of product. **pb**

Valley and provide a picture-perfect setting for growing potatoes. Its natural environment also allows a minimal use of pesticides because of its location and climate. “It is here, at 7,600 feet above sea level — the highest and largest alpine valley in the world where commercial crops are grown — where the potatoes thrive,” Ehrlich notes.

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 CPAC’s Ehrlich. “Buying Colorado

potatoes equals less food miles with our natural 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.”

With its high elevation and low temperatures, winter freezing helps naturally sterilize the ground, reducing pest and disease pressures, Ehrlich explains. Cool weather also contributes to a smoother-skinned potato.

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. “While retailers continue to strive to be more green, Colorado’s freight advantage is always in our favor,” Ehrlich adds.

Pam Dunning, potato buyer at Growers Exchange Co. Inc., in Dallas, TX, concurs, adding, “Colorado potatoes can be delivered to our customers in one or two days, which reduces shrink and makes them fresher.” She adds that one-stop potato shopping available through a single growing region can be another way to save on freight costs.

“Delivery can sometimes even be done overnight,” Dunning continues, describing the 800-mile trip from the San Luis Valley to some Dallas-Fort Worth delivery points.

“The industry is realizing, with freight being what it is, that sales and distribution will become more regional,” stresses Center, CO-based Aspen Produce’s Dwayne Weyers, a company principal. “It’s a changing world, and we have to change with it.”

And as consumers continue to tighten their belts facing a questionable economic future, “they will be turning more to potatoes as a nutritional and versatile way to feed their families for pennies on the dollar,” adds Weyers.

This winter, potatoes are predicted to offer even more value, with consumer-attractive prices as a result of plenty of potato volume nationwide. “The 15-lb. jumbo potato bag and other larger bag options might be more popular this year,” because they may offer an even more attractive price, predicts Randy Bache, chief operations officer and general manager of Center, CO-based Skyline Potato Co.

Economically A Perfect Fit

David Tonso, president and CEO of Canon Potato Co., headquartered in Center, 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.”

Skyline Potato’s general manager of sales, Roger Christensen, says potatoes remain among

the best fresh produce values for consumers. This even applies to organic potatoes, which some still perceive to carry higher prices. “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 an organic program that has taken 19 years to develop,” he emphasizes. Because of the varying popularity of organics, “a lot of handlers jump in, and then jump right back out, but we’ve had a consistent supply for our customers.”

The company markets a portion of its organic volume through Food Source Inc., 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,” Christensen adds. “We will also pack private labels for organics as well as conventional potatoes.”

“Potatoes are a good food source during tough economic times,” touts Jim Knutzon, CEO of Monte Vista, CO-based Farm Fresh Direct LLC. Historically, “there is a direct corre-



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CPAC ACTIVITIES

With its ongoing aim to emphasize the nutritional value of potatoes, the Monte Vista-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC) will continue to utilize the talents of Olympic figure skater Rachael Flatt to help reach consumers in Colorado and throughout the country. According to CPAC Administrator Linda Weyers, Flatt will continue to represent the committee at several events throughout the 2012-13 shipping season. “She’s a great spokesperson for us and a great role model for kids, who we are also trying to reach with the message of the health value of potatoes,” she emphasizes.

In a partnership with CPAC since 2010, Flatt has been involved in numerous live and multi-media events as a committee spokesperson. Yet another appearance from Flatt will come as a part of the Produce Marketing Association’s Fresh Summit in Anaheim in late October. “She will be at our booth for one of the days of the trade show, which will be a great draw for attendees,” Weyers predicts. The San Luis Valley potato booth will be a part of the Colorado Pavilion at the Fresh Summit. The committee has its own booth space, as well as independent shipper representation from the San Luis Valley.

In other activities, the spotlight on Colorado potatoes was especially bright



CPAC’s Elaine Ford, Jim Ehrlich and Linda Weyers

on September 8, when CPAC coordinated its annual Potato Festival in Monte Vista. The festival featured cooking demonstrations, field and warehouse tours, a potato-decorating contest, kids’ games, and other activities.

The committee is also involved in a K-12 curriculum program that is available to teachers throughout the state of Colorado with local teacher and curriculum developer, Judy Lopez, who adapts the studies for each level. 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 how to educate consumers about including potatoes as a regular part of their diets. **pb**

lation 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 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.”

Multiply that value with the added bonus of being good for the environment. “People want to support locally grown to help cut fuel usage and cut costs,” Skyline’s Christensen notes. “That’s good for all of us.”

According to Ray Keegan, manager of American Produce Co. 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 of Mountain Valley Produce, emphasizes that the variety offered through her company provides added benefits to retailers. The company is in its third year of offering 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 notes. “Fingerlings are a convenience potato product as well. They have shorter cooking time and are so versatile.”

Consistency of quality is also key to help increase in-store sales, stresses Christensen. “We probably have one of the best source buyers in the area. We also have been using the same basic group of growers, which leads to more consistency.” **pb**

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Tomatoes and citrus are two of the many Florida-grown items that the state supplies through the winter.

Florida Fall Produce Shines

Florida produce adds color, flavor and nutrition to fall menus. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**

Fall brings a profusion of colorful, flavor-rich, nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables from Florida. In 2011, the state was ranked first in the value of production of fresh market snap beans, cucumbers for fresh market, bell peppers, squash, sweet corn, fresh market tomatoes and watermelons. The value of the Florida vegetable crops exceeded \$1.5 billion, and the state ranks second to California in the total value of fresh vegetable market production. The state also produces sizable amounts of strawberries, blueberries, as well as oranges, grapefruit and tangerines for the fresh market. Cabbage, eggplant, sweet potatoes, potatoes, broccoli, chili peppers, avocados and other tropical fruits add to the diversity of Florida-grown produce.

With plantings underway for the upcoming Florida produce season, there was much concern over the late August Tropical Storm Isaac and what damage has occurred. "It was a big rainmaker in certain spots and they're still getting rain in southeast Florida," comments Mike Stuart, president of the Maitland-based Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (FFVA). "The eastern part of the state seemed to get more rain than the west."

However, Mike Aerts, FFVA's director of marketing and membership, warns, "There may be some delays in harvesting, but Florida

should have ample supplies of fall produce for the markets. We expect a three to five percent increase in costs, primarily due to drought conditions in the Midwest. Fertilizer and fuel costs are among those items with heavier increases. It will be up to consumers to decide whether they want to purchase produce that has been grown in the United States or from other areas, which do not have the protections we have in this country."

According to Jason Bedsole, eastern region vegetables sales manager of Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc., headquartered in Oviedo, FL. "The vegetable crops look good and plantings will ramp up in the coming weeks. We continue to increase our leafy green item mix to help customers reduce the number of stops their trucks have to make. With new DOT (Department of Transportation) regulations, we need to help streamline the loading process so customers can capitalize on freight advantages. Organic celery plantings have increased due to customer demand, and we look to expand our organic offerings in the future."

The company will have celery available from December through May and radishes October through May. Approaching the holidays, social media will become a source of holiday planning, with recipes and photos incorporating Duda's produce offerings.

Retailers Support Fresh Produce Campaigns

Retail support of any fresh produce campaign is critical, and the Florida produce industry is fortunate that so many retailers have been supportive. "Once the Florida season starts, we promote Florida-grown products in our weekly ads every week," states Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets Inc., in Lakeland, FL. "At Publix, we have supported local agriculture for decades. In addition to weekly ads, we feature Florida produce in our variety merchandising program. Florida-grown products are prominently displayed in the produce departments, often in what we refer to as 'first' position."

"We partner with the Florida Department of Agriculture [FDACS] to participate in state initiatives that focus on locally grown products, including the Fresh From Florida campaign," shares Benny L. Smith, spokesman for Harveys, a Salisbury, NC-based 73-store chain affiliate of Delhaize America.

"We are seeing a shift among consumers toward locally produced items, including natural and organic products," continues Smith. "Harveys supports the purchase of products made in the states in which we operate, including Florida. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the [FDACS] to offer fresh produce in season and grow our

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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
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FRESH FROM FLORIDA CAMPAIGN GROWS IN IMPORTANCE

Dan Sleep, supervisor/senior analyst of the marketing and development division of the Tallahassee-based Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS), asserts, “*Fresh From Florida* is our campaign slogan or brand. It works well in Florida and neighboring areas for locally or regionally grown campaigns. It works well in telling consumers throughout the United States and countries around the world about Florida’s quality produce. Our campaign’s goal is to increase sales and awareness of the fresh commodities produced in Florida.”

Our neighbors to the north are an important audience in the campaign. Sleep adds, “Canada is a huge market for us. Nearly one-quarter of all the campaign ads appear in Canada. Last year, our campaign reached 52 retail chains in 22 countries with 14,000 stores. This year, we will launch a campaign in November, running through January. A second campaign will run from February to early May.”

The Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign (FAPC) allows both small and large producers an opportunity to be a part of the *Fresh From Florida* programs, conducted by the FDACS. The program centers on the *Fresh from Florida* logo, which is displayed on product packaging, signage and a variety of print and electronic media.

“Retail promotions are an important aspect of the Florida program, and we’ve been fortunate to have fine cooperation from many retailers, among them Publix, Bravo, Sedano’s, Harveys, and Sobeys and Metro in Canada,” reveals Sleep. “We’ve had large displays of a diversity of products, depending on the seasonal

timing. Sampling programs, advertising and use of social media have all been components of our programs. We are continually looking for new opportunities, both here and abroad, to promote the high quality, freshness and good pricing of Florida’s produce. It helps our growers and others in the industry and can translate into new jobs, an important factor in today’s economy.”

The FDACS also reaches out to children and parents with programs to encourage healthy eating habits by using more fresh fruits and vegetables. One is designed to help fight against childhood obesity and other diet-related health problems. *Fresh2U* suggests young people eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day. It encourages children to try at least 20 different Florida fruits and vegetables at home during the school year. The program can also be used in the classroom. Two Florida produce items are featured each month, with a mini-poster available.

Another program, *Fresh From Florida Kids*, helps parents instill healthy eating habits in their young children. Research suggests that taste preferences and eating habits are fully developed by the time a child is three-years-old. This program is divided into three phases corresponding to the child’s age. Recipes are provided for each phase and “The Practical Mom” weekly tips are also available.

Targeting adults, the FDACS presents an *Easy as 1-2-3 Plan* to help instill better eating habits, to help fight obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and other chronic diseases. The plan suggests eating one or more fresh vegetables with two meals a day for three months. Easy-to-prepare recipes are also provided. **pb**

prospective local suppliers.”

“Above supporting Fresh From Florida, we also know that local produce has a positive impact on creating jobs and producing revenue in communities,” remarks Smith. “We like to promote our local growers in advertisements and in store signage.”

Canadian retail support for Florida-grown produce is important, according to Frank Bondi, director of category management for

Sobeys Ontario, a 102-chain Milton, Ontario-based division of Sobeys Inc. He says, “We need to look to all growing regions for seasonal supplies to remain sustainable the entire year. That’s why we depend on Florida for supplies as soon as their produce is available and meets our standards. The state’s citrus is huge for us, especially grapefruit and tangerines. We also buy their juice oranges. Florida strawberries and blueberries are popular here and we carry green

“In addition to weekly ads, we feature Florida produce in our variety merchandising program. Florida-grown products are prominently displayed in the produce departments, often in what we refer to as ‘first’ position.”

— Maria Brous, Publix Super Markets Inc.

beans and other fresh vegetables. Corn is a big item in the spring. The Fresh From Florida logo materials are used in our displays. The customers like the idea they are purchasing produce from Florida.”

Fresh Tomatoes A Major Florida Crop

Fresh tomatoes are an important Florida fall crop, with new plantings starting in August. DiMare Fresh, headquartered in Tampa, FL, produces a variety of fresh tomatoes, including round, Roma, cherry and grape. “We always participate in promotional programs with our customers at various times of the year, but the promotions are customized to suit the individual retailer,” remarks vice president Tony DiMare. “Some will be scripted by the individual customer and some will be in conjunction with the FDACS and the Florida Tomato Committee.”

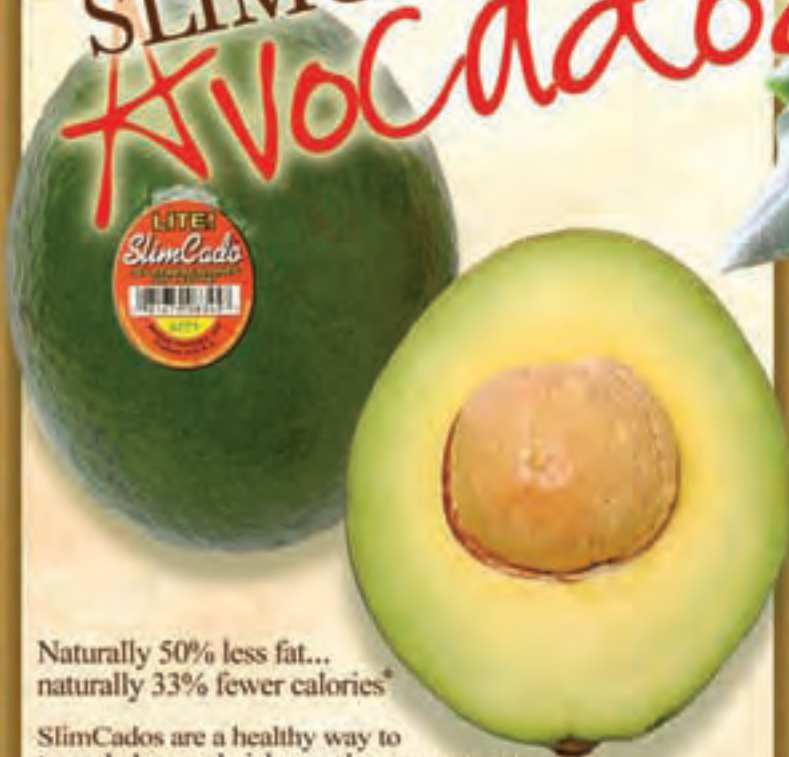
“The recent high winds and rain we experienced in late August have been fairly typical for us,” says Samantha Winters, director of education and promotion for the Maitland-based Florida Tomato Committee (FTC). “However, we don’t anticipate any serious interruption as a result.”

The Committee’s marketing program will focus on moving Florida round field-grown tomatoes. Efforts will focus east of the Mississippi River to make the most of the available marketing dollars. Promotional activities are usually concentrated in the spring, but Florida-branded point-of-sale (POS) materials will be available to retailers during the fall season.

“The FTC recently sponsored a Florida tomato cooking and in-the-field segment with Florida chef, Justin Timineri, on the *How to Do Florida* show,” reports Winters. “It is a regional program and series running on the Sun Sports

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channel. Further, our television commercials, speaking to the commitment of our growers to produce a wholesome, flavorful tomato, will be running in each program of the series in October through our spring season.”

The Committee is also launching a *Kids Corner* on its website for the fall. “We believe it will provide good information for children, parents and educators,” Winters adds.

Strawberries A Florida Favorite

The Plant City-based Florida Strawberry

Growers Association (FSGA) always anticipates a good crop, with the primary variable being the weather. “This year’s acreage should remain close to last year’s, but perhaps a bit lower, reflecting last year’s weak financial results,” says Ted Campbell, the association’s executive director.

Promotions generally begin in December when the state has solid strawberry volume. “Consumers are excited by creative recipes, and chefs have become rock stars,” recognizes Campbell. “Therefore, we have focused a lot of energy on our chef advisory panel to create new

recipes for strawberries, using them in both local and regional restaurant chain promotions. There are lots of spring and summer strawberry promotions, but foodservice tends to overlook them in the winter,” he continues. “The new recipes will stimulate winter consumption. We will use our website, blog and outreach to food editors and women’s magazines to deliver our message to consumers. We have upgraded our website and will promote the smaller family farms that produce the specialty crops. There has been much negative publicity about ‘factory farms’ so we’re putting a face on the small family farm.”

Strawberries have nutritional and convenience benefits, and consumption continues to climb. Several strawberry handlers have promotions with local retailers, emphasizing the locally grown and fresh attributes of Florida berries. FSGA produces some of its own materials and also uses those from FDACS. Using its small budget, it has developed POS videos, and posters and video materials are all downloadable from its website.

Campbell remarks, “The scope of locally grown in winter changes significantly. Florida is the closest locally grown strawberry for Montreal in the winter, and we are the best local choice for half the country at that point. We are faced with substantial market encroachment from Mexico so we will be heavily promoting Florida-grown, suggesting consumers look for the U.S. grown labels.”

Florida Known For Appealing Citrus Varieties

The Bartow-based Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC) is an agency of the Florida government charged with the marketing, research and regulation of the Florida citrus industry. Karen Bennett Mathis, FDOC domestic public relations director, acknowledges, “The proposed FDOC operating budget for fiscal year 2011-2012 includes a smaller amount of funding for fresh citrus retail merchandising, compared to years past. We can provide retailers with several fresh POS materials at no charge, while supplies last.” The materials include display cards and two Florida Fresh bin posters. Brochures, with citrus product and nutrition information and recipes, and a *Florida Citrus Varieties Produce Buyers’ Guide* are also available.

Florida boasts a number of different citrus varieties that extend all the way into the beginning of summer. Florida Ambersweet oranges are available from late September to October; Hamlin, Navel and Cara Cara oranges are in the market October to December; Fallglo and



Robinson tangerines are marketed from September to November, while Sunburst tangerines and Tangelos are available November to January; red and white grapefruit are marketed October to June.

“FDOC has a wide variety of Florida citrus recipes and images available on our website for retailers to use in their consumer communications programs,” adds Mathis.

Duda markets Florida citrus fruits as well as a variety of fresh vegetables. Sam Jones, eastern citrus division operations manager, reports, “The new 2012-2013 citrus crop is sizing well; with a uniform spring bloom, a consistent harvest pace is expected without gaps. The quality I see on the tree tells us there will be a balanced supply of fresh citrus for our programs and sales throughout the season. We are committed to the long term sustainability of the Florida citrus industry and thus, are expanding our new variety plantings and trials in southwest Florida.”

Vero Beach, FL-based Seald-Sweet International expects a more normal size structure on all varieties this year. “Last year, big sizes were prevalent,” remarks marketing manager Kim Flores. “Good volume on all varieties will help us promote the fruit with regularity. We will be touting Florida Navels as a specialty variety this year and will have a big push on bagged Navels.” The company customizes some of its own promotional materials, but also uses promotional items from both the FDACS and the FDOC. A QR code has been added to Seald-Sweet’s new packaging, that when scanned, the consumer can access information about the growers, products and growing operations.

DNE World Fruit Sales, headquartered in Fort Pierce, FL, and its affiliates own and operate over 20,000 acres of citrus groves in Florida. “We plan our promotions based on the peak flavor periods of each variety to meet consumers’ desires for good tasting fruit,” states Kevin Swords, Florida sales manager. “Educating consumers on the different varieties by using effective POS materials and conducting in-store sampling to entice consumers to taste before purchasing helps boost sales and creates repeat buyers.”

The company will promote Cara Cara Navels in 3-lb. bags from early November through December, and suggests jumbo Navels are an excellent item to promote during the holiday period. “In January, we will conduct a cross-promotion of Ocean Spray fresh grapefruit with Ocean Spray juices,” reveals Swords. “This has been a successful produce promotion for us in the past, as January is a good time to feature items that promote health and nutri-

tion. We also plan to participate in the FDOC grapefruit promotions.”

Florida Nutritious Vegetables Promoted

Many Florida agricultural companies produce and market a variety of fresh vegetables. One of those companies is J & J Produce Inc., headquartered in Loxahatchee. “Once our harvest schedule is completed, we will offer both retail and foodservice customers price promotions to ensure consistent movement of our core commodities,” remarks Kohl Brown,

vice president of sales. “Locally grown is a major part of our marketing strategy, plus we promote domestically grown to our partners across the country. Many of our customers are provided with bios of our family of growers to help promote locally grown Florida produce. All of our promotional efforts and materials come from J & J’s internal marketing team.”

Weis-Buy Farms Inc., in Fort Myers, FL, markets tomatoes, strawberries and a variety of vegetables. “We find that we can load trucks with items that complement each other in

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— Kevin Swords, DNE World Fruit Sales LLC

temperature and in lots as small as five pallets and as much as 10 trailer loads,” notes president and CEO Chuck Weisinger. “We have expanded our sales staff to give our customers a better handle on rapidly moving markets and changes that are inherent in the produce business. Our company continues to promote fresh fruits and vegetables each day in its advertising and by word of mouth.”

Strawberries, grape tomatoes and an array of fresh vegetables are marketed by Bradenton, FL-based C & D Fruit & Vegetable Co. Inc. “We don’t really push locally grown promotions, but we do use some of the promotional materials from the FDACS,” shares president Tom O’Brien. “We also develop some of our own materials through personal contacts with our retail customers.”

Raleigh, NC-based L&M Companies Inc. markets a large number of fresh Florida-grown vegetables. “Promotions to support retailers may vary with the retailer’s request,” states Bobby Creel, business development director. We produce our own POS materials, or sometimes retailers will supply them. The locally or regionally grown theme is emphasized whenever possible.”

Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and product development at Boca Raton, FL-based Rosemont Farms, a C.H. Robinson company, shares, “We market a premium, blocky-style green pepper in a variety of pack types and place cartons, bags and special offerings. Hot peppers and mini-sweet peppers continue to be of growing interest to the trade. We also market a combination of pole cucumbers and field cucumbers. Well-timed promotional opportunities are offered to maximize the impact of production peaks with lifts in consumer sales. Some of the promotional materials we use are our own, but we also use some from the FDACS.”

Rosemont is planning to reveal some new developments in the way of sustainable packaging at the Produce Marketing Association meeting this fall. It also plans to offer a full line in the dry vegetable category.

B & W Quality Growers Inc., headquartered in Fellsmere, FL, grows a range of distinctive baby leaves, including watercress,

wild red cress, Bordeaux baby red spinach, gourmet baby pea tendrils and wild baby arugula. The company works closely with both retail and foodservice customers on a customer-specific basis to maintain promotions throughout the year. “We develop our own programs and also work with FDACS and its Florida-grown programs,” says Andy Brown, vice president of marketing. “We are looking forward to a strong fall/winter season with a new state-of-the-art processing facility for both our bunch and value-added products. This year, we began working with The Culinary Institute’s Greystone Campus in California, which helped sponsor a series of events attracting top chefs, restaurants, physicians, nutritionists and health writers to learn about the nutritional values of our baby leaves.”

Tropical Fruits Add Diversity To Florida Crops

Florida avocados are another produce item available this fall through January. Homestead, FL-based Brooks Tropicals LLC markets the Slimcado avocado, a range of avocado varieties with one-half the fat and one-third fewer calories than the leading California avocado. “We do a monthly newsletter called *Cooking in the Tropics*, with a medley of recipes, many of them for our Slimcado,” comments Mary Ostlund, director of marketing. “We recently conducted a sweepstakes promotion with Concord Foods and its guacamole mix package. Consumers entered for a \$500 cash prize and could sign up to receive our newsletter and information from Concord Foods. Over 10,000 entries were received for the contest, which just ended on September 30.”

Among the other Florida-grown tropical fruits marketed by Brooks Tropical and available this fall is the sweet, tangy star fruit, or carambola. Another marketer of Florida avocados and carambola is New Limeco LLC, located in Princeton, FL. Doria Potts, sales and marketing director, notes, “The crops look strong and we plan to promote avocados this fall. We will be working with a few select chain stores on promotions and ads, using our own materials as well as some from the FDACS.” **pb**



Argentina is an important up-and-comer in the imported blueberry industry.

Imported Berries Help Maintain A Year-Round Supply

Once the domestic berry supply has finished, retailers can rely on high quality imports to keep consumers very happy. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

The arrival of fresh berries on supermarket shelves was once a sure sign of summer. No longer. Imports of blueberries, blackberries and raspberries from Mexico, Central and South America during the fall, winter and early spring now mean any time is ripe for customers to buy and enjoy berries.

Year-round availability has grown berry category contribution to 8.2 percent of produce department sales in the 52 weeks ending June 30, 2012, according to the Nielsen Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based fresh food consulting firm. What's more, imports are far from a token addition. Between 2007 and 2011, for example, fresh blueberry imports averaged 46.7 percent of domestic fresh blueberry consumption, according to USDA ERS statistics.

Jeff Fairchild, director of produce at New Seasons Market, a 10-store chain based in Portland, OR, says, "Berries are healthy, convenient, consistent in quality and available all year long; that's what driving sales."

Here's an update on the import season ahead and how retailers can capitalize on berry sales during this non-traditional time.

Blueberries: Argentina, Uruguay, Chile And Mexico

Fresh blueberries finish up in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia by mid- to late September. After that, explains Luciano Fizman, in South American procurement for Los Angeles, CA-based Gourmet Trading Berry LLC, "Blueberries will arrive from Argentina from September 15 through December 15; from Uruguay from October 1 to December 1; and Chile from November 15 to March 30."

Not all these countries supply the United States equally, however. Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co., based in Brooks, OR, says, "The up-and-coming country is Argentina, which can help fill North American demand primarily in October. Chilean blueberries are by far the most imported blueberry into the United States, representing more than 60 percent of blueberry imports. Both Mexico and Uruguay have also increased blueberry tonnage, but Chile and Argentina clearly dominate the import blueberry market so far."

Argentina and Uruguay: The Argentina import season into the United States is relatively short, Curry details, "We'll start toward the end

of September. During this time we also have controlled-atmosphere blueberries from Oregon into October so it's a time of transition and scheduling to meet the needs of our customers."

Inez Pelaez, marketing director for Buenos Aires-based Profrutal Argentina, a company that promotes Argentine fresh produce growers, says, "This year we are expecting almost the same volumes as the 2011/12 season starting around 38th week." In 2011/2012, the United States imported nearly 21 million pounds of Southern Highbush blueberries from Argentina, according to USDA ERS statistics.

A mild winter meant that Argentina's blueberry crop is about two weeks early, with promotional volume expected starting mid-October, rather than the beginning of November, advises Dr. Ulises Sabato, vice president of Weston, FL-based Fresh Results LLC, and a large grower of blueberries in Argentina. "However, severe weather in the past and an inflationary economy skyrocketing the cost of inputs, such as fertilizer and labor, have caused 300 to 400 blueberry growers to go bankrupt. As a result, there are now about 200 growers in the country down from 700, with six growers

“Growers are identifying the best early and late season varieties as we see this as an opportunity to fill domestic needs until domestic blueberries start. The other trend we’re seeing is the continued investment in technology, in particular cold chain technology, which improves the quality and shelf-life overall.”

— Matt Curry, Curry & Co.

controlling 80 percent of the production. Hence, blueberry production is in a slower growth pattern than in the past.”

According to Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms LLC, headquartered in Estero, FL, two additional cost variables challenging Argentina are the need to fly berries to the United States and the requirement to cold treat or fumigate fruit. “Uruguay is faced with the same challenges of logistics and phytosanitary demands,” he adds, “which is why we don’t expect to see an increase from these two countries.”

Chile: All imported berries have become an integral part of the produce program at Marketplace IGA, a 32-store chain in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. Kent Disher, director of produce operations for Marketplace IGA and H.Y. Louie Co. Ltd., reports, “In the past two years, Chilean blueberries in particular have really gained in popularity at a time when local berries are unavailable.”

The 2012/2013 season will see another substantial step up in the volume of Chilean blueberries shipped to the United States, remarks Tom Tjerandson, managing director for the Sonoma, CA-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA). “We expect this to exceed the 61,000-plus tons (122.7 million pounds) imported last season, which makes Chile the leading source of blueberry imports into North America and the United States, now surpassing Canada,” he details. “Added hectares in production and replacing old varieties with new high production ones are conspiring to increase imports.”

Curry & Co.’s Curry agrees that the Chilean blueberry industry is continuing to grow. “Reports suggest about a 50 percent production increase over the next five years,” he cites. “The biggest development is the intent to lengthen the season on both the front and back ends of the season.”

“This upcoming season, we expect a first peak for the Christmas pull and a second peak prior to Valentine’s Day,” details Luciano Fiszman, agronomy engineer and blueberry

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

Fresh blueberries	(percent):
2007	43.7
2008	46.9
2009	45.2
2010	49.0
2011	46.8
Fresh raspberries	(percent):
2007	25.8
2008	23.6
2009	18.8
2010	29.0
2011	46.4

Fresh blackberries

Data not available separately from grouped blackberry, mulberry and loganberry.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce

program manager at Gourmet Trading Co., in Los Angeles, CA.

Mexico: While the focus remains on the traditional growing regions in the United States and Southern Hemisphere, Ben Reilly, Midwest business development manager for Los Angeles, CA-based Giumarra Companies adds, “We do have trial blueberry production in Mexico.”

Eric Crawford, president of Fresh Results, remarks, “Mexico is the new frontier for blueberries, especially from the beginning of December to June. This won’t affect Argentina, but it could result in a huge effort for Chile.”

“This past early March through the end of April was the first year of production for blueberries out of Mexico for Family Tree Farms, in Reedley, CA. “Our project in Mexico started five years ago with land and infrastructure development,” explains Don Goforth, director of marketing. “We planted the first variety two years ago, and this year’s production was better than anticipated. We expect to have four times the volume in 2013, enough for our retail partners. As new varieties come into production in

Mexico, we hope to see timing back up into February, but we won’t know for sure until the bushes mature.”

Family Tree Farms has bought the exclusive rights to grow and distribute in North America five uniquely sized, explosive flavored blueberry varieties developed by an Australian breeder. “Our objective,” says Goforth, “is to enable consumers to understand that there are multiple varieties of blueberries, just as there are apples. We’ll be working on a marketing program in the future to convey this concept.”

Blackberries: Guatemala And Mexico

Guatemala, and to a much larger extent Mexico, are leading blackberry exporters to the United States.

Guatemala: “We import blackberries from Mexico from September through May, along with other fruit from Guatemala,” explains Reilly. “This year, the Guatemalan product has played an important role in maintaining supply when weather affected Mexican and U.S. crops.”

Mexico: Blackberries are available out of Mexico from the end of September until mid-July, says Fresh Result’s Crawford. “Promotional volumes start at the end of October, peak in December and peak again in April,” he details, adding that blackberry production and export out of Mexico has grown dramatically. “Ninety percent of what’s planted in Mexico is the Tupee variety, which has changed the face of blackberry consumption due to its consistent eating quality and shelf-life,” he reports. “As a result, I could see blackberries overtaking raspberries in sales over the next few years.”

According to Roberts, test plots in Mexico of new proprietary blackberries varieties should be available in the next couple of years.

Raspberries: Mexico

Sales of raspberries are slow from December to February at New Season’s Market, says Fairchild. “That’s due to the higher price over what customers are used to seeing for domestic raspberries,” he notes. “We tend to carry them just for convenience.”

Naturipe Farms has planted its two newest proprietary raspberry varieties, Pacific Deluxe and Pacific Royale, in California as well as a smaller amount of acreage in Mexico. Roberts reveals, “This year marked the first commercial production for us of these varieties out of Mexico. Availability is from October to December, and then there’s a gap, and available again from March to May or early June.”

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DO CUSTOMERS CARE WHERE THEIR BERRIES COME FROM?

There are two sides to every story, and according to Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co., based in Brooks, OR, consumers care. “U.S. customers certainly care where there produce comes from, and the continued emphasis of local first throughout the country drives sales nationwide. That being said, U.S. consumers also expect to find blueberries in produce departments year-round, and when domestic blueberries are out of season, imports certainly fill that niche. Retailers should use this information to take advantage of the seasonality of the domestic blueberry programs and when it’s time for imports, they should announce that they have the most consistent, highest quality import blueberries that are available.”

Dovey Plain, Reedley, CA-based Family Tree Farm’s marketing coordinator, contends the answer is two-sided. “We ask this question to store produce managers and we get a wide range of answers,” he says. “In some cases, there are geographical areas where consumers are more concerned. In other cases, it seems to vary from consumer to consumer. But the continued year-round growth in all berry categories seems to indicate that consumers want berries, regardless of their origin.”

Yet Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral at King’s Super Markets, a 25-store chain in Parsippany, NJ, doesn’t think consumers give the country of origin question much thought. “Certain customers are concerned with origin, but for the majority, quality trumps where the berries were grown.” **pb**

Size Matters — Bigger Is Better When It Comes To Packaging

Growth is exploding for larger sized clamshells of berries in the winter, says New Seasons Market’s Fairchild. “Consumers are looking for a value,” he says. “That’s what makes 18-oz. blueberries and 12-oz. blackberries and raspberries popular.”

The traditional 4.4-oz. pack hasn’t become a dinosaur yet. Curry contends, “The 4.4-oz. clamshell is an important part of import blueberry programs, especially at the start and the end of the season when it allows for a more attractive price point for consumers. During the peak of the season you’ll have larger clamshell sizes to help move the necessary volume.”

The percentage of larger packs is dramatically increasing at a faster rate than industry

production. Naturipe’s Roberts points out, “It used to be only club stores that wanted large packs. Now, traditional retailers are stocking up on 6-, 12- and 18-oz. blackberries and raspberries in pints and 18-oz., and even experimenting with 24-oz. blueberries.”

The success of larger packs may be counter-intuitive to some in a down economy, but not so in consumers’ minds. CFFA’s Tjerandsen reports, “Research indicates that when retailers tested [larger packs], berry sales are inelastic, and a higher unit cost isn’t a barrier to sales. In fact, the customers lost to sticker shock are more than offset by the sell-through of those who purchase the larger packs.”

Don’t Put Berries In A Winter Hideaway

Berries are merchandised together front-and-center year-round at King’s Super Markets, a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ. Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral, adds, “The berry category is huge. It’s one of the top categories in produce.”

The best berry displays are large ones at the entrance to the store, or wherever there is the most foot traffic, recommends Julia Inestroza, Gourmet Trading’s marketing and merchandising manager. “Berries are impulse purchases, so exposure is a big component of sales.”

Shelf space and visibility is important for imported berries, agrees Curry & Co.’s Curry. “Domestically, consumers anticipate fresh blueberries and know it’s blueberry season,” he says. “For imports, you need to remind your consumers that they are available.”

Displays of imported berries are built in cooler cases at New Seasons Market. Fairchild explains, “They’ve already lost four to seven days or more in transit, so we find it important to keep them chilled to maintain quantity.

Volumes of Chilean blueberries have grown so great that some retailers, such as Marketplace IGA, will feature them in chain-wide display contests. “For the past two years, we have run a display contest with the stores in conjunction with a flyer ad on Chilean blueberries in January,” says Disher. “The stores have come up with a variety of creative ways to merchandise the blueberries that have helped make this a very successful promotion at a time when our customers are looking for healthy choices after the holiday indulgence.”

Berries Aren’t Just Warm Weather Fare

Winter is a wonderful time to promote berries, recommends Giumarra’s Reilly. “Consumers are focused on staying healthy during cold and flu season, and many of them recognize berries as delicious super fruits with



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excellent nutritional benefits,” he points out. “Berries can also add warmth and color to displays, and their versatility makes them a good candidate for cross promotions.”

Argentina’s blueberries are ripe for Thanksgiving promotions. Fresh Result’s Crawford emphasizes, “There’s a huge opportunity to bring in revenue during this time. Blueberries, while not traditional ingredients, can be used to make pies and even in place of cranberries in cranberry sauce.”

Christmas and New Years are two great holidays during the peak volumes of imported blueberries, remarks Curry. “Blueberries can be a part of so many delicious dessert recipes like Blueberry cobblers and pies,” he says. “New Year’s kicks in the health benefits, and retailers should celebrate all the great healthy attributes of blueberries to help drive sales.”

Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Pompano Beach, FL-headquartered Southern Specialties, says, “Blueberries are being used in festive holiday drinks like Mimosas.”

Recipes are a focus of merchandising for import berry season at Kings, and Kneeland details, “We seasonally create in-house five or six QR codes that lead to our website and recipes.”

Cool Promotions

Imported berries are promoted as much as possible at Kings Super Markets, while at New Seasons Market, ads on 18-oz. Chilean blueberries are popular.

Gourmet Trading’s Inestroza says, “The best way to promote imported berries is to plan large scale promotions during the peak production times. During the other weeks, back page promotions or in store promotions work well.”

Value is a driving force for consumer spending, adds Naturipe’s Roberts. “Therefore, promotions that feature price and pack size are common,” he notes.

Once again this season, the Chilean Blueberry Committee will work closely with the CFFA in the United States to increase sales of Chile’s blueberries from November to April in coordination with winter promotions of the Folsom, CA-based U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council. The CFFA’s Tjerandsen, says, “In the spirit of cooperation and teamwork, the domestic blueberry marketing program has evolved to provide additional supplemental support when imports are in the market. This will fund in-store radio, POS materials such as cards and danglers and a recipe booklet that shows multiple ways to enjoy blueberries with a focus on winter.”

pb



California contributes 63 percent of the nation's citrus crops.

California Citrus Provides A Solid Ring For Produce Department

California Navel oranges, along with Clementines and Mandarins are some of California's most beloved fruit. **BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ**

California has long been the land of dreams, and many view the Golden State as paradise. This virtual Garden of Eden is abundant with almost everything, and certainly citrus. While California production of citrus is nowhere near that of Florida — 33 percent of the nation's citrus supply compared to 63 percent — the state contributes a significant portion.

Introduced to Californian soil in 1769, citrus crops have flourished in its picture-perfect climate. In the 1840s, the state's first commercial citrus farm was founded in what is now downtown Los Angeles. And while it's true that the state's "citrus belt" has gradually inched north into the San Joaquin Valley, due to the increasing urbanization of Southern California, you won't find West Coast citrus growers mourning the migration. While Florida ranks first in the production of seeded oranges, such as Valencias, which are used mostly for orange juice, California is tops when it comes to fresh market oranges, most notably the Navel orange. California citrus production reached \$1.3 billion in 2011.

"These are good times for the California

citrus industry," says Kevin Fiori, vice president of sales and marketing for Sunkist Growers, in Sherman Oaks, CA. "Citrus is a good value for consumers and we've seen good demand."

While Navels continue to dominate the California citrus industry, growers are seeing increased demand for Mandarins and Clementines — the so-called "easy-peelers." That characteristic alone makes Mandarins and Clementines the natural choice for lunch boxes and snacking occasions, according to Fred Berry, director of marketing for Orange Cove, CA-based Mulholland Citrus. "The fruit is inherently more snackable because it is naturally easy to peel," he says. "It's really a good product from a snacking, user-friendly standpoint. Consequently, consumers have picked up on this more and more."

With Clementines enjoying a hearty "growth spurt," growers are dedicating even more acreage to the variety, says Berry. The decision makes complete sense simply because the hefty investment in water, land, taxes, and labor required to produce a given crop forces growers to always be cognizant of where they can reap the greatest profit. "Naturally, if growers are making money, they are going to

gravitate toward crops that make them a decent return on investment," he explains. "Right now, it's all about easy-peelers."

The intense popularity of easy-peelers has led to a trade-off of sorts, as consumers shift their purchases from Navels to Clementines and Mandarins, according to Barney Evans, vice president of sales for Sun Pacific Marketing Cooperative, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. "Especially on the front end, prior to Christmas, we are seeing a decline in Navel consumption based on the amount of Clementines and Mandarins that are now becoming available from California," he reports. "That cannibalization — we are doing it to ourselves."

Retailers agree that consumers have taken to the easy-peel varieties. Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets Inc., located in Lakeland, FL, says Clementines now rank right alongside Navels as the most popular oranges at the southeastern chain. "Clementines have become a customer favorite," she asserts. "They are easy to peel, seedless, juicy, sweet and great for school lunch boxes."

Up the coast, in Parsippany, NJ, Paul Knee-



California's Navels are widely recognized as the best eating navels in the world.

land, vice president of produce and floral at Kings Super Markets, also reports an increase in Clementine demand, which he says have “taken the world by storm.” However, he does not believe Clementines have supplanted Navel oranges or stolen any of their sales. Rather, he sees the two varieties as “two different commodities,” each with their own distinctive uses. “The Clementines are more for snacking and the Navel oranges are more of a dessert thing,” he details. “I see people bringing Navel oranges to work with their lunch, but in between breakfast and lunch, they are snacking on Clementines.”

Despite Clementines’ strong performance, Kneeland contends Navels are still the best-selling citrus item in terms of volume. Truth be told, sales of Clementines are actually flattening a bit, he says. Whereas Kings used to sell many 5-lb. boxes of Clementines, now it primarily sells 3-lb. bags. While the economy could be part of the cause, Kneeland believes it’s more of a matter of trying to avoid waste. “Sometimes, when consumers buy a 5-lb. box, by the time they get to that last piece of fruit, it’s not as good as the first piece of fruit,” he reasons. “Coming back to the store more often and buying that 3-lb. bag is preferred.”

The other major easy-peeler, the Mandarin, is also doing well, particularly for those growers who cater to Asian niche markets. That’s the case for Edison, CA-based Johnston Farms, which enjoys “a tremendous support” from Asian consumers. Salesman Harley Phillips questions other growers’ wisdom in planting Clementines in such enormous numbers, wondering if they are “going to be able to handle everything they’ve got planted.” As far as he’s concerned, growers should be paying more attention to Mandarins. “The Mandarin is the queen of the citrus varieties,” he declares. “Nothing compares to it, not even the Clementines.”

“We can’t tell them their business, but we’d like to see lower retails, especially on Navels. Certain times of the year, they’ve got to work with us to ensure they are putting either on sale or on-shelf the fruit that’s not only going to be the best value to the customer, but can make them the most money.”

— Barney Evans, Sun Pacific Marketing Cooperative

Evans agrees, calling the quality of Mandarins “superior to the Navel orange,” particularly before Christmas. According to Mulholland’s Berry, one Mandarin variety that’s proving especially popular is the Satsuma.

Other emerging types of citrus include W. Murcotts, Moro oranges, Gold Nugget Mandarins, and Ojai Pixie Tangerines, according to Sunkist’s Fiori. Berry adds the Tango to that list. Basically, he explains, a Tango is just the “near-seedless offshoot of the W. Murcott,” adding, “That’s probably been the most widely planted new citrus varietal in California within the past five years.”

Orange Cove, CA-based Booth Ranches LLC offers a variety called Spring Navels, which are available from the end of January into April. Boasting a bright orange color, this

hardy piece of fruit possesses a higher sugar content than traditional Navel oranges.

At Kings, Kneeland reports a “huge uplift” in the more unusual citrus offerings, such as Blood oranges and Pink Navels. “Our customers like to try some different, funky things,” he acknowledges. “They use them on salads or for juicing. A lot of them use the funky varieties for cooking, like for a glaze on a chicken. It’s a little bit different.”

Encroachment From Imports

Phillips says the citrus industry is getting away from early varieties and “going heavy” into late varieties. For its part, Johnston Farms is concentrating many of its efforts on such late varieties as Autumn Golds, Powells, Barnsfields, and Lane Late Navel oranges. Phillips blames imported citrus — Australian varieties, in particular — for causing the shift by “stomping” on the front end of the domestic season. “You used to get some big money for early fruit, but it doesn’t seem to work that way anymore,” he laments. “There’s too much competition from other parts of the world.”

For the most part, Southern Hemisphere growers pose little threat to the California citrus industry simply because their product is largely counter-seasonal. Offshore product typically hits U.S. stores during the summer and early fall months, while California citrus is primarily available late fall through early spring. “Most of the [domestic] industry finishes up just as the imports start coming in,” says Tracy Jones, vice president of domestic sales at Booth Ranches. “For the most part, they are not in direct competition.”

That said, there are some varieties, like Valencia oranges, whose sales may have been harmed by Southern Hemisphere imports. However, other citrus varieties have actually been helped by imports because the resulting year-round availability has served to introduce more consumers to the fruit in question. “Imports have allowed the overall category to be available to the consumer on a near year-round basis, so that has made it possible to buy a specific type of fruit whenever they want,” says Mulholland’s Berry.

Kings brings in many of its citrus imports from South Africa. According to Kneeland, the quality is excellent, resulting in widespread acceptance by consumers. Nonetheless, Kneeland acknowledges California citrus carries a certain cache that the imports simply do not have, no matter how high their quality. For that reason, Kings’ customers always look forward to the result of domestically grown product and are willing to pay a good price for it.

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“The Clementines are more for snacking and the Navel oranges are more of a dessert thing. I see people bringing Navel oranges to work with their lunch, but in between breakfast and lunch, they are snacking on Clementines.”

— Paul Kneeland, Kings Super Markets

“There’s definitely a premium for domestic product,” he adds. “It’s very important that we have the solid quality and taste that comes out of California.”

Likewise, Publix turns to imported citrus when necessary, but strives to stay with domestic product “as long as product availability and quality meet our specifications,” Brous notes.

When it comes to Northern Hemisphere growers, Johnston Farms’ Phillips is concerned about China, which he brands “a major threat,” primarily due to its potential to produce a vast amount of fruit. He does find solace in the fact that the quality of Chinese-grown citrus has not proven to be very high, at least to date. So while the price may be right, he is confident discerning retailers are still going to seek out domestic product. “Chinese fruit is not particularly flavorful, whereas it’s widely accepted that the California Navel is the best eating navel in the world,” he says. “If an orange is an orange and somebody merely wants to put an orange on the shelf and they don’t care about flavor, it’s fine. But there are certain retailers who want to put an orange out that’s going to generate repeat business.”

In reality, Berry claims the imports may actually be experiencing far greater challenges than domestic citrus in that they have to compete with the deciduous fruits — melons and grapes, for example — that are traditionally consumed during the summer months. Domestic citrus has the luxury of being available during the time of the year when people are accustomed to eating citrus. What’s more, they are widely available during cold and flu season, a selling point in and of itself. On that note, Sunkist’s Fiori shares, “We’ve had a few

retailers place citrus, such as Cara Cara oranges, in the pharmacy department during the cold and flu season with incredible sales results. The best merchants try new things, which usually result in leading industry outcomes.”

Delightful Displays And Plentiful Promotions

According to Kneeland, Kings typically merchandises all the citrus together, using different colored citrus, like lemons and limes, to break up the color of the display. Lemons — in particular, the Meyer variety — have emerged as one of the top items in the citrus category, he says.

Sun Pacific’s Evans reports strong demand for lemons, especially in the summer when iced tea and other libations are consumed more frequently.

Fiori describes lemons as a “secondary display item” because there is a primary driver, such as seafood, water, and alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverages driving lemon demand. Sunkist has been working with retailers to cross-promote lemons with the primary demand item, placing secondary displays of lemons near the primary drivers. Such initiatives usually result in a 30 percent increase in lemon consumption. That’s particularly important in today’s marketplace, Fiori says, where high volumes of lemon imports from Chile and Mexico are causing oversupply and downward pricing pressure. “Lemons are the No. 1 food flavor additive in the world,” he says. “We continue to promote that fact in our S’Alternative campaign, which encourages consumers to use lemons as an alternative to salt.”



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Promotion is key to boosting sales on all types of citrus. Placing citrus in ads when it's at its peak will help move more volume, says Booth Ranches' Jones, as will building creative displays and bringing in bins and pop-up displays to create more shelf space. She recommends retailers take advantage of high-graphic boxes and bins offered by growers. Sunkist, for example, sells oranges in 10-lb. themed cartons specially designed to promote consumption at sporting events, such as soccer, racing, and tailgating.

Overall, Fiori says Sunkist is pleased with the support it has received from its retail customers in promoting the citrus category. Retailers have been supportive in helping the grower achieve its goal of placing secondary displays for items like Cara Caras, Gold Nuggets, Moro Oranges,

and Minneola Tangelos.

Retailers could benefit greatly if they were to partner more closely with growers, says Evans. Doing so would not only come in handy in terms of promoting the product and securing eye-catching POS materials, it would also help retailers determine appropriate pricing. That's one area where Evans, in particular, feels progress has yet to be made. "We can't tell them their business, but we'd like to see lower retails, especially on Navels," he says. "Certain times of the year, they've got to work with us to ensure they are putting either on sale or on-shelf the fruit that's not only going to be the best value to the customer, but can make them the most money."

Working more closely with their grower-

partners also can help retailers determine which citrus products are most appropriate to be featured as the item of the month, says Evans. He also feels a close partnership would help retailers overcome the problem of being "stuck on any one size or grade."

The need for retailers to be more flexible in terms of size is also a concern for Phillips. All too often, he says, retailers are not open to promoting different sizes. Natural crop variances from year to year create challenges in that the sizing structure may be smaller or larger than a particular retailer finds desirable. "Chain stores could do a lot more for themselves and their grower by being more flexible," he says. "Rather than getting hung up on particular sizes, they need to take a risk and do something different." **pb**

NATIONAL CITRUS SHOWCASE



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COMBINING PROMOTION AND EDUCATION is the targeted approach taken by sponsors of this Floral Masters of Merchandising BOUQUET supplement – our first in a series of PRODUCE BUSINESS Floral Guidebooks to help supermarket executives do a better job of merchandising and marketing fresh flowers and other floral products.

In keeping with our mission to “INITIATE INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT,” the editors of PRODUCE BUSINESS invite supermarket executives to give us feedback on this Floral Masters of Merchandising supplement as well as suggestions for future topics. Please contact us at info@producebusiness.com

Retailers may also request a PDF of this supplement or printed copies of this guide (while supplies last) to pass along to your managers by contacting us at info@producebusiness.com.

If you are a floral vendor and would like to see your category in the next Floral Masters of Merchandising supplement, please contact E. Shaun Alderman, Floral Department Marketing Strategist, PRODUCE BUSINESS, 561-703-4010, SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com.

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Floral Masters of Merchandising is an advertising supplement in PRODUCE BUSINESS. In addition, FLORAL BUSINESS — a magazine providing important how-to information on topics such as pricing, labor, space-to-sales, seasonal promotions, care and handling, value-added services, etc. — is published and inserted into PRODUCE BUSINESS in our March, June, September and December issues.



SUNSHINE BOUQUET COMPANY
 2011 NW 70th Ave., Miami, FL 33122
 Contact: Karen Leggett, Sales & Marketing
 Cell Phone: 508-395-5038
 kleggett@sunshinebouquet.com



HAND-TIED BOUQUETS



HOW SUNSHINE BOUQUET HELPS THE RETAILER'S BOTTOM LINE

Sunshine Bouquet's management team has well over 50 years of experience and expertise in marketing flowers to florists and mass market retailers. We have over 235 hectares of roses and fresh flowers grown on our farms in Bogota, Colombia, S.A. Harvest and production occur daily for transport to the United States. All flowers are pre-cooled, treated with preservative and packed under stringent controls. Increased shelf-life and lower shrink at store-level are results of the proper post-harvest treatment, care and handling.

All of our bouquets offer construction that is hand-tied, making them easy for store personnel to merchandise in any refrigerated case or to upgrade into a profit making vase arrangement. Our bouquets are 100 percent vase-ready for the consumer purchase, making the customers instantly successful in creating their vase at home.

We offer accessible store support, POP, signage and marketing materials. Field merchandising personnel is made available to support bouquet programs. Category management expertise is available for category analysis, promotions and metrics.

MERCHANDISING HOW-TO'S FOR A BOUQUET PROGRAM

- Create a visual "wow factor" and high drama with flowers arranged in vertical ribbons by price point in refrigerated case or fixture.

- Identify an optimum five to six retail price points to carry as a foundation of your program year-round. Build your promotions on alternate retail prices.

- Display lowest retail price to highest in left to right presentation for consumer selection ease.

- Integrate monochromatic color palettes and mixed bouquet price points within the program to add dramatic visual impact.

- Rely on Sunshine Bouquet to make timely changes to the recipe colors so they are seasonally appropriate, while maintaining the same retail price points and branded names.

- Always display a clear sign with name and price message over each item for ease of customer shopping. Signs sell product!

SIGNAGE & POINT OF SALE MATERIALS

Sunshine Bouquet believes our flowers are of outstanding quality, but you have to make it easy for the consumer to shop the display. The goal is always to sell more flowers! Vertical merchandising in

linear rows brings the customer into the department, but retail signs actually sell product! The fresh bouquet and rose categories are the sales drivers of your floral department and can account for 60-65 percent of your weekly sales.

CROSS-MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES

Develop promotional buzz in the store by creating merchandising ties with other departments and tie bouquets into a theme or a contest for the stores.

- **Candy, Bakery & Flowers-Cross Promotion:** Colorful bouquets can be partnered with mass grocery merchandising displays of holiday candy and yummy baked goods for Halloween, Christmas, or Valentine's Day treats.

- **Fall Harvest Promotion:** An ideal tie in with produce for the rich colors of fall bouquets, with indoor and hardy mums, pumpkins, gourds, apples, cornstalks and fall perennials. Floral design contests can be created for the best arrangement upgrade, or vase competition.

- **Sports Themes:** Cheer on your favorite teams! Merchandise fresh flower bouquets with grocery items, GM, and beer and wine, and participate in all mass display contests. This generates customer excitement year-round.



CARE & HANDLING OF ROSES

With our fantastic new rose farms we are focused on sharing care and handling tips for our customers. Receive the roses from 36-38 degrees on refrigerated trucks, and place directly into the refrigerated warehouse. Maintaining the cold chain can extend flower life.

Upon receipt of the flowers at store-level:

1. Immediately unpack cases of flowers and remove any external packaging from individual flowers.

2. For roses, packed dry-cut 1 to 1½ inches from the bottom of each bouquet with a stem cutter or knife. Hydrate in buckets of warm water with preservative for three to four hours before displaying for sale. Wet pack roses come to you already conditioned and packed in water filled with preservative. No additional cutting is necessary.

3. Because the rose has a thick vascular system, it is critical to its longevity that it be placed in clean disinfected buckets on the sales floor for optimal shelf-life.

4. Roses are very thirsty and should always have plenty of fresh clean water. If a bunch ever gets left out of water, be sure to give it a fresh clean cut before replacing in the bucket.

5. Changing the water in buckets every other day is ideal for maximum shelf-life.

6. Always display item and price sign above each rose item.



The illumination of your floral department
should match the beauty within.

Anything less is lost opportunity.

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 www.usabq.com
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FRESH CUT FLOWER BOUQUETS AND ARRANGEMENTS

The USA Bouquet Company is a leading national distributor of fresh-cut flower bouquets and arrangements. The partnering of the best growers worldwide assures delivery of extensive variety, quality and competitive pricing while at the same time mitigating supply risk encountered by single-origin suppliers.

We source more than 200 million stems annually with a vast choice by variety. Product is procured from several source countries and a large percentage is purchased from U.S. domestic growers. Our market-driven model allows us to offer a global variety of products and offer our customers the security of consistent supply.

Innovation in marketing, manufacturing, and logistics is vital to our leadership role in helping our customers drive sales outside the lines. Cross merchandising, cause marketing, category management and vendor managed inventory are just a few of the innovative initiatives the company brings to customers to improve both their top- and bottom-line performances.

CROSS MERCHANDISING

Reach floral customers beyond



seasonal pies with corresponding bouquets. Marketing our category outside the traditional box will lead to long-term floral customers in the future.

CAUSE MARKETING

Consider cause marketing as a successful way to generate sales during slower selling periods.

National or even more regional causes give customers the ability to give back to the community. A shopper who does not normally buy flowers may do so for a united cause such as American Cancer Society, Autism Speaks, American Forestry and American Heart Association. The USA Bouquet Company is involved in several cause marketing programs. Cause marketing is our company's way of spreading awareness about a variety of environmental and social issues and partnering with organizations to help make a positive impact in our world.

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Assure your customers the flowers you offer from The USA Bouquet Company are grown in an environmentally friendly and socially responsible manner. Certifications are in place to ensure all

flowers grown and harvested meet specific social and environmental standards. We promote participation in the Rainforest Alliance Certification Program and we partner with Fair Trade Certified. Fair Trade ensures that flowers are used from Fair Trade Certified farms. The farm workers are given the opportunity to invest in the development of their communities, better schooling for their children and work in an environment that uses sustainable farming methods.

NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Our national manufacturing and distribution footprint enables our team of more than 500 employees to expertly serve our customers. The USA Bouquet Company is the only major floral distributor with full-service locations in six of the country's main ports of entry, Miami, FL; Atlanta, GA; Cresskill, NJ; Chicago, IL; Dallas, TX; and San Diego, CA. Each of the company's locations attend to all aspects of the retail industry with expert services ranging from basic farm-made bouquets to high-end hand-tied bouquets to elaborate wedding designs. This forward distribution model has established the company as a leading partner in the e-commerce arena to the world's most recognized brands.



the floral department. We have many market-driven promotion programs and cross-merchandising ideas that help supermarkets drive sales not only in floral but other departments. Our Essential Living Program ties seasonal fruit and produce into bouquets that promote recipe ideas. Our newest Bake Shoppe Collection promotes



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PLEASE SEE AD ON PAGE 100



BOOTH #1426
PLEASE SEE AD ON PAGE 114



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PMA AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

AISLE 300

Booth #340
BC HOT HOUSE FOODS INC.
St. Langley, BC, Canada

The Star Group consists of Star Produce, Nova Produce, CFP Consolidated Fruit Packers, BC Hot House Foods, Fresh Direct Foods and Patterson Farms. We work to create value and provide the finest produce you will find worldwide.



THE star GROUP



AISLE 400

Booth #457
OHL
Brentwood, TN

The Customs Clearance process must be smooth and efficient. You need competence, and you need service. Stop by our booth for a chance to take a seat, charge your phone, take a drink, and relax for a while. You can even enter your business card into our drawing for an iPad.



AISLE 500

Booth #531
NORTH BAY PRODUCE, INC.
Traverse City, MI

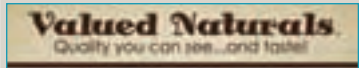
North Bay Produce, Inc. is a global, grower-owned, year-round, fresh produce marketing and distribution cooperative, headquartered in Traverse City, MI. The company's 26 stockholders are located in the United States, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay.



AISLE 600

Booth #602
VALUED NATURALS
Dover, NJ

Valued Naturals is a premier snack, nut, dried fruit and candy company with a unique produce snack program. Our farmer's-market-style racks coupled with tailored programs, increases the profitability of your produce section by improving your density of sales. Stop by our booth, chat and have a burger on us!



Booth #619
FAIR TRADE USA
Oakland, CA



Fair Trade USA's certification model assures your customers that the products they buy come from farms with the best social and environmental practices and provides an opportunity to give back to these farming communities.

By certifying your existing supply chains, Fair Trade USA can help satisfy your customers' growing demands for supply chain transparency and environmental awareness.

Booth #628
GREAT LAKES INTERNATIONAL TRADING, INC
Traverse City, MI

Great Lakes International Trading has been specializing in premium quality dried fruits, nuts and edible seeds for over 25 years. We offer sealed-in "peak season flavor" and freshness in each package utilizing vacuum-sealed technology. In addition to our Vac Pack line, we offer Stand-Up Bag presentations.



Booth #634
¡SWEET GUSTO!
Traverse City, MI

Introducing the Finest Produce of the Americas™: an onion high in sugar, low in pyruvates. From the expertise of our growers to the finest seed available, we've created an excessively high quality pack armed with a marketing campaign that presents the brand directly to the consumer.



Booth #638
MIXTEC GROUP
Glendale, CA



MIXTEC Group is the #1 Executive Search Firm in Produce. We provide exceptional executive recruitment and leadership consulting to the industry's top companies.

AISLE 700

Booth #743
FIRSTFRUITS MARKETING
Yakima, WA

FFM offers a broad line of organic tree fruits along with exclusive offerings of the Opal and Sweetie varieties of apples. Stop by to talk about our special promotional opportunities that include the "Take a Bite Out of Hunger" and NFL "Fuel up to Play 60" market campaigns.



AISLE 800

Booth #817
CAVENDISH PRODUCE
Charlottetown, PE, Canada

At Cavendish Produce, we are the Fresh Potato Specialists offering an assortment of value-added and mainstream potato products. We are your one-stop supplier of top quality potatoes.



Booth #848
HBF INTERNATIONAL
Sheridan, OR

HBF International sells a wide variety of the freshest berries under the Hurst's Berry Farm brand. From blueberries to raspberries to specialty varieties such as cranberries, blackberries and red currants, HBF offers premium berries all-year round. Stop by for a sample of what "truly fresh" means.



Booth #880
MAXCO PACKAGING
Parlier, CA

For over four decades, Maxco Supply, Inc. has been an innovator in packaging design and manufacturing for the agricultural industry. The company's ability to listen and respond to the needs of its customers has kept Maxco on the leading edge of technology and industry trends.



AISLE 900

Booth #934
DPRODUCE MAN ONLINE
Half Moon Bay, CA

The most complete integrated accounting & management software package, specifically designed for the produce industry since 1980. Come to see dProduce Man Online. With an Internet connection, you will have your company at your fingertips



Booth #938
BALL DESIGN
Fresno, CA

Specialists in Produce and Food Marketing Design for over 30 years. Work includes: websites, social media, advertising, logos, packaging, in-store POP, trade show displays, and photography. Every day, we think about food. Produce in particular. How to design for it dynamically. Advertise it creatively. Promote it effectively.



Booth #968
YAKIMA FRESH
Yakima, WA

Our growing, packing and shipping experience reaches back to the early 1900's. Yakima Fresh was formed by three of the most successful Northwest growers: Roche, Stadelman and Yakima Fruit. Yakima Fresh is your source for all your Northwest apple, cherry and pear needs!



AISLE 1000

Booth #1028
THE IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION
Eagle, ID

The Idaho Potato Commission is the marketing arm for the entire Idaho potato industry. Started 75 years ago, the organization has created the well known the "Grown in Idaho" seal, which symbolizes quality, known around the world.



PMA AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

Booth #1039
SCOTT FARMS, INC.
Lucama, NC

Scott Farms, Inc., along with Scott Farms International, is a family owned and operated grower-packer-shipper in North Carolina providing a full line of fresh sweet potato packs to customers around the world. With offices in the U.S. and U.K., we offer direct, personalized customer service on a domestic and international basis.



Booth #1053
AMERICAN PACKAGING CORPORATION
Story City, IA

American Packaging is a flexible packaging converter providing: expertise in building breathable specifications to extend the shelf-life of produce, anti-fog films & registered anti-fog coatings for clear product visibility, laser micro-perforation for high respiration products and easy package opening, microwave steam release technologies, and more.



Booth #1073
VIRTUALONE
Plant City, FL

VirtualOne provides technology to solve safety and business challenges for the produce industry. Its patented FreshQC® solution integrates data collection, trace-back and payroll capabilities to deliver superior results for the produce industry.



Booth #1074
WISH FARMS
Plant City, FL

Wish Farms, the largest strawberry shipper/grower in Florida, is proud to continue its tradition of providing high quality produce since 1922. It represents more than 1,500 acres, and ships approximately 3 million flats of strawberries, 6 million pounds of blueberries and 1 million packages of vegetables a year.



Booth #1078
CRUNCHIES FOOD COMPANY
Westlake Village, CA

Crunchies Food Company offers a wide variety of delicious and nutritious freeze dried fruits and vegetables. Crunchies are all natural with no added sugars and no preservatives. All gluten free, vegan, kosher, non-GMO and Made in the USA.



AISLE 1100

Booth #1124
ALLEN LUND COMPANY
La Canada Flitridge, CA

Established in 1976, the Allen Lund Company is a third-party transportation broker, working with shippers, growers and carriers across the nation to arrange the transport of dry, refrigerated and flatbed freight. Additionally, the Allen Lund Company has an international division, ALC International.



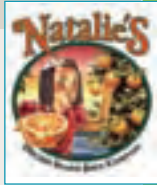
Booth #1132
NEW YORK APPLE ASSOCIATION
Victor, NY

New York Apple Association represents New York apple growers helping to grow sales for consumer favorites such as McIntosh, Empire, Gala, Honeycrisp, Cortland, Fuji and many more!



Booth #1138
NATALIE'S ORCHID ISLAND JUICE COMPANY
Fort Pierce, Florida

We are a privately owned business started by current CEO Marygrace Sexton. The company was founded in 1989 when Sexton began squeezing juice from oranges grown in the family groves with her infant daughter Natalie at her side. Today the company, named after her daughter, still squeezes juice every day, fresh to order.



Booth #1164
CURRY & COMPANY
Brooks, OR

Expect the Best™ from our 52 weeks/year blueberry, sweet onion and red/white/yellow onion programs. Our seasonal Vidalia Sweet Carrots and delicious West coast blackberries create excitement in your stores.



Booth #1170
IPPOLITO FRUIT & PRODUCE, LTD.
Burlington, ON, Canada

Visit North America's largest Brussels sprouts grower/shipper, and let's talk about getting your company on a year-round Brussels sprout program! We also offer a full line of vegetables, including artichokes, iceberg, broccoli, cauliflower, romaine hearts, green onions, leaf lettuces and specialty vegetables.



AISLE 1200

Booth #1274
AYCO FARMS
Pompano Beach, FL

Come and see about all the new changes at Ayco Farms. New building, new staff, new offices, new products. It's all about the future at the Ayco booth. Your source for Mini Me Watermelons, Cantaloupes, Honey Dews, Asparagus, Papayas, Colored Bell Peppers, Avocados, Limes, Peas and Broccoli.



Booth #1280
PECO PALLET
Yonkers, NY

PECO Pallet is a North American leader in pallet rental services with an outstanding reputation for quality, service, and sustainability. For more information, visit www.pecopallet.com.



Booth #1286
SUN PACIFIC
Pasadena, CA

Growing opportunities for over 40 years! A leading California grower, shipper and marketer of Oranges, Cuties® California Clementines, Table Grapes and Kiwis. Visit the booth to see our newest innovation, "Ripe & Easy™" Kiwis and visit with one of our experienced team members about how we can help grow your business.



Booth #1286
CALIFIA FARMS
Pasadena, CA

Odwalla founder Greg Steltenpohl has teamed with farming visionary Sun Pacific to bring you Cuties Juice™. Cuties Juice™ and Smoothies have NO sugar, NO dyes, NO preservatives, and are all 100% Juice. Califia Farms also produces exciting healthy beverages in emerging categories.



AISLE 1300

Booth #1332
POTANDON PRODUCE
Salinas, CA

Visit Potandon for a fresh perspective on potatoes and onions. Samples distributed and entertainment on the hour. Also visit our Sampling Trailer in the Anaheim Marriott parking lot for a taste of the 1950's!



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PMA AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

AISLE 1400

**Booth #1426
LGS SPECIALTY SALES,
LTD.**

Bronx, NY
LGS is your year-round source for premium produce from around the world. Our core group of commodities includes Hass avocados, Clementines and other citrus, grapes, apples, pears and stone fruit. We offer a variety of innovative and attractive new packages and pallet configurations to fit the needs of different retailers and family groups.



See our ad on page 114

AISLE 1500

**Booth #1510
SAMBRAILO PACKAGING
Watsonville CA**

Since 1923, Sambrailo Packaging has been known for its innovative packaging solutions. We will be featuring our cost-saving Mixim Packaging Systems, as well as our compostable Fibre-Pack containers and new low-profile blueberry and bushberry clamshells.



**Booth#1544
CALIFORNIA GIANT
BERRY FARMS
Watsonville, CA**

We support breast cancer awareness and prevention in October. Visit our booth to learn more about this nationwide effort and how to partner with us for a win-win cause-marketing program.



**Booth #1575
PURITY ORGANIC
San Francisco, CA**

Purity Organic Produce (formerly Pacific Organic Produce) has been packing, shipping, and marketing organic fruit & vegetables grown by high quality organic farmers for almost 20 years. We work with farmers primarily located throughout the Western United States, Latin America, and New Zealand.



AISLE 1600

**Booth #1611
CHRISTOPHER RANCH
Gilroy, CA**

Christopher Ranch's new Halloween boxes will boost sales on one of the biggest consumer shopping days of the year! These striking and colorful display cartons will draw customers to your produce dept. for garlic and other cross-merchandised items.



**Booth #1634
DURAND-WAYLAND INC
LaGrange, GA**

Durand-Wayland and Greefa and others are partners combining advanced technology with expert sales, service and support. Our complete line of produce-packing equipment includes: electronic grading by blemish, sweetness, internal defect, weight, dimension, shape, and color.



AISLE 1700

**Booth #1710
SORMA USA
Exeter, CA**

Big news at Sorma USA with the opening of the new manufacturing plant in Visalia, CA, to better serve the customers in the most important agricultural region of the world. Sorma also introduces Ecopunnet, a new package concept with a tray wrapped in net and an attractive handle.



AISLE 1800

**Booth #1808
WASHINGTON STATE
PRODUCE PAVILION
Moses Lake, WA**

Washington State is one of the premier produce producing areas in the world. Come learn more about the high quality fresh items available from our farms.



**Booth #1820
DRISCOLL'S
Watsonville, CA**

ONLY THE FINEST BERRIES™ are packed under the Driscoll's brand. Continually delighting berry consumers with year round availability of conventional and organic strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries. For over 100 years, the Driscoll's brand has been trusted and recognized for superior quality.



**Booth #1832
WHOLESUM FAMILY FARMS
Nogales, AZ**

Wholesum Family Farms produces a full line of organic tomatoes, peppers, cucumber, eggplant, zucchini, hard squash and mangos. Wholesum Harvest is Fair Trade certified and is committed to sustainable practices. Wholesum grows in both Mexico and the USA and distributes coast to coast.



**Booth
#1838, 1848
MELISSA'S
Los Angeles, CA**

Come see the winner of the TV Food Network "The Great Food Truck Race" season 2 at our booth cooking up Melissa's produce and food. We will be featuring at the booths: Lemon/Lime Combo 16 oz., Finger Limes 3 oz., Jeju Mandarins 16 oz., Pink Pumpkins to support Breast Cancer Awareness.



**Booth #1878
PERO FAMILY FARMS
COMPANY LLC
Delray Beach, FL**

Pero Family Farms Food Company LLC is a vibrant, 100-year old, privately owned business. We specialize in the retail and wholesale of high-quality produce as a grower, processor, packager, marketer and distributor.



**Booth #1890
LASERSHARP FLEXPAK
SERVICES LLC
Vadnais Heights, MN**

LaserSharp FlexPak Services specializes in contract laser converting services for the flexible packaging industry. LaserSharp FlexPak Services uses innovative and cost-efficient laser processing techniques to achieve superior results for flexible packaging applications.



**Booth #1894
SAGE FRUIT COMPANY
Yakima, WA**

Sage Fruit Company is a grower/shipper/packer of high quality apples, cherries and pears from Washington State. We specialize in marketing programs to help you grow your sales.



AISLE 1900

**Booth #1902
FRESH SOLUTIONS
NETWORK, LLC
Moses Lake, WA**

We are your one choice for superior potato and onion category performance. With ownership of over 60,000 production acres, the Partners are: Sterman Masser, Inc.; Keystone Potato Products, LLC; Michael Farms, Inc.; Basin Gold Cooperative, Inc.; Green Thumb Farms, Inc.; Red Isle Produce Company, Ltd.; NoKota Packers, Inc.



PMA AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

Booth #1912
FLORAL BUSINESS
Boca Raton, FL

Come visit Booth 1912 and pick up the newest tool to help supermarkets floral executives become better marketers, merchandisers, managers, and buyers of floral products: FLORAL BUSINESS.



Booth #1912
PERISHABLE NEWS.COM
Boca Raton, FL

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



PerishableNews.com

Booth #1912
PERISHABLE PUNDIT
Boca Raton, FL

There is nothing quite like Jim Prevora's Perishable Pundit. Access the Pundit at www.perishablepundit.com and see for yourself. Or come by our booth and meet Jim Prevora and the whole staff.



Booth #1912
PRODUCE BUSINESS
Boca Raton, FL

Covering marketing, merchandising, management and procurement issues that affect the sales of produce and floral items, PRODUCE BUSINESS uniquely "initiates industry improvements."



Booth #1916
THERMAL TECHNOLOGY
Ardmore, PA



Thermal Technologies is a provider of produce ripening room systems. Our patented Tarpless design is the most widely used in the marketplace, processing over 100 million pounds of bananas across the United States, Canada and Mexico every day.



Booth #1957
BABÉ FARMS
Santa Maria, CA



Babé Farms of Santa Maria, CA, is the premier label top chefs and fine retailers look to for their specialty vegetable needs. Come see our NEW RETAIL LINE of packaged gourmet vegetables; assorted baby beets, specialty radishes, baby rainbow carrots, baby fennel, colorful baby cauliflower and baby purple artichokes.

Booth #1960
KEYSTONE FRUIT MARKETING, INC
Greencastle, PA

We are a single-source grower, packer and shipper of year-round Certified Sweet® Onions. We have year-round supplies of Walla Walla® River, Vidalia® and Mayan Sweet® sweet onions, plus hybrid red, white and yellow onions. We also supply southern peaches, eastern apples and asparagus.



Life should be this sweet.

Booth #1988
ABC RESEARCH LABORATORIES
Gainesville, FL

ABC Research Laboratories, an ISO 17025 accredited food testing facility, provides consultations and analytical results across the entire spectrum of the food industry.



Dedication to personalized service, coupled with superior scientific practices, is the foundation of ABC Research Laboratories' success.

Booth #1991
RPE INC.
Bancroft, WI

RPE is a year-round grower and shipper of potatoes and onions that specializes in providing category innovation and best-in-class solutions for its customers. RPE packs a full line of onions, potatoes, along with a full line of value-added and specialty products. For more information, visit RPEproduce.com.

AISLE 2000

Booth #2041
CATALYTIC GENERATORS, LLC
Norfolk, VA

Our latest innovation is the Smart-Ripe Ethylene Management System, which provides PC-based control, monitoring and data logging of ethylene application in ripening rooms. This innovation will allow the ripener to enter an ethylene set point and achieve complete control of the ethylene level in any ripening room.



Booth #2041
QA SUPPLIES LLC
Norfolk, VA

Our new handheld Ethylene Detector is an impressive instrument featuring the latest in sensor technology and a high level of reliability. The state of the art sensor ensures speed and reliability, while the data logger feature allows readings and events to be stored together with the times and dates.



Booth #2045
TANIMURA & ANTLE
Salinas, CA

Based in California's Salinas Valley, Tanimura & Antle is a family owned and operated business focused on quality, freshness and innovation. Tanimura & Antle produces a full line of fresh vegetables including Artisan Lettuce, Artisan Romaine, Artisan Boston, Artisan Red Onion, Living Lettuce, Iceberg, Broccoli, Cauliflower and Romaine.



AISLE 2100

Booth #2173
SILVER CREEK SOFTWARE
Boise, ID

Our accounting/financial management software targets the fresh produce industry and offers unique capabilities to produce industry executives with traceability, customer menus, contract pricing, lot control, route accounting, Visual Internet online ordering, EDI, landed cost and much more.



Booth #2189
ATLAS PRODUCE & DIST., INC.
Bakersfield, CA

Grower / Shipper of Caramel Naturel Brand, Medjool Dates, Date Coconut Rolls, Date Almond Rolls, Jumbo Dried Grapes and Table Grapes. All Items are all natural and grown in California.



Booth #2190
WEST PAK AVOCADO
Temecula, CA

West Pak is celebrating 30 years of California growing this year! Not only do we have regional distribution and ripening centers across the U.S., we've created value-added services such as our JustRipe! avocado pre-conditioning program.



Booth #2191
HOLLANDIA PRODUCE/ LIVE GOURMET
Carpinteria, CA

Live Gourmet hydroponically grown living lettuces, cresses and leafy greens by Hollandia Produce. "Absolutely FRESH because it's still alive!" Experience the difference freshness can make.

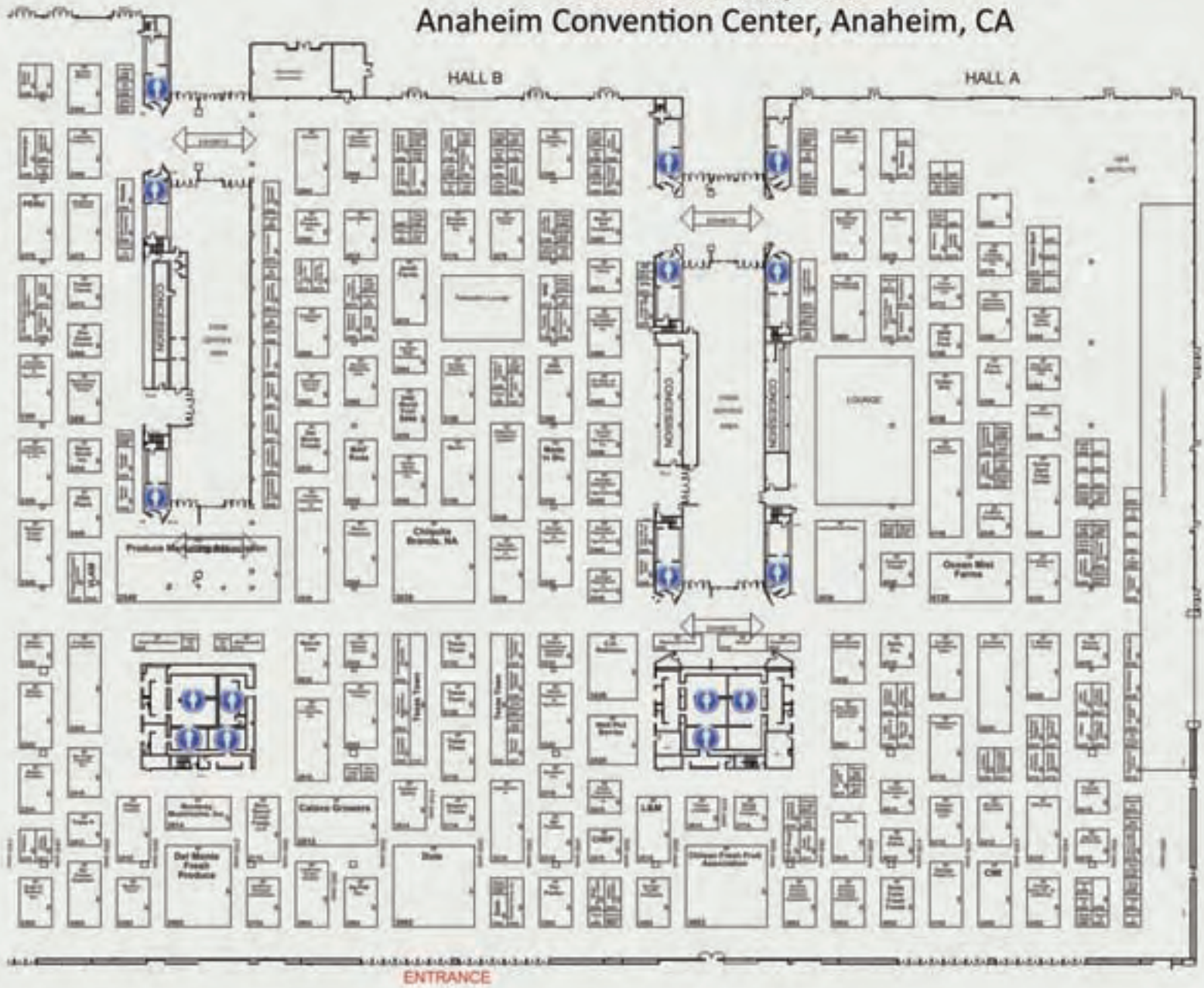


AISLE *by* AISLE

BOOTH *pma* REVIEW FRESH SUMMIT CONVENTION + EXPO



Fresh Summit International Convention & Exposition
October 26 - 28, 2012
Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA



PMA AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

AISLE 2200

Booth #2266, 2368
NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Las Cruces, NM

Green chile is just the start of what's good at the NEW MEXICO - Grown with Tradition® Pavilion. Follow your nose to our coveted quesadillas and learn about our top-notch pecans, sweet onions, watermelons, pinto beans, and pumpkins. Produce-bagging equipment is available, too.



Booth #2274
DOMEX SUPERFRESH GROWERS
Yakima, WA

Domex Superfresh Growers® is a leading grower and shipper of apples, pears and cherries from the Pacific Northwest including our new club apple variety, Autumn Glory™.



Booth #2288
RED BLOSSOM SALES
Salinas, CA

Your customers are Our customers...We Get That! Enticing your customers with fresh, sweet, delicious berries, day after day.



AISLE 2400

Booth #2424
AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO
Los Angeles, CA



The first 100 people in line to meet the charismatic chef will receive a free Avocados from Mexico cookbook to be autographed by Chef Pepin. Back by popular demand this year is the colorful and glamorous ambassador of Avocados from Mexico, Miss Ava Cado, who will be at the booth all weekend to greet attendees.

Booth #2454
SPICE WORLD
Orlando, FL

Spice World introduces "Squeeze Garlic in Olive Oil" and "Grill Garlic-Qu Sauce." Specialist in Garlic since 1949. Spice World is the No. 1 jarred garlic in America's Supermarkets (IRI Data) Spice World owns and operates two processing plants — one in California and one in Florida.



Booth #2494
ITAUEIRA MELONS
Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil

Itaueira is a family-owned company that grows the most delicious Canary Yellow melons in Brazil. Exporting them to US and Canada since 2008, the company will be serving melon samples in its booth to prove their sweetness and amazing taste.



AISLE 2500

Booth #2510
VILLAGE FARMS
Eatontown, NJ

From our Garden Fresh Flavor® exclusive tomato varieties, Heavenly Villagio Marzano®, or new exquisite Heirloom®, to our luscious seedless long English® cucumbers and Sweet Bells® peppers, we have you covered 365 days a year.



Booth #2580
THE LITTLE POTATO COMPANY
Edmonton, AB, Canada

From The Little Potato Company comes a brand new revelation to the premium and value-added produce market: Potato Jazz. Potato Jazz microwave kits provide an exciting, healthy side dish in minutes flat with no muss, no fuss!



AISLE 2600

Booth #2614
MONTEREY MUSHROOMS, INC.
Knoxville, TN

SHOPPERS LOVE our NEW SUSTAINABLE TILLS: Monterey's new, sustainable packaging delivers the best in flavor and nutrition with innovation as natural as our Mushrooms.



AISLE 2700

Booth #2702
CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION
Irvine, CA

Visit booth #2702 to meet Top Chef Masters contestants Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger and sample their California Avocado creations. You can count on California Avocados spring through fall!



AISLE 2800

Booth #2802
CALIFORNIA GROWN PAVILION
Modesto, CA



California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (in the California Pavilion). The LGMA is a model program that was created to protect public health by establishing a culture of food safety on leafy greens farms

Booth #2849
SHENANDOAH GROWERS
Harrisonburg, VA

Organic Living Herbs are kept on the kitchen windowsill to ensure the freshest, healthiest herbs are available everyday.



Booth #2853
CHANTLER PACKAGING INC
Mississauga, ON, Canada

As a fully integrated manufacturer of flexible plastic packaging, Chantler Packaging takes pride in being able to offer customers these high levels of certification for food safety in addition to their ISO 9001:2008 manufacturing-to-customer-needs certification and OMRI Listing for PrimePro® Shelf Life Extension film.



Booth #2861
NATIONAL RAISIN COMPANY
Fowler, CA

National Raisin Company is pleased to introduce its new line of specialty baking items, uniquely positioned in the Dried Fruit Category to help consumers bake more delicious treats economically and easier than ever before. New items include a Fruitcake Blend, Walnut Baking Blend, Almond Fruit Mix and Dates.



Booth #2862
CALIFORNIA SUN DRY FOODS
Danville, CA

Sweet, full-bodied and intensely flavored, we sun-dry only the finest California grown tomatoes. Our unique trade promotion and marketing programs are designed to maximize your sales and profits in this important niche category.



AISLE 2900

Booth #2902
AG-PAK INC.
Gasport, NY

Ag-Pak, is exhibiting the latest technological innovations in produce weighing and optics. Featured in our booth: NEWTEC 4014XB1, a flexible weigher is designed for stringent sanitary practices, data acquisition for PTI compliance, Vario Speed Technology, and packaging options.





*Where the subject may be perishable
but the insight isn't.*

What is a Pundit?

Merriam Webster — a person who gives opinions in an authoritative manner usually through the mass media.

What is the Perishable Pundit?

Just ask our readers —

“... providing substance, thought-provoking opinions and, at the very least, waking up many.”

“Excellent commentary on the status of regulators’ positioning on food safety for the produce industry.”

“... bringing some common sense to the E. coli issue of late.”

“... a lively and engaging forum for discussion of issues relevant to the produce industry.”

“... thought-provoking commentary with robust dialog.”

“... keeping the debate going...”

“... kind of an investigative reporter...”

“... extensive coverage leaves no subject without great healthy discussion, and no topic is too sacred.”

“Your courage in stating your opinion and your reaction to criticism is respectful and honest.”

“... focused on the complicated issues relating to food safety in produce.”

“... teaching the industry quite a bit about the power of the internet.”

“... an education for those of us who are still refining our computer skills.”

“... a valuable service.”

“... the most important journalism in the industry, and now we get them every day... you have become the ‘voice’ ...”

“Your analysis of the state of leadership in the produce industry past, present, and future is right on!”

“... a welcome part of the day that stimulates the mind and encourages us to think about and consider a different point of view.”

“... writing with heart and insight...”

“... one of my ‘must-read’ e-mails everyday!”

“Our industry has traditionally not been associated with being ‘deep thinkers’, and you have definitely become our Thought Leader.”

“... a resource that delves deeply into issues impacting our industry. Kudo’s!”

“Keeps us thinking.”

“... spreading your abundant common sense on a daily basis.”

“... most refreshing.”

“The Pundit does, in fact, incite reactions and cause good thinkers to think harder and longer on topics that are current and newsworthy.”

Catch the Perishable Pundit every day. Go to www.perishablepundit.com click on the “Subscribe Today” button and receive a daily copy of Jim Prevor’s Perishable Pundit via e-mail.

PMA AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

Booth #2922
GRIMMWAY FARMS
Bakersfield, CA

Grimmway Farms is delivering new innovation to the produce category. Our focus is providing the best quality produce, from carrots through organic vegetables, while delivering impeccable service. Visit our booth to learn more about our products. We value your business.



A family of Growing companies.™

Booth #2932
IDAHO-E. OREGON ONIONS
Parma, ID

The Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Committee's booth at PMA Fresh Summit will be a definite crowd pleaser. With a cool football theme, great tailgate food will be created by the Committee's Executive Chef, Nick Duncan, and the Committee will be giving away football-related promotion items AND will be drawing for larger prizes including a large Weber gas grill.



Booth #2960
BANACOL
MARKETING
CORP.

Coral Gables, FL
Banacol is a multinational corporation, dedicated to the production and distribution of agro-industrial products, including pineapples, bananas, plantains, tropicals (yucca), and frozen products.



Booth #2975
KEENAN FARMS, INC
Kettleman City, CA

New for 2012, Keenan Farms will debut revised pistachio packaging including the official American Health Association's (AHA) heart-healthy food logo. The

AHA has certified the nutritious power of the pistachio. We're also highlighting our use of Sea Salt on roasted pistachios.



AISLE 3000

Booth #3002, 3202

DOLE
Westlake Villages, CA

Dole will be showcasing the Yonanas banana frozen dessert maker, which makes delicious, low-cost, healthy frozen treats in just minutes, and is part of Dole's ongoing commitment to reducing waste and addressing the No. 1 complaint by banana lovers: having to throw away over-ripe fruit.



See our ad on page 100

Booth #3014
CARLSON AIRFLO
Brooklyn Park, MN

Are you interested in: reducing shrink, reducing labor, increasing produce sales, or transforming your current merchandising? Carlson AirFlo® Merchandising Systems get results! Come see us about more effective, cost-efficient solutions in your produce department.



Booth #3058
DNE WORLD FRUIT SALES LLC
Fort Pierce, FL

DNE World Fruit LLC is one of the largest independently owned grower, packer and marketer of fresh Florida citrus. DNE offers year round citrus of the highest quality to its customers. Our experience in growing, packing and marketing fruit from Florida and Texas as well as sourcing fruit from around the globe can help grow your citrus profits all year.



Booth #3070
JEMD FARMS
Kingsville, ON

JemD Farms: Red Sun and Golden Sun produce provides you with greenhouse perfection — all year long. We're known as your greenhouse go-to team, with six North American distribution centers. Stop by booth 3070 to learn

about our "Artisan Series", a new and innovative line of specialty greenhouse produce.



AISLE 3100

Booth #3114
AMPORT FOODS
St. Paul, MN

"Flagstone Foods (formerly Snacks Holding Company), headquartered in St. Paul, MN, owns Ann's House of Nuts and Amport Foods. Ann's House of Nuts, with production facilities in North Carolina, is the largest manufacturer and marketer of trail mixes in the world.



Booth #3118
FOX PACKAGING
McAllen, TX

Fox Packaging is an industry leading packaging company manufacturing and distributing customized mesh and poly/mesh bag solutions. Our unique 2-layer Ultra Shield film prevents nearly 100% of potato greening.



Booth #3121
EDINBURG CITRUS ASSOCIATION
Mission, TX

The growers of Edinburg Citrus invite you to enjoy the fruits of our labor-deliciously sweet, thin-skinned and juicy, Texas Red Grapefruit and Oranges. We are committed to producing top quality fruit and assisting our customers in ideas and programs to increase consumer sales.



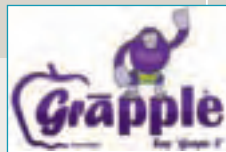
Booth #3150
MARIE'S
Dallas, TX

Marie's®, the leader in Refrigerated Produce Dressing nationally, uses the finest ingredients to create our great tasting dressings with the homemade flavor your customers love. Marie's — makes the Ordinary Extraordinary!



Booth #3184
GRAPPLE
FRUITS
Wenatchee WA

Grapple® brand apples — Reaching customers with a new taste and flavor. Try one of the latest juicy, crispy, up-and-coming gourmet Grapple® brand apples.



Booth #3185
INTELLEFLEX
Santa Clara, CA

The Intellex Freshness Management™ solution enables produce industry members to reduce loss due to spoilage, improve quality and address traceability requirements. Intellex delivers on-demand visibility for tracking and monitoring the temperature and condition of produce, and frozen and packaged foods from the producer to consumer.

AISLE 3200

Booth #3248
ARGENTINA-FUNDACION EXPORTAR
CIUDAD DE BUENOS AIRES, Argentina



Come to Argentina's booth and make your off-season business by meeting Argentine growers and exporters of fresh pears, apples, stone fruit, blueberries and cherries.

IT'S BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL




FRESH SUMMIT
CONVENTION + EXPO

Imagine a world where rules and models no longer apply. Where customers are in control, where geographic and competitive barriers are fluid. Where talent trumps conformity and ideas trump knowledge. This isn't your imagination. This is the future of business. And it is pure chaos. Are you ready for this new world? Are you prepared to adapt, to disrupt, to change the game?

Join your community and **SAY HELLO TO THE FUTURE @ FRESH SUMMIT.**

Register today: www.freshsummit.com/unusual

OCTOBER 26 | 27 | 28
2012
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA USA

PMA AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

Booth #3260

YERICIC LABEL
New Kingston, PA

Yericic Label designs and manufactures on-pack labels that deliver proven sales results to increase our customer's top line. Our labels educate consumers in the store and inspire them to make a purchase by providing instant meal solutions that make the buying decision SIMPLE!



Booth #3278

DULCINEA FARMS
Ladera Ranch, CA

At Dulcinea® our commitment is to deliver only the highest quality, best tasting fruit. We are passionate about providing the freshest produce and flavor consumers love year-round.



AISLE 3300

Booth #3385

REDLINE SOLUTIONS
Santa Clara, CA



RedLine Solutions provides practical PTI and Inventory control solutions for grower shippers. Our traceability suite collects and manages information as work is performed, providing detailed real time operational insights in the field, packing shed, or cooler.

AISLE 3400

Booth #3420
WELL•PICT BERRIES
Watsonville, CA

Naturally developed to deliver in both looks and taste, Well•Pict Strawberries and Raspberries are eye-catching on display, with big flavor that will have customers returning for more. Fall crops are up in volume and outstanding in quality, while Oxnard-grown raspberries will be available from Nov to Jan.



Booth #3420

JACOBS, MALCOLM, AND BURTT
San Francisco, CA

Since 1888, Jacobs, Malcolm, and Burtt has provided the highest quality produce. From our specialty asparagus to our variety of other commodities, JMB consistently delivers the quality and service that have kept us in business for over 120 years.



Booth #3428

C.H. ROBINSON
Eden Prairie, MN

C.H. Robinson is a supply chain solutions provider with over 100 years of experience in produce sourcing. We provide solutions through improved efficiencies, superior technology, access to growers, suppliers and temperature-controlled carriers. Stop by booth 3428 to learn more!



AISLE 3500

Booth #3510

L&M
Raleigh, NC

L&M is a fully integrated, year-round supplier of fresh produce, focusing on four core categories: vegetables; potatoes and onions; apples, pears and cherries; and limes, mangoes and Texas grown. Visit booth #3510 to learn more about our exciting new Idaho Potato program and Michigan Vegetable program and more!



Completely obsessed with produce

Booth #3540

BASKET EASE®
Prior Lake, MN

The easiest and fastest way to make fruit baskets. Our baskets and trays have patented designs for fruit baskets. All the supplies needed to create beautiful fruit and gift baskets stocked year round.



Booth #3574

EPA
Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico

EPA® is a Mexican leading company in production, commercialization and development of agricultural plastic films. We specialize in plastic mulch, advanced solarization, high barrier films, micro-tunnels, five layered greenhouse and hoop films.



Booth #3585

BLUE CREEK PRODUCE
St. Charles, IL

Blue Creek Produce is a grower and distributor of fresh produce with over 85 years of combined produce experience. We specialize in greenhouse grown tomatoes and peppers with transportation capabilities from pallet orders to full truckloads throughout the country.



AISLE 3700

Booth #3733

OXNARD GROWERS/SHIPPERS
Ventura, CA

Cargo Data Corporation's Boomerang and Boomerang RF (radio frequency enabled) reusable temperature recorders are designed for refrigerated dedicated logistics and captive delivery fleets. These innovative reusable digital temperature recorders provide cost effective, high value temperature monitoring in closed loop, round-trip transportation systems.



AISLE 3900

Booth #3911

DADE SERVICE CORPORATION
Daytona Beach, FL

Dade Service Corporation has over 50 years of experience in the industry! We have design-built more than 1,000 Tarp-Free Ripening Rooms that Ripen more than 200 million bananas and 50 million avocados every day!.



Booth #3930

SEALD-SWEET INTERNATIONAL
Vero Beach, FL

Seald-Sweet is a leading supplier of the full citrus sweet and other fresh produce such as apples, grapes, pears, stone fruit, pineapples and more. As a vertically integrated company, we grow and nurture fresh produce from seed to consumer with the highest food safety standards and consistent quality.



Booth #3973

LIGHT SPEED LOGISTICS INC.
Calgary, AB, Canada

Light Sped Logistics, Inc. is always there for you with over 250 refrigerated units, satellite tracking on all our units, 24 hr. hotline available for last minute orders, one stop shop for all your transportation needs, team of professionals that are dedicated to customer satisfaction.



AISLE 4000

Booth #4016

TEMKIN INTERNATIONAL, INC
Payson, UT

As an AIB-audited domestic packaging manufacturer with a 30-year track record, Temkin provides exceptional flexible film packaging solutions with compostable and recyclable film options as part of the company's commitment to environmental sustainability.



AISLE 4100

Booth #4128

SUNLIGHT INTERNATIONAL
McFarland, CA

New in 2012 from Sunlight International: Pretty Lady for the Summer, which includes stand-up colander bags and POS cards. Preview a sample bin for the 2013 season at the booth. Favorite brands Pretty Lady for the Holidays and Harvest Hobgoblin return to the produce aisle as well, creating a delicious assortment for consumers.



PMA AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

Booth #4138
OCEAN MIST FARMS
Castroville, CA

Visit our booth for all your 2012 holiday retail promotional planning for the top of consumer's mind: cooking vegetable category. As a year round grower of fresh Brussels sprouts, Ocean Mist Farms will debut new Brussels sprout packs just in time to support the peak of cooking vegetable sales season.



Booth #4146
WHOLLY GUACAMOLE
Saginaw, TX

Wholly Guacamole® Avocado Ranch Snack Packs snack packs are full of the delicious ranch flavor you love without compromising the nutritional goodness often found in the leading ranch dressings. Available in your grocer's produce section January 2013.



Booth #4169
PAKSENSE
Boise, ID

PakSense, Inc., an innovator in sensory solutions for packaging, has launched the XpressPDF temperature monitoring label, which tracks time and temperature of perishable items. Labels are flat and feature an integrated USB connection point.



Booth #4172
Cravo EQUIPMENT LTD
Brantford, ON, Canada

For 35 years, Cravo has developed retractable roof structures to allow growers to utilize the best of mother nature and a greenhouse. Our unique production systems have been used around the world successfully for many crops. Come learn about our new low cost X-Frame for berries, tree fruits and vegetables.



AISLE 4200

Booth #4202
CMI
Wenatchee, WA

Over the past 20-plus years, CMI has steadily grown into one of Washington State's largest apple, pear and cherry shipper and grower and continues to be a pioneer in new varieties, sustainability, creative packaging and growing technologies.



Booth #4260
PURE FLAVOR
Leamington, ON, Canada

Pure Flavor is a year-round grower, shipper & marketer of greenhouse vegetables. We continually strive to bring revolutionary ideas, such as Pure Flavor Grillers™, Aurora Bites™, and Luna Sweets Trio™ to consumers.



AISLE 4300

Booth #4318
AURORA PRODUCTS, INC
Stratford, CT

Aurora packages only the highest quality and freshest All Natural and Organic dried fruits, nuts, trail mixes, salad toppings, and granolas.



Booth #4328
T. MARZETTI COMPANY
Columbus, OH

T. Marzetti Company is a leading manufacturer of refrigerated salad dressings and dips. We also produce croutons under both the Marzetti and Chatham Village brands. More recently, we have introduced the very successful Simply Dressed salad dressings and Otria Greek Yogurt Veggie Dips.



Booth #4362
CLEAR LAM PACKAGING, INC.
Elk Grove Village, IL

Clear Lam develops and manufactures flexible and rigid packaging films. We will showcase its newest peel/reseal lidding materials and will introduce the new PrimaPak, a flexible, stackable, reclosable package perfectly suited for sliced fruits and vegetables.



AISLE 4400

Booth #4426
GILLS ONIONS
Turlock, CA

Gills Onions is a family owned and operated grower and processor of sliced, diced, slivered and whole peeled yellow, red and sweet onions for retail and food-service applications.



AISLE 4500

Booth #4506
JOVY FRUIT ROLLS
City of Industry, CA

Jovy Fruit Rolls are available in 10 delicious flavors. A family favorite since 1975, with an SRP of \$.50 to \$.59, our products are highly promotable and great impulse items.



Booth #4516
GLORIANN FARMS
Tracy, CA

Prima Bella Produce is now GloriAnn Farms! Our name has changed, but everything else is the same: we still offer the finest Fresh Sweet Corn year round under the GloriAnn brand, backed by top-notch, personalized customer service from our third generation family-owned company.



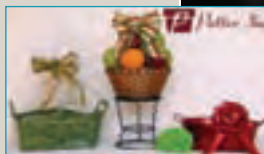
Booth #4527
PRODUCT PROTECTOR, LLC
Walnut Creek, CA

Finally, a fresh idea - the Product Protector is the only forklift attachment that solves the product and pallet damage problem. A recent study by Dr. Marshall White found that the Product Protector reduces product damage by 75-80% and doubles the life of any pallet.



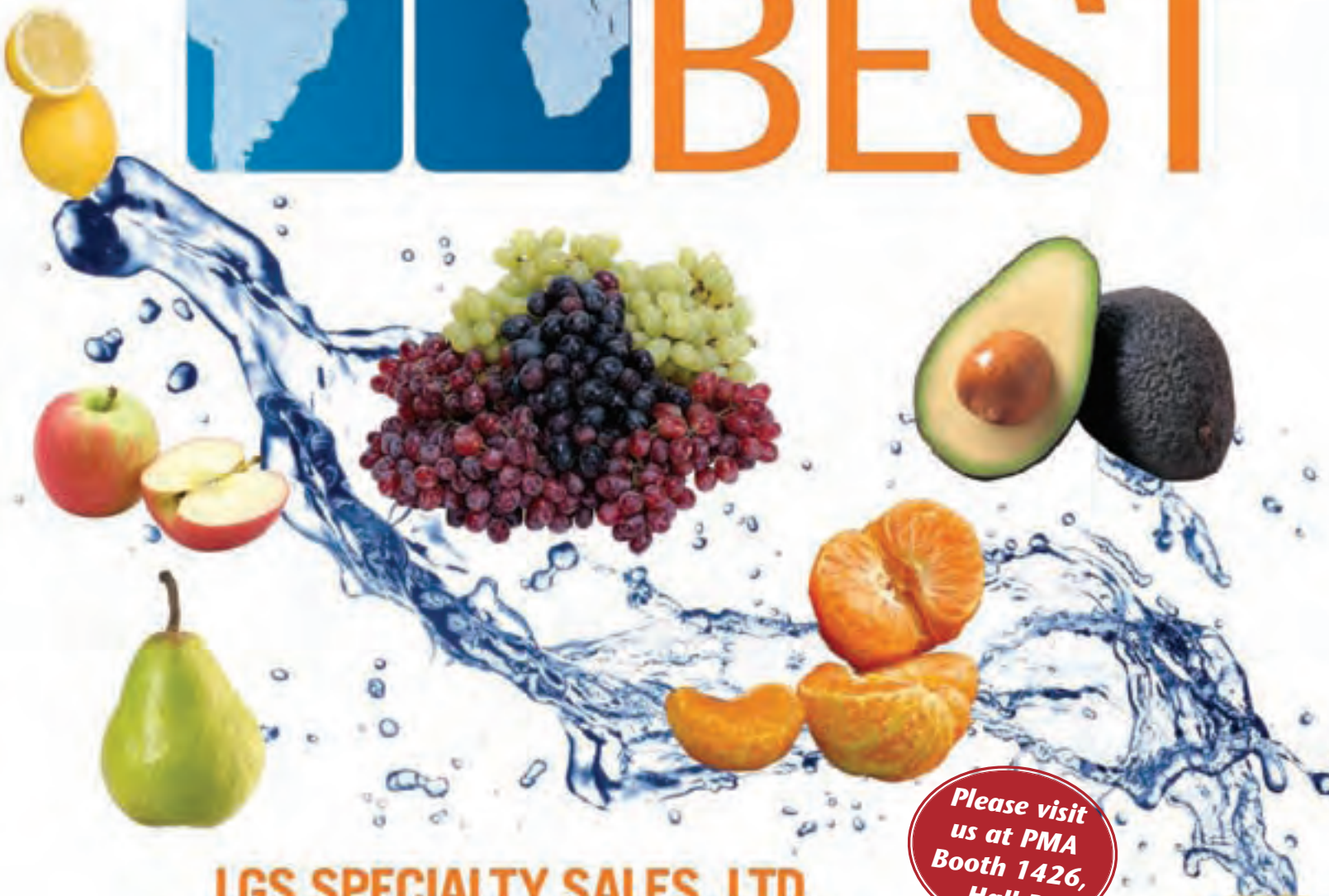
Booth #4532
POTTER INC.
Bryan, OH

Potter Inc. is your fruit and gift basket specialists. Let us help you customize your holiday and everyday fruit basket programs. Our unique basket and container designs along with our coordinating hand-tied bows are a sure way to create excitement and boost sales.





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*Please visit
us at PMA
Booth 1426,
Hall D*





Mexican Tomato Importers Make Appeal For Market Access

Tomatoes represent over \$800 million FOB and 20 to 25 percent of the value of produce brought into Nogales. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

West Mexico has long played a crucial role in providing a consistent supply of winter produce to the United States and Canada. “The West Mexico industry is very important to the U.S. market considering it basically supplies North America during the winter and the springtime,” says Martin Ley, vice president of Del Campo Supreme in Nogales, AZ. “Particularly in tomatoes during that time, one of every two tomatoes consumed comes from Mexico through the West Mexico borders.”

“There are somewhere around 1,200 trucks a day passing through Nogales supplying U.S. and Canadian needs for fresh produce,” reports Brent Harrison, president of Al Harrison Co., in Nogales, AZ. “Mexican operations have made tremendous investment, not just monetarily, but also in time and resources in production technology, certifications in food safety, traceability and packaging. The West Mexico grower really looks to the future of our industry and makes changes as needed.”

While the industry has built a strong market in response to consumer demand, it

has struggled with various challenges throughout the years. “The tomato and vegetable industry from Mexico has been in a development process for close to 100 years now,” states Alejandro Canelos, owner/director of Apache Produce Imports LLC, located in Nogales, AZ, and Chairman of the Board of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA). “There has been a number of challenges over the years, but we overcome them because the market continues to demand our products. As long as U.S. consumers want our products, I’m confident we’ll overcome whatever obstacles are before us — be it political, regulatory or other.”

The ageless dispute over tomato anti-dumping and a newly forming disagreement over what should be labeled as greenhouse are being met head-on by all sides. “These challenges make people more aware of what is going on and how valuable a supplier Mexico is,” says Alberto Maldonado, general manager of Apache Produce.

Tomato Complexities

The ongoing dispute over Mexican versus

Florida/U.S. tomato production has once again raised its ornery head. This past June, the Florida Tomato Exchange made a request to the U.S. Department of Commerce to terminate the Tomato Suspension Agreement with Mexico. The 16-year-old agreement sets a minimum price, determined by the Department of Commerce, under which Mexican growers agree not to sell in the U.S. market. The agreement has been renegotiated and renewed in 2002 and 2008.

“To say the issue is complex would be a grave understatement,” states Matt Mandel, vice president of sales and marketing for Rio Rico, AZ-based SunFed. “The basis of the issue dates back to a dumping investigation initiated by Florida growers in 1996. They claimed Mexican producers were selling tomatoes in the fresh marketplace below the fair cost of production. Before the investigation was completed, the Mexican growers agreed to enter into a suspension agreement with the Department of Commerce by which they would agree to certain terms, namely a floor price under which they would not sell. The current issue stems from the same Florida

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grower group filing a petition for the current suspension agreement to be cancelled. They are doing so in order to file a new dumping lawsuit against the Mexican producers.”

Needless to say, those in the West Mexican tomato industry are not pleased. “This agreement has successfully settled one of the largest bilateral trade disputes between our two countries,” says Lance Jungmeyer, president of the FPAA, headquartered in Nogales, AZ. “The petition to terminate does not make sense, because at the end of this year the agreement is due for a review. There are many ways to address any alleged concerns within the context of the current agreement. There is no need to terminate it.”

“A review of the fundamentals of the agreement is done every five years, and that Sunset Review is coming up this December,” explains Jaime Chamberlain, president of Nogales, AZ-based J-C Distributing Inc. “Florida and Mexico both have the opportunity to discuss what they don’t like about the agreement. The two other times we’ve had a Sunset Review, there were significant changes made to the agreement on which both parties agreed.”

Competition And Differences

The renewed difficulty between the production areas may be partly due to better logistics and technology. “In general, Florida and West Mexico have been direct competitors in tomatoes for over 100 years,” remarks Jungmeyer. “Florida traditionally served the Eastern Seaboard and West Mexico served west of the Mississippi. Innovations in transportation and handling have put them in more direct competition as time has gone on.”

“We have growing techniques that far surpass other areas and have invested heavily in technology,” says Canelos. “We’re leaders in what we’re doing.”

“Seasonality in Florida is limited to their natural season, basically the winter season when they experience milder temperatures than the rest of the country,” explains Mandel. “In Mexico, heavy investments have been made in protected agriculture and the necessary infrastructure to support it due to a grower base that is increasingly educated and business-savvy. This has allowed Mexico to be able to produce year-round in its varied climates and geographic regions.”

Mexican growers have been pushed to efficiency by technology and trade. “Developments have meant Mexico’s tomato industry now uses around 70 percent less water and has a cleaner product, overseen by third- to fifth-generation growers that are farmers for the long term,” says

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“When we insist on looking at the industry as country-of-origin, we build barriers. The reality of the produce industry as a whole is that we are intertwined. The success of Mexico is not Mexico’s success; it is the success of the tomato industry as a whole.”

— Martin Ley, Del Campo Supreme

Eric Viramontes, CEO of the Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC) based in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico. “Additionally, the United States has been very hard in its demands on Mexico. But this resulted in something very positive for our industry. It’s forced us to become one of the best industries in the world today.”

The difference in varieties produced by Florida and Mexico is another contributor to the debate. SunFed’s Mandel states, “Mexico is able to provide a vine-ripened tomato experience where the true flavor of the tomato can be expressed because it is allowed to gain its natural sugars during the maturation process. This differs from Florida, where they pick the majority of their tomato crops long before

maturation and subject them to ethylene gas for ripening. In regards to specific varieties, Florida claims there is no major difference between its varieties and those from Mexico. Florida growers claim to grow a bevy of varieties and types of tomatoes. I cannot say this claim is completely unfounded, but if I have 1 percent vine-ripes, 1 percent Heirlooms and 98 percent gassed-green rounds, such a claim is a bit disingenuous.”

A Bigger Perspective

As with other globally sourced products, the issue is more complex than a U.S. versus Mexico take. Del Campo’s Ley explains, “Ideal conditions have been found in Mexico by U.S., Canadian and some Mexican companies.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CERTIFIED GREENHOUSE FARMERS

Companies from the United States, including Floridian and Canadian companies, have driven the success in Mexico. Those actors, regardless of their country of origin, accomplished the work by providing consumers with what they want.”

“We need to talk about the industry in terms of the actors and not in terms of birth certificates,” continues Ley. “When we insist on looking at the industry as country-of-origin, we build barriers. The reality of the produce industry as a whole is that we are intertwined. The success of Mexico is not Mexico’s success;

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SUPPORT FREE TRADE OF MEXICAN TOMATOES

Despite widespread success and growth of the tomato category in retail stores, a portion of the Florida tomato industry is attempting to negate the 16-year old Tomato Suspension Agreement in order to file a new trade case, re-igniting a trade dispute that neither benefits the industry nor consumers. For years, U.S. and Mexican producers (as well as other countries) along with retailers have worked to build and expand the tomato category for U.S. consumers – an achievement that should continue for many solid reasons.

1. Collaboration among growing regions builds stable and successful markets in various commodities. The growth and success of today's tomato category is proof.
2. The United States Department of Commerce has repeatedly confirmed the Tomato Suspension Agreement to be in the public interest because it brings stability to the marketplace. The Agreement has been renewed two times and no violation of unfair pricing has ever been found.
3. The demand for tomatoes is so great that U.S. production couldn't possibly meet the needs. Reinstating duties on Mexican tomatoes will only lead to inefficiency in the supply chain and lack of reasonably priced product for consumers.
4. Restrictions on Mexican imports would result in less choice available for tomatoes. The market would see a reduced consumer selection of tomatoes and therefore fewer tomatoes being bought – further affecting the U.S. retail economy.
5. Increased duties would mean consumers would pay higher prices for the reduced offerings of tomatoes on supermarket shelves.
6. Many U.S. jobs are dependent on Mexican tomato trade. Informal studies suggest 12,000 jobs in the Nogales area come from produce and around 3,000 of these jobs are related to the Mexican tomato trade. The Mexican trade supports high caliber employment of U.S. citizens, not migrant workers.
7. Restriction of Mexican tomatoes would affect the distribution chain in the United States. More than 1,000 U.S. companies are dedicated to distributing Mexican produce. Allied U.S. businesses also include transportation, suppliers, retailers, and companies that make pallets, as well as cartons, fertilizers, and seed coming from the U.S.
8. Estimates show the jobs generated by the Mexican tomato industry in both countries as exceeding 400,000 people. About 5 percent of U.S. residents have jobs tied directly to Mexico which equates to 6 million jobs.
9. Trade interruption could hurt Florida's economy. Florida benefits from \$7.58 billion in two-way trade between Florida and Mexico, with more than \$2 billion of that in exports from Florida to Mexico.
10. Working together instead of erecting barriers would elevate consumption and grow the category even more. This approach, which the two countries can work towards together, would not only improve market conditions but the well-being of U.S. and Mexican populations.



Key Questions for Profiting from Mexican Melons

Melons represent a significant sales opportunity for retailers and represent around 2% of total produce sales. Mexico is a reliable and consistent supplier of melons and has exported melons to the United States for over 30 years. Understanding the answers to a few key questions will help better business in Mexican melons.

Q: Where are Mexican melons grown?

While melons are grown throughout Mexico, the arid desert region and deep groundwater aquifers of coastal Sonora create ideal growing conditions. Production in Sonora is within half-a-day's drive from the U.S. border at Nogales thus reducing the complexity of the supply chain logistics for importing into the U.S. Further south along the Pacific coastal states, such as Colima and Guerrero, are other growing regions that produce winter crops for export. There is also some production in the eastern part of the country. Most melons are grown open field, although there are always new technologies used to protect the plants, especially from late winter freezes in the case of Sonora.

Q: When are Mexican melons available in the U.S.? Is there peak time for quality or flavor?

Mexican melons potentially could be available in the U.S. year round, but the peak crops of Honeydew and Cantaloupe (originating in Sonora) occur from early October until mid December and then from mid April until early July. Due to the diversity of growing regions in the state of Sonora, excellent quality melons can be found throughout these time periods.

Q: What are some of the best aspects of melons to promote?

Great taste, health and diversity...melons are a healthy addition to any meal, whether breakfast, lunch, or used as a dessert. They can be cut into a variety of shapes, or served as a slice with the rind. The variety of flesh color from different melons, which includes different shades of oranges, greens, and yellows, provides excellent retail marketing opportunities.

Q: Should whole melons be promoted alongside cut melons?

Yes! Whole melons are easy to handle and keep at home. Cut melons, especially when combining different varieties and taking advantage of the contrasting colors, make for an exciting promotional item. Cut melons offer the consumer the option of quick and easy consumption, while whole melons can often be kept for a few days on the shelf at home thus offering the consumer flexibility on when they decide to enjoy the fruit.

Q: What is a good way to increase melon sales?

Increase melon sales by taking advantage of peak production seasons from different growing regions, thus ensuring only the freshest fruit is offered to consumers. While a wide variety of U.S. growing areas dominate production in summer months, Fall and Spring production mostly originates in Sonora which provides optimum conditions for growing melons in those seasons.

Q: What is the best answer a retailer can give a consumer concerned about food safety on melons?

Melon production in Sonora occurs with extreme vigilance and emphasis on food safety. The growing conditions themselves – warm, arid weather with deep-aquifer irrigation wells – inhibit microbiological contamination. Field and packing shed standards have

been developed in conjunction with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Mexican state and federal food safety agencies. Additionally, Mexican produce of any type must pass a wide variety of inspections to enter the U.S. which ensures only the highest quality products reach retail shelves.

Q: What type of food safety certifications do Mexican melon growers have?

To be able to export cantaloupe melons to the U.S., all Mexican producers must adhere to a series of standards set by the Mexican federal agency charged with food safety (SENASICA) in conjunction with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Approved Mexican cantaloupe growers for export to the U.S. can be found under the FDA Import Alert 22-01. The vast majority of honeydew producers (and cantaloupe growers as well) acquire third-party certification by entities recognized in the U.S. such as Primus Labs or SCS, among others.

Q: Do Mexican melon growers have traceability measures?

Many producers have maintained internal traceability for years, both for use in the case of a potential recall as well as for internal assessment of product quality and value. PTI standards are welcomed by most producers as they understand and value the concept of traceability throughout the supply chain. The culture of valuing traceability is well established within Mexican melon exporters. Some producers in Sonora have been on the cutting edge of the industry, enacting item level traceability studies on honeydew melons.



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“Government and industry should be thinking about the consumer. Historically, several times Florida has been wiped out and Mexico has supplied the whole market. A few years ago, both got hurt and between the two industries, they complemented each other, filling the market needs.”

— Alberto Maldonado, Apache Produce

it is the success of the tomato industry as a whole. It's about everyone in the industry figuring out how to serve the customer with the tomato choices they want.”

Mexican industry leaders maintain the need for both areas. “Many consumers prefer the Mexican tomato because of flavor and quality, as opposed to the gas-green tomatoes,” says Apache's Maldonado. “However, many foodservice users and repackers use green tomatoes. There is demand for both.”

Weather is a major factor in the argument for ensuring multiple viable production sources. “Neither country can guarantee the public consistent production on account of the weather,” Maldonado points out. “Government and industry should be thinking about the

consumer. Historically, several times Florida has been wiped out and Mexico has supplied the whole market. A few years ago, both got hurt and between the two industries, they complemented each other, filling the market needs.”

Chamberlain of J-C Distributing asks, “If the hurricane that just came through would have hit Florida, what would Subway or SYSCO or Alliant do without being able to quickly change to Mexico as a source? What would prices be?”

Market Consequences

Regardless of the arguments, a new trade dispute would affect the tomato category. “Growers, shippers, wholesalers, buyers and



others on both sides of the border have invested to build the tomato category into what it is today,” emphasizes FPAA's Jungmeyer. “The current U.S. demand for tomatoes is so great that U.S. production alone couldn't possibly meet the needs. The United States is the largest importer of Mexican tomatoes totaling \$1.3 billion last year.”

A drastic reduction of market supply and higher retail pricing are assumed results from significant restriction of Mexican production. “What the Mexican tomato industry offers the U.S. marketplace, above



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A WORD FROM FLORIDA

The action being sought by domestic producers across the United States, not just Florida, seeks to end a case that dates back to 1996 and which remains focused on facts from the past (pricing in 1995-96 [based on] market conditions in 1993-95) which don't reflect market conditions in 2012. All types of tomatoes are grown in the United States, just as they are in Mexico.

While producers in any country may take pride in the quality of what they produce, tomatoes from U.S. growers are of the highest quality. Growers of all types of tomatoes all across the U.S. — even in Arizona — support our effort. Agricultural Commissioners, Representatives and Senators and workers from across the country support letting the current facts guide future trade in tomatoes.

U.S. producers simply want a chance to eliminate a suspended investigation that has ceased to have factual relevance to the current times and preserve their rights, as are available to all domestic agricultural and industrial producers.”

*Reggie Brown
Executive Vice President
Florida Tomato Exchange
Maitland, Florida*

Editor's Note: PRODUCE BUSINESS welcomes all opinions and will publish any letter on the subject of the Tomato Suspension Agreement. Please email your comments to: info@producebusiness.com

everything else, is a wide array of vine-ripened tomato styles and packs,” says SunFed's Mandel. “It provides a multitude of SKUs for a retailer to carry; it provides choice and flavor to the end consumer as well as thousands of U.S. jobs to move, sell and distribute these tomatoes.”

“Without Mexican tomatoes, supermarket shelves would have far fewer SKUs to offer consumers,” states Jungmeyer. “If there was a freeze in Florida, without Mexican tomatoes prices would go through the roof. In 1989, there was low production in West Mexico and Florida had a freeze. FOBs went to \$50 and stayed there for an extended period. In 2011, there was a freeze in both areas. Prices briefly went above \$40. Retailers shied away from the category and sales stayed low the whole season. High FOB prices are only good for the growers that have tomatoes. They are not good for consumers or retailers.”

“Restricting Mexican imports would certainly result in consumers and buyers paying higher prices for a reduced offering of tomatoes,” advises Ley of Del Campo. “Our industry should be looking for ways to increase affordable quality products to U.S. consumers, not decrease the offering and increase price. The effect of a new dispute would lead to a meager and pricey selection — the exact opposite of what benefits consumers and our industry in general.”

Larger Economic Impact

FPAA reports a value of approximately

\$816 million FOB as registered for the trade of Mexican tomatoes in Nogales, AZ, in 2011 and representing 20 to 25 percent of the value of all produce brought into Nogales. “Terminating the agreement would have a hugely negative impact in this country,” warns Jungmeyer. “Informal studies suggest 12,000 jobs in the Nogales area come from produce, with around 3,000 of these jobs related to Mexican tomato trade — high caliber employment since Nogales workers are U.S. citizens.”

FPAA envisions consequences that would affect companies in almost all U.S. states. “These companies make boxes, sell seeds and offer services in support of the importation of fresh Mexican tomatoes,” continues FPAA's Jungmeyer. “This trade action is certain to threaten numerous U.S. jobs all across the country.”

The FPAA estimates 350,000 overall jobs result from the protected agriculture industry with nearly 50 percent of those in the tomato industry. FPAA further estimates five percent of U.S. residents have jobs tied directly to Mexico (equating to six million jobs). “Ironically, the trade interruption could end up hurting Florida's economy as well,” states Jungmeyer. “Statistics show Florida benefits from \$7.58 billion in two-way trade between Florida and Mexico, with more than \$2 billion of that in exports from Florida to Mexico. That ‘free’ trade could be jeopardized by any new trade dispute erected by the United States.”

“In the event the agreement is negated, it

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would be to the benefit of a very small few and the detriment of every tomato consumer in the United States,” says SunFed’s Mandel. “Florida would gain at the expense of a large number of U.S. distributors, who would be irreparably harmed financially. Florida would gain at the expense of a drastic reduction in exports from Mexico.”

Hurting A Relationship

Proponents of the agreement also fear a larger trade war. “Mexico would be unduly injured as tomatoes represent the No.1 agricultural export to the U.S. from Mexico,” says Mandel. “It is a very large industry employing several hundred thousands of individuals. Mexican exporters would be forced to defend

themselves in a court of law.”

“We cannot afford to get into this argument and embark on a major trade war,” states Chamberlain. “We have the opportunity to have a trillion dollar trade relationship with a country that has seen a 4.5 percent GDP growth in the last year alone. We don’t want Mexico to retaliate on our pork or electronics or apples. This is about more than just tomatoes. Working together, our two countries should be a symbol of economic freedom.”


The West Mexico industry looks to a future of free trade. “I appreciate our domestic growers and the hard work they put in to produce their products,” says Mandel. “However, this cannot be painted as an example of anything other than Florida asking

for protectionist politics.”

“What is most clear is that the economies of Mexico and the U.S. become more intertwined each day,” relates Jungmeyer. “Mexican pork producers have suffered because U.S. pork producers are more efficient and able to increase their exports to Mexico. Similarly, Mexican tomato growers have found efficiencies.”


“Especially in these economic times, it’s fantastic to think we have one of our best trading partners right next to us,” states J-C’s Chamberlain. “We don’t need to go halfway across the world to sell \$460 billion worth of products. We have that market right here, and it is fundamentally programmed to want American products. We shouldn’t jeopardize it.” **pb**

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Apples: 15 Thoughts To Help In A Tough Year

Despite weather woes, apple growers/shippers around the country remain positive for future seasons. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



PHOTO COURTESY OF C.M. HOLTZINGER FRUIT CO. LLC

Industry experts recommend merchandising an average of eight to 10 SKUs of apples to make the most of the category.

Produce is always at the mercy of the weather, and the 2012 apple crop endured a perfect storm, or rather, series of storms. First came the late April freeze that devastated the crop in Michigan, western New York and much of Canada. Chuck Sinks, CEO/president of sales and marketing at Sage Fruit Co. LLC, in Yakima, WA, acknowledges, “Crop growing conditions in any given year can greatly affect the availability of a particular variety. Case in point, Michigan has lost the vast majority of its crop due to a freeze in the spring.”

Then, three weeks into July, hailstorms destroyed or damaged millions of boxes of apples across Washington. “There’s probably up to 20 million boxes of apples affected by hail this year,” estimates Andy Tudor, director of marketing at Yakima, WA-based FirstFruits Marketing of Washington, LLC. “Some of it was destroyed, but some just has light hail damage, which will be picked and put in the warehouse.”

The weather damage to the 2012 apple crop even extends across the Atlantic to orchards in Europe, adding to a supply problem of historic proportions. Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager at Domex Super-Fresh Growers, LLC, headquartered in Yakima, WA, acknowledges, “This year we’ve had a

unique apple crop not just nationwide, but globally, as Europe has had to contend with similar supply and demand issues. There’s a massive demand for apples with an historically low supply. We haven’t had a nationwide crop this small since 1986.”

Just as it was a difficult year to grow apples, 2012 will be a challenging year to merchandise them. Industry insiders offer 15 thoughts to consider in meeting that challenge:

1. They Will Be Back

Apple growers who suffered freeze losses in 2012 have spent decades building and serving loyal local markets, and these growers will be back with their prized local varieties in 2013. “The apple growers in Michigan, New York and Ontario have decades-long relationships with their customers,” remarks Queen. “We see them coming back next year. They should have a bumper crop because their trees will be ready.”

Fortunately, the freeze that destroyed the fruit did not damage the trees, so growers should be able to rebound with a strong crop in 2013. Diane Smith, executive director of the Lansing-based Michigan Apple Commission (MAC), confirms, “We should have a wonderful crop in 2013. Retailers understand this could happen to anybody. Our locally

grown market will bounce back,” she says.

For 2012, most of the slack will be picked up by apples from other areas of the country. “We’ve got a pretty good crop, about normal in timing,” reports Jim P. Mertz, vice chairman of Symms Fruit Ranch, Inc., in Caldwell, ID. “We’ve had a few weeks of warm weather and the cullage is going to be minimal.”

There will even be ample supply from some apple growing areas in the Northeast and East that were largely spared from freeze damage. According to Karin Rodriguez, executive director of Harrisburg-based Pennsylvania Apple Marketing, “It’s looking pretty good. We fared better than the other Eastern states. We’re looking for an average-sized crop. We are finding more demand because of the problems in New York and Michigan, so I do think pricing will be higher,” she says.

Some Eastern shippers have a cushion because they source apples from a number of local areas. “There’s a lot of question about the size or volume of the crop, but Pennsylvania will not be down,” guarantees Fred Hess, owner/president of Hess Bros. Fruit Co., in Leola, PA. “Since everybody is saying New York will be a half a crop, we will be affected by that as we pack a lot of apples from that area. But on the other hand, we get apples from Virginia,

too, and they should have a good crop.”

Indeed, eastern and midwestern retailers will lean heavily on apples from Washington to take up the slack. “At this point I’m told the East Coast apple crop will be significantly down. If necessary, we will bring in more apples from Washington,” says Mike Patterson, director of produce operations at Magruder’s, a family-owned independent chain with six markets based in Rockville, Maryland.

Other Eastern produce retailers are also already looking to the West for apples this year. “We will certainly not have the supply we expected from New York,” says Jeff Cady, produce/floral category manager at Tops Friendly Markets, based in Buffalo, NY. “We will have to lean on apples from the West, from Washington State in particular.”

Despite the difficulties with this year’s crop, there is a loyal customer base that will return next year to their favorite New York and Michigan varieties. “We will go back to New York apples next year,” says Cady. “This is apple country; last year we carried only New York apples in the month of October. We did carry a couple varieties from Washington that aren’t grown here, but we did not put them up front.”

Magruder’s, too, will return to Eastern

apples as they become available next year. “We have Virginia to New York to keep us supplied, and the freight is more economical than bringing them all the way from the West Coast,” Patterson says.

With a short supply arriving from the eastern apple producing regions, 2012 might be the year to feature club varieties until the local favorites return in 2013. Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing at Rainier Fruit Co., in Selah, WA, states, “The apple category is unique to bulk produce as it offers multiple new varieties to consumers. Retailers are now featuring these limited volume varieties in store and through print ads with great success.”

2. Price ‘em High(er)

The supply of apples in 2012 will be down precipitously, as a result of the weather, but the demand for apples will be up a little, as a result of population increases. As a result of this imbalance between supply and demand, the prices paid by retailers figure to be higher this year.

“We expect there to be a higher premium for apples as the Michigan crop is gone, New York state lost approximately 50 percent of their crop and Washington state lost 10 percent of theirs,”

says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix, in Lakeland, FL.

The earliest wholesale market prices confirmed that apples are likely to be a little more expensive this year. “With the overall supply down, we’re seeing some stronger opening prices,” confirms Paul Newman, organic/category manager for Columbia Valley Fruit, LLC., headquartered in Union Gap, WA.

Don Roper, vice president for sales and marketing at Honey Bear Tree Fruit Co., LLC., located in Elgin, MN, notes, “Retailers are going to have to move their price points up to \$1.69, \$1.89 or \$1.99 a pound, which, in turn, will slow demand.”

Even at higher than usual prices, however, apples will still be one of the bargains of the produce department. “Compared to other fruits and vegetables, apples are still at a very good price point, especially when you consider the health benefits,” contends Hess of Hess Bros.

3. ‘Hail Quality’ Bargains Will Be Available

The estimate for the Washington crop is 108 to 109 million boxes, give or take four or five million, and Domex’s Queen thinks the final number will be toward the high end of

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that range.

The impact of the hail varied greatly from region to region and even orchard to orchard. “Our crop is looking excellent,” confirms Sandra Steineke, director of merchandising at C.M. Holtzinger Fruit Co. LLC, in Yakima WA. We lost a tiny amount, but nothing to write home about.”

Other Washington shippers also report that hail damage was inconsistent throughout the state. “We caught some hail at some of the ranches, and missed it at others,” Newman says. “With the early varieties, we can have the pickers sort out the hail-damaged from the rest. With the later varieties there won’t be enough pickers to sort, but the further you get away from the hail the longer the fruit will have to rebound.”

No one will know the extent of the damage until the apples have been picked and sorted, but the amount of hail damaged fruit will be in the millions of boxes. According to Newman, “The figure everyone is throwing out is 15 percent damage. Some of that will be lost, but the question is whether retailers will consider hail-damaged fruit. Some will carry 5-lb. pound bags, or even a few 8-lb. bags.”

These large bags of hail-damaged fruit will give retailers an opportunity to offer their customers apple bargains. “You’ll get five pounds for the price of three,” says FristFruits’ Tudor.

We are in relatively uncharted waters, and it remains to be seen how these apples will do in this market. Retailers who go with the discount bags of hail-damaged fruit still need to be vigilant about keeping their apple displays looking good. “Rotation is the key to success,” says Jim Allen, president of the Fishers-based New York Apple Association (NYAA).

4. Bags Can Be Bargains

The conventional mix between bagged and bulk apples could be turned on its head a bit this year. According to Domex’s Queen, “Supply problems and the economic malaise will combine to make this a big year for bagged apples. Michigan and New York are traditionally strong in bagged apples, so you’re going to see more bags out of Washington than usual. The bag deals will be marginally less per pound than the bulk deals,” he says.

Others agree that bags, particularly fairly large bags, will be important in this year’s apple merchandising. “There will be lots of opportunity for retailing 5-lb. bags of apples this season,” agrees Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt Growers Inc., LLC., in Wenatchee, WA. “Promoting these items in a tri-wall bin makes for a great in-and-out promotion.”

It is more important than ever this year to

Hard Times For A Comfort Fruit

This has been one of the toughest weather years ever for apple growers in the United States, Canada and Mexico. In Michigan, an early heat wave caused the trees to bloom early, and then a fierce spring frost destroyed the flowers before they set fruit. The result was the greatest apple crop loss state wide in nearly 70 years. “We won’t be doing much in terms of merchandising apples this year,” admits Diane Smith, executive director of the Michigan Apple Commission, Lansing, MI. “We’re looking at 10 percent of the normal crop if we’re lucky. The apple crop as a whole will be down this year; it’s not just Michigan.”

The damage from that frost extended beyond Michigan. The cold snap of April 27 to April 29 caused 90 percent crop losses not just in Michigan, but also in Western New York and Ontario. St. Catharines-based Ontario Apple Growers association chair, Brian Gilroy, estimated in August that the apple crop loss in Ontario this year will be 88 percent.

“When you take those regions out of the mix, and add the hail problems in Washington, we’re looking at an overall reduction in apples between 20 and 35 percent,” says Don Roper, vice president for sales and marketing at Honey Bear Tree Fruit, located in Elgin, MN.

There were hailstorms in Washington

this summer and, though they were not as catastrophic as the freeze, they will have a significant impact on the crop from the nation’s leading apple producer. “On July 20, we had hailstorms across the State of Washington that did a fair amount of damage to the apples,” describes Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager at Domex SuperFresh Growers, in Yakima, WA. “It was uneven — some orchards had apples pelted with golf ball-sized hail — while other orchards weren’t even hit by smaller hail. Until we begin to harvest and pack, we won’t know what we’ve got.”

“I think it will be a manageable year; it’s not a panic situation,” says Bob Mast, vice president for marketing and food safety at CMI Corporation, located in Wenatchee, WA. “The volume out of the Northwest is good this year, but the rest of North America is down.”

According to Mast, the latest estimates are the Midwest crop is down 70 to 90 percent, and the East will be down 31 percent, but the West should be up 6 percent. The total volume from the United States will be down an estimated 14 percent from last year, but the harvest from Canada will be down 30 percent, and from Mexico down 50 percent. **pb**

work with apple shippers to get the kind and size apple packages that will work best in a particular market. “As a shipper you’ve got to have a relationship with your customers,” asserts Symms Mertz. “You’ve got to have that relationship, because what works for some people won’t work for others. When they ask for a certain container, or a certain kind of package, we say ‘sure.’”

5. Apples and Pears, Together Now More than Ever

Apples and pears are always a natural to merchandise together, as pears can serve as a color break between varieties of apples that are of similar color. Research has also shown that sales of both apples and pears increase significantly when displayed together.

“Use pears as a color break among apple varieties of the same general color,” suggests Queen. “When you promote apples and pears together, you get a seven percent increase in the sales of each,” he reports.

And this year there is one more reason to

display apples and pears side by side: With apples in short supply the pears may pick up some of the slack. According to Bob Mast, vice president for marketing and food safety at CMI Corp. headquartered in Wenatchee, WA, “Pears are going to be strong this year; and it might be a good opportunity to promote them. The pear crop is down a little from last year, but it is up from the five-year average.”

6. Honeycrisp Is Still On the Rise

Honeycrisp continues to enjoy an extraordinary increase in popularity, and growers are still working to catch up with the demand. “There’s certainly going to be more Honeycrisp available this year — both from our company and from the industry as a whole,” remarks FirstFruits Tudor. “The supply has been ending in January, but it will extend deeper into the spring this year.”

Even in the relatively arid orchards of Idaho, Mertz says, “We grow some Honeycrisp, but we’re in the desert and they need a little more water.”

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“We will certainly not have the supply we expected from New York. We will have to lean on apples from the West, from Washington State in particular....We will go back to New York apples next year. This is apple country; last year we carried only New York apples in the month of October.”

— Jeff Cady, *Tops Friendly Markets*

Honeycrisp is still on the rise, and has become the fastest growing apple variety ever. “I see Honeycrisp popularity having started in the Midwest, but it’s probably the fastest growing apple because it’s such a good apple,” remarks Honeybear’s Roper. “There are still areas that haven’t had enough supply, but this will be the quickest apple to 20 million cases ever.”

7. Beyond Honeycrisp

The extraordinary success of Honeycrisp has inspired breeders to search for the next big thing in apples. “We’re trying to find the new Honeycrisp. We’ve got a few varieties in the ground, but they’re still numbered experimental varieties,” says Newman of Columbia Valley.

The next new important apple varieties could be two new Honeycrisp relatives that will extend the harvest season and, more important, greatly extend the time the fruit can maintain peak flavor in storage. Roper details, “We have two new apples coming out this fall. The first comes before Honeycrisp; it’s an early September harvest. Our other new one is a mid-October harvest.

Honeycrisp has a flaw that causes flavor to decline in storage, and the latter of these two new varieties will go a long ways toward correcting that flaw. “What’s probably more important than the harvest date is the mix of Brix and starch,” explains Roper. “When Honeycrisp is harvested, the Brix is at its peak, but there is little starch. As you put that apple in storage, there are no starches that turn to sugar. It’s flavor profile really wanes. Toward the end of December and into January, it fades in flavor. It is still crisp, but it has less flavor. Our second new variety has high Brix and high starch. It reaches its peak flavor from December through March.”

8. Apples: The Year-Round Fruit

The new apple season begins just in time for back-to-school promotions. Sage’s Sink points out, “Apples are available in promotable volume in late August or early September on particular varieties, even though full availability will not be until late October.”

Apples may begin in late summer, but they are among a handful of fruits that are available from domestic sources year-round. “While not all varieties are available year round, certainly the apple category can be maintained year-round,” says NYAA’s Allen.

It is advisable to develop a plan-o-gram to assist in always featuring a number of apple varieties when they are at their peak.

“Apples are available all year, but not all varieties,” says Stemilt’s Pepperl. “Red and Golden Delicious and Granny Smith are available year-round, Gala/Fuji are available most months, and others are seasonal, such as Honeycrisp, Piñata and Pink Lady.”

The secret is that shippers have learned to maintain peak flavor in many apple varieties when they are kept in storage for months. “With controlled Atmosphere, apples can be stored and kept fresh year-round on particular varieties,” notes Sage’s Sinks.

9. Know Your Varieties

An important merchandising decision is how many apple varieties to carry, and which ones.

“Carry as many as you can profitably sell, and delight your customers,” Allen says.

You do not want customers looking elsewhere for a favored variety they hoped to find in your produce department.

“Carry as many varieties as possible in your rack space. Customers want as much variety as is available, give them choices so they don’t have to go to your competitor to find something else,” Sinks advises.

There are a number of staple varieties that should probably be in the apple section in every region in the country.

“Regardless of region, apple favorites include Gala, Fuji, Red Delicious and Honey-

crisp,” Brous says.

There are as many as six varieties that could be considered apple staples, and should probably be found in the section no matter where the store is located.

“Red Delicious is still the most wanted variety, but the market share is half what it used to be. The top five are Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, Gala and Fuji,” Mertz says.

Add Honeycrisp to the list of staples and you’ve got six varieties that account for around 80 percent of all apple sales.

“The number of varieties you should carry depends on the department size and volume. However 8 to 10 is a ballpark number. You increase SKU count by also selling multiple ways. Example: bulk Gala, bagged Gala and organic Gala. You end up with 18 to 25 SKUs,” Pepperl says. “Timing and item selection are the most important things to consider in merchandising apples. Don’t carry too many items at one time. Sell and promote items hard when they are at their best. Examples are Honeycrisp in fall and winter; Pink lady in winter, spring and summer.”

The major varieties are best combined with a number of additional rotating varieties.

“Store size is the major factor in the number of apple varieties a retailer carries. A recommended mix would be conventional varieties (Red Delicious, Golden Delicious and Granny Smith) to allow for color breaks and a few of the premium apples (Gala, Fuji, Pink Lady) to service the connoisseur and a larger per pound ring,” Steineke says.

10. Regions Matter

In filling out the apple menu beyond the Big



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“Creating the connection between consumers and the growers, Holtzinger is offering a Yakima Nation reusable apple bag. The apples, grown on the land of the Yakima Indians, tell the ‘grower story’ through the reusable bag and point of purchase with a QR code for consumers who are interested in learning more about their grower.”

— Sandra Steineke, C.M. Holtzinger Fruit Co., LLC

5, or Big 6 if you include Honeycrisp, regional taste preferences matter. Each region of the country has its own favorite varieties, and its own preferred flavor profile. Queen details, “The West likes sweet apples like Fuji and Gala. The Midwest likes tart, sweet apples like Honeycrisp, Braeburn and Jonagold. The Northeast likes tart apples like McIntosh and Granny Smith.”

Even as Honeycrisp has become the newest apple variety to go national, these regional preferences have remained stable. “People are always looking for more Honeycrisp — it’s the new kid on the block — but the regional flavor profiles have stayed about the same,” Queen says.

11. Buy (And Sell) Local

Many retailers will not be able to find enough locally grown apples this stormy year, but the importance of offering locally grown apples remains a long-term trend.

“Since homegrown and regionally correct is such a marketing tool, retailers should make sure they take advantage of the trend,” advises NYAA’s Allen. “Additionally, because some varieties are regional, retailers should source from many areas. Promoting home-grown New York State apples is a win-win for both retailers and consumers.”

Apple shippers from Washington advise using locally grown apples in addition to Washington apples. “Retailers should usually use two

regions — the local source and Washington,” Stemilt’s Pepperl says. “Local, of course, matters. In Washington, we focus on the family-farmed aspect as well as our great locale to promote our crop to other regions. It’s a great way for retailers to show consumers where their fruit is coming from and who is growing it. They are getting apples from the best locale in the world by growers who have a passion for what they do.”

In apples, localism corresponds to preference for particular varieties that usually cannot be found outside of the area. Sinks asserts, “Region of origin matters. Customers are more informed than ever now, with all the different aspects of social media available. Let them know your apples come from Washington State. Use all three main growing regions, as they all carry varieties that are not available in the others,” he advises. “For example make sure to vary Michigan Jonathons, New York Empires, and Washington Sonyas. Local is good as well, and if a particular region has a good local supply, use it and let your customers know you are promoting local grown.”

A typical strategy is to combine local orchards with the State of Washington to build a year-round apple program. “Depending on

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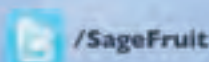
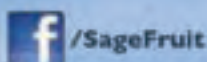
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store location, retailers should pull from the regions necessary to ensure a year-round supply of apples to their customers,” suggests Holtzinger’s Steineke. “Many retailers offer local options while in season and then look to Washington and then international shippers for their off-season sales,” Steineke says.

Washington is the one locality that carries weight pretty much everywhere in the country. “While the ‘buy local’ movement still has legs with an emotional connection between consumers and growers, consumers are looking to purchase apples year-round, which is not always an option with their local orchards,” explains Steineke. “Consumers are also purchasing USA products to support their country and as a reaction to food safety concerns. Creating the connection between

consumers and the growers, Holtzinger is offering a Yakima Nation reusable apple bag. The apples, grown on the land of the Yakima Indians, tell the ‘grower story’ through the reusable bag and point of purchase with a QR code for consumers who are interested in learning more about their grower.”

12. Fuel Up To Play 60

Apples, and apple promotions, can play an important role in the move to promote healthy eating and regular exercise as a way to combat childhood obesity. A major initiative with this goal in mind has already become widespread in schools the past few years, and is about to move into retail produce sections.

“The National Football League Fuel Up to Play 60 program is a hit,” says Terry Braith-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAGE FRUIT FRUIT CO. LLC

waite, director of marketing at Chelan Fresh Marketing, Chelan, WA. “The program itself is reaching 73,000 schools targeting 36 million kids. We’re taking the program to retailers now that it’s been in the schools a few years.”

The program will promote three produce items particularly suited for inclusion in kids’ lunches. “We’re targeting carrots, grapes and moving into apples now,” details Braithwaite. “We already have four shippers on board. It’s about eating healthy and getting 60 minutes of exercise a day.”

According to FirstFruits’ Tudor, the four shippers in the Fuel Up To Play 60 are Chelan Fresh, FirstFruits Marketing, Rainer Fruit Co. and Borden’s. There will be a promotion in October, and a second in January.

But all retailers can benefit from promoting the health benefits of apples. “USDA dietary guidelines promoting the ‘half your plate’ message, along with Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move campaign, present unique opportunities for apples and the entire produce department, due to the emphasis on increased fruit and vegetable consumption,” remarks Rainier’s Wolter. “Furthermore, consumers are increasingly reaching for ‘functional foods,’ supporting industry promotion of the health benefits associated with apples. In a 2010 U.S. Apple Association consumer survey, consumers rated apples as one of the most healthful fruits. Once the survey disclosed that scientific evidence supports various health claims and statements, the majority of survey participants said they would purchase and serve apples more frequently.”

Apples are not only healthy, they are also extremely convenient. “In addition to health benefits, consumers are looking for convenience, and apples fit that niche — just wash and eat,” says Wolter. “They’re perfectly portable, come in a variety of flavor profiles and provide multiple health benefits.”

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“Consumer information that provides shoppers with reasons to purchase apples versus alternative fruits and snacks is important in driving purchase frequency. In addition, creating an optimal merchandising display for apples, while at the same time providing POS materials to educate/remind shoppers on the many uses for the different varieties of apples, is essential to increasing sales.”

— Suzanne Wolter, Rainier Fruit Co.

fresh-cut apple products, because they meet the demand for healthy and convenient foods. “Prepared apple sales are on the rise after a slight recession-related decline,” reports Tony Freytag, managing member and marketing manager at Crunch Pak, LLC., headquartered in Cashmere, WA. “We’ve seen a 25 percent category dollar increase in the past five years, according to Nielsen Perishable Groups Fresh Facts. People want healthy choices that fit their on-the-go lifestyle.”

Crunch Pak’s family of brands includes Crunch Pak with Disney and Crunch Pak Organics. “We choose varieties based on taste and pressure, so we slice mostly Pink Lady and Galas for our sweet apples products, and Granny Smiths for our green apple products,” Freytag details.

The firm is launching a new line of sliced apples infused with the flavors of other fruits in three flavors: Peach/mango, grape and strawberry-vanilla cream. The Flavorz line made its debut in May, but national rollout is in late August, just in time for back-to-school; the suggested retail price is \$3.99 to \$4.29.

“We see more and more retailers putting in a snacking section, mainly to call attention to the assortment and product offered,” remarks Freytag. “The more a destination category is created, the stronger the appeal. It’s important to maintain an assortment and watch for out of stocks. This is critical: You can’t sell it if you don’t own it,” he asserts.

14. Organic Apples Are Here To Stay

An older trend is the continuing popularity of organic apples. “The organic market continues to grow,” confirms Columbia Valley’s Newman. “You’re seeing a lot of conventional retailers open up space for organic apples. It’s a mainstay that’s gone beyond being a fad.”

The decision of whether to display organic apples with the other apples, or with the other organic produce, depends on the importance

of the organic offerings in the particular market. It is advisable in either case to keep these two sections fairly close to each other. “As a consumer, I want to see the organic section fairly close to the conventional apples and pears,” relates Newman. “Plus, some retailers will run a special on one variety in organic, like Fuji, and that needs to be visible to shoppers not typically looking to buy organic.”

15. Keep On Promoting

Even in a year of tough supply and tougher prices, apples are such a central part of the produce department that it is important to maintain a promotion program. “We plan to promote apples this year; however, due to the reduced crops, we may not as aggressively promote,” says Brous from Publix.

In some areas of the country, apple promotions are an annual celebration of the local harvest. “Usually promotions are pretty heavy when we have apples from Minnesota,” says Bert Galarza, produce manager at Hugo’s Family Marketplace, a 9-unit independent chain based in Grand Forks, ND. “We have bins of Honeycrisp. Once in a while we’ll do promotions of McIntosh. That’s usually what I see from Minnesota.”

According to Rodriguez from Pennsylvania Apple Marketing, “Consumers are always interested in apples. With the early crop it makes sense to promote, even if prices are higher.”

While supplies will be shorter this year, there will be enough apples to promote. CMI’s Mast confirms this, adding, “The promotions simply may not be as aggressive as they have been.”

Suppliers suggest developing a promotion program in advance. “Establish a program and stick with it, when the crop allows,” advises Sage’s Sinks. “Unless crop conditions are unstable, it is best to stay on a particular size, like 80/88, and quality range, like premium number 1, when possible. It is okay to carry larger sizes, like 56/64, and small sizes, like

80/88, in the same rack set, as well as having a two-tier program such as 80/88 tray packs and small fruit in tote bags, as the PLU break is on the 100 sizes.”

The price point for apples will be higher this year, but the discounts for effective promotion will be about the same. “We will promote, but we have to be more creative about it,” says Cady from Tops Markets.

Every October Magruder’s has a two-week “Apple Fest” promotion. “We have as many varieties as possible. I’m hoping everything will be fine this year,” Patterson says.

It makes sense to plan the apple promotion price points in advance. “Retailers need to have a promotion plan in place they can live with throughout the season,” asserts Domex’s Queen. “If Gala apples are \$1.99 a pound, what’s the appropriate reduction to get them moving? Usually it’s around 30 percent, but get those plans in place.”

To be successful the promotion needs an eye-catching display, in addition to a good price. “In a category that’s been around forever, visual merchandising could play a major role in increasing apples sales for retailers,” contends Holtzinger’s Steineke. “Combining eye-catching visual merchandising in packaging designed to increase the ring at the register can add up. Holtzinger’s new Veteran’s Honor box offers a graphically compelling display and a 5-lb. ring at the counter,” she details.

Other shippers agree that eye appeal is essential to successful promotion. “In-store marketing strategies should focus on capturing the attention of consumers to initiate purchase,” says Rainer’s Wolter. “Consumer information that provides shoppers with reasons to purchase apples versus alternative fruits and snacks is important in driving purchase frequency. In addition, creating an optimal merchandising display for apples, while at the same time providing POS materials to educate/remind shoppers on the many uses for the different varieties of apples, is essential to increasing sales.”

The time for eye-catching apple promotions is the weeks and months when the harvest rolls in. “Apple household penetration is highest during peak apple season, the fourth and first quarters, at more than 40 percent,” Wolter details. “Obviously, apples are on consumers’ minds. However, even at peak season, many households are not purchasing apples, indicating significant opportunities to increase penetration throughout the year. It’s important to capture consumers’ attention with promotions and displays to encourage trial.”

pb

Spotlight On Detroit



Despite its economic hardships, the Detroit region is known for independent retailers that cater to its diverse population.

BY LISA WHITE

With the recent spring freeze and summer droughts, those working in Detroit's produce industry have had their fair share of challenges. Yet, from a retail and foodservice perspective, Detroit is experiencing a resurgence. There are currently about 84 independent markets in the inner city. "Also, more than 50 restaurants have opened in the area over the last year," says Dominic Russo, a buyer and sales representative for Rocky Produce, a wholesaler in the city. "There have been 10,000 new jobs created in the past year or two, and hundreds of new residents are moving into the city. We think this is a trend that will continue. Detroit is on its way back."

Surprisingly, after California, Michigan is the second most agriculturally diverse state in the country. The Detroit area is 6,657 square miles and consists of 10 counties as well as 275 cities, villages and townships. In 2010, its population totaled more than 5.3 million, and retail sales totaled almost \$75 million.

Serviced by two produce markets, Detroit has always been a hot spot for fruits and vegetables. Created in 1929, The Detroit Terminal Market consists of two long buildings constructed in an 'H' formation and connected by a bridge. Originally designed around rail lines, its eight vendors are now mostly serviced by trucks.

Detroit's Eastern Market, which opened in 1891, is located about 10 miles north of its terminal market. Open to the public on Saturdays, this six-block operation has more than 250 vendors, including area farmers. The Eastern Market has undergone an expansion recently and continues to evolve as one of the area's primary retail destinations.

Recently, there has been a focus on expanding produce production in Detroit via the city's Detroit Market Garden Project, which will showcase growing methods and business models related to small-scale specialty crop production. Also, new vertical hydroponic and aeroponic systems are being looked at as a way to repurpose abandoned and vacant industrial buildings.

Overcoming Challenges

Although the weather issues in the Midwest have been challenging, Michigan farmers have continued to make a vital impact in the state's produce industry. The region's wholesalers have always strived to be supportive of these businesses. "What these farmers do in the produce segment is substantial, and we try to be a part of that," Russo says. "We do what we can as produce professionals to create and maintain value."

It hasn't been easy. Due to the extreme weather this year, most

of the Michigan treefruit has been virtually wiped out. "With the warm early spring and freezing temperatures in late spring, no fruit came," Russo says. "To top it off, most of the summer we've had 90-plus degree weather, no rain and drought issues. Many produce items have suffered."

Ben. B. Schwartz, a Detroit wholesaler, was prepared for the weather-related issues. "We know what's going to happen when growing regions are having trouble, whether it's southern peaches or regional apples," says Nate Stone, general manager and chief operating officer of Ben B. Schwartz. "Sometimes the changes are what we have to do to go along with what has already happened or what will happen as a result. We generally have a great year in southern peaches, but it wasn't that great this year. We also typically have a great year with Michigan apples and blueberries. We had as good a year as we could, but it was limited by availability."

The fruits and vegetables that were available cost more than normal. Even with the weather and production issues, Rocky Produce has had a successful year in fruit sales, particularly with treefruit and grapes from California.

Much of the increased interest in produce can be attributed to the growing focus on healthier eating. "No matter the age group, everyone is eating more produce," Stone says. "People have become smarter, even if it means adding lettuce and tomato to hamburgers. Everyone knows eating more produce is the way to go. The more produce you eat, the healthier you are."

Although the organic segment has been in the spotlight, the category is not a big seller in the Detroit region. "Yes, the organic segment is still growing, but the numbers are insignificant in terms of everyday business when looking at the big picture," Stone says. "High-end items used to be big, but discretionary spending is down. Ten years ago, we could put up a fancy pack and people were willing to pay for it. Now, it's more back to basics. There is less demand for the more extravagant products."

The federal initiative touting healthier products in schools also has had a positive effect on Detroit's produce wholesalers. "If we can educate and inform people about what it means to eat healthier, it can make a difference," Rocky Produce's Russo says.

Detroit wholesalers are still contending with competition in this tough economy,

which has impacted profit margins. "The competition is stiff, but it makes us all better," Russo says. "Our customers have become more creative and demanding. As a result, our profit margins aren't easy to come by. But as long as we can keep repositioning ourselves for new opportunities, we can handle the changes."

Companies like Rocky Produce rely heavily on relationships with buyers, shippers and growers, especially in more challenging times. "These are generic, but

fundamental things," Russo says. "It takes a tough economy to recognize that."

Retailers And Restaurants

With Detroit's inner city population dwindling significantly over the years and the public transportation system lacking, foodservice and retail businesses have struggled. Lately, however, those doing business in the city have reported growing opportunity. "Between 2007 and 2008 was rough for restaurants, but now these busi-

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nesses are busy again,” Ben B. Schwartz’s Stone says.

Casual comfort food, in particular, is on the rise, with a growing number of bars and grills, barbecue and Mexican restaurants. “Although a small segment of these are upscale restaurants, there are more high-end eateries opening up in the city, as well,” Russo says. “These places offer reasonably-priced food and creative menus.”

Like the foodservice segment, the

limited number of residents within the city has impacted the retail climate. “The big question people ask is whether there are enough grocery stores in the inner city, but the real question is whether or not there are enough people to support these establishments,” Stone says. “It can be a losing proposition for big chains that have a social commitment. I don’t see the amount of support for the type of stores that other communities can back.”

This has led to an influx of independent

supermarkets in the city, many that cater to specific demographics. “Detroit’s independent stores are cutting edge,” Russo says. “They have a positive impact on the terminal market, as well.”

Detroit’s Gigante Prince Valley Supermercado, a single-store retailer, has one of the higher volumes in the city and has been in business for 37 years. The store caters to the Hispanic marketplace. The operation includes a tortilla factory and bakery. Produce is the focus of Gigante due to its demographics and comprises 10 percent of sales. Popular Hispanic produce items include Roma tomatoes, avocados, jalapenos, habeneros, fresh poblanos, nopales (cactus leaves) and Spanish onions, including large red and white.

Still, because healthier eating is typically not a priority for its customers, produce is more difficult to sell. What has had a positive effect on business is the state welfare system’s new program that offers shoppers better deals when they shop at independent retailers. “There has been a rejuvenation, with most vacant buildings having been torn down,” says Joe Gappy, manager of Gigante Prince Valley. “There are more independent markets here because most chains cannot survive in the inner city due to pilferage. We can keep a better eye on it.”

E&L Supermercado, a Detroit-based single store retailer, is another independent retailer in the city positioned to serve the area’s Hispanic population. The store opened in the 1940s and is family-run by the third generation of the founders. In the past, these stores had sales fluctuations that increased as much as 30 percent in the summer due to seasonal workers, but these have leveled off recently. “We don’t see the fluctuations in sales from winter to summer, because we don’t have the seasonal customers that we used to,” says manager Brian Dubrinsky, who attributes this to the economy in Detroit. “Many Hispanics work in landscaping, construction and agriculture, which are all summer vocations, so these workers would move out of the area in the winter.”

This year, the drought resulted in no work for apple picking, and construction and landscaping opportunities were few and far between. “These changes meant the seasonal Hispanics were not here,” Dubrinsky says. “It makes it easier in some respects, because without fluctuations, we can regulate a little better. It was a hard adjustment to make, and now we don’t

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have to make it.”

E&L Supermercado constantly revamps its offerings based on consumers’ changing preferences. “Sometimes we will see sales driven by a food show, or if consumers see a recipe or someone using a particular item on television, they will ask for it,” Dubrinsky says.

As part of the city’s program that promotes healthful eating in schools, children are regularly taken on tours through E&L’s produce department and store. “People will point out the choices children should be making,” Dubrinsky says. “The programs in schools that promote healthier eating have had a positive impact on our produce sales overall. Kids are given vouchers to buy items. They learn how to pick out fresh fruits and vegetables and what they can get for their money.”

Dearborn, MI-based Westborn Market, an upscale gourmet store that has three Detroit-area locations, opened almost 50 years ago as a corner fruit stand. With a focus on produce, the store also offers hot foods, meats, deli items, fish, baked goods, dairy products and grocery items. “Independents are huge in Detroit compared with other parts of the country,” confirms Jim Moran, Westborn Market’s produce buyer. “When independents started in this region, they were very quality-oriented, and customers gravitated toward beautiful things that taste great. We were initially able to focus on one aspect, that being fruits and vegetables. Now we have a full line of offerings.”

At press time, soft fruit was in full season at the store, including cherries, peaches, nectarines and plums. During fall, the store brings in more local items like tomatoes, cucumbers and green peppers. “Unfortunately, this year’s drought hurt Michigan blueberries, and we were never able to get the same quality as last year,” Moran says. “The price was slightly higher than last year. There also weren’t Michigan peaches, and we won’t have any Michigan apples. For some orchards, this is a first in three generations.”

Still, Moran notes that Michigan grape tomatoes have rebounded, even though these are in short supply. Southern peaches were prevalent from Georgia and the Carolinas. The market will look to New York for apples this year. “Weather always is the biggest challenge,” Moran says. “Items like corn came early, and other items were stunted or came late due to the weather issues this year.”

Like Westborn Market, University Foods, a single-unti Detroit retailer, purchases a large amount of Michigan produce to help support the local farmers and economy. The store recently remodeled its produce department, installing new shelving and revamping its water system. “We had to move our vegetables, because our water system broke down,” says Sam Marrogy, produce manager. “We now have a new round shelf.”

University Foods’ produce is sold in bulk, not wrapped. Bulk greens were

moved to a new area with the remodel. The organic section was incorporated with conventional produce and, as a result, sales for organics have doubled. “Our customers are seeking healthier produce,” Marrogy says. “Fresh beets and leeks are now selling well.”

The produce industry continues to thrive in Detroit. Evidence of this is Rocky Produce’s new sales and accounting offices, and Ben B. Schwartz larger remodeled office space. **pb**

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Make The Most Of Demographic Opportunities For Organic Growth

The organic category continues to grow in more than pocket niches around the country. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



PHOTO COURTESY OF KINGS FOOD MARKETS INC.

Kings Food Markets carries every apple variety in a one-to-one ratio of organic and conventional.

In an economic environment proving difficult for many retailers, Whole Foods Markets, the Austin, TX-based retailer of natural and organic foods, increased its sales by 13 percent to \$8.8 billion for the 40-week period ending July 1, 2012. If you think this says something about consumer demand for organic food, you're right.

Organic food sales are booming, contrary to the belief that consumers may leave higher-priced products on the shelf when pocketbooks are slimmer. To put it in dollar figures, the organic food and beverage sector grew by 9.4 percent to \$29.2 billion, according to the Organic Trade Association's (OTA's) *2012 Organic Industry Survey*, with the fruit and vegetable category contributing close to 50 percent of these new dollars. Industry experts predict that organic food sales will continue to grow at a rate of 9 percent or higher through 2013.

A hunger for healthful foods is one factor driving organic demand. In addition, Andy Martin, president of A&A Organic Marketing Inc., in Watsonville, CA, remarks, "Prices are now competitive; quality is excellent; media coverage is broad and the consumers know about it."

Greg Holzman, founder/owner of San

Francisco, CA-based Pacific Organic Produce Inc., adds, "The success of alternative formats like Whole Foods has increased the popularity of organic and forced conventional retailers such as Wal-Mart and Safeway to add organics in an effort not to lose customers."

At retail, and not including booming alternative format retailers such as Whole Foods Markets, Earth Fare and Sprouts, organic fruits and vegetables accounted for a nationwide average of 5.7 percent of total produce department sales in the 52 weeks ending June 30, 2012, according to the Nielsen Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based fresh food-consulting firm. Yet in some regions of the country, conventional and small independent retailers are successfully selling four or more times this percentage. It's not just on the coasts, known to be long time bastions of organic food sales. Several other regions of the country are poised to become future population centers for organics. Retailers need only recognize and capitalize on this and merchandise astutely to see their organic produce sales soar.

Where The Opportunities Lie

The West Coast, in general, is a highly developed market for organics. The Pacific

Northwest, especially Seattle, was a grass roots leader in the organic movement, and has been generating powerful organic sales for the past 10 to 15 years. Nearly 200 miles south of Seattle in Portland, OR, the 9-store chain New Seasons Market offers customers 75 to 80 percent of its produce as organic, according to Jeff Fairchild, director of produce. "Our shoppers are parents with young children who are concerned with health," he details. "The Northwest is also dominated by foodies who seek out organic for its flavor and quality, whether they are grocery shopping, buying at the farmer's market or eating at a white tablecloth restaurant. People here probably also buy more because it's available. In season, there are over 30 farmer's markets in Portland with 20 to 25 percent of organic product."

Lara Grossman, the Monterey, CA-based sales and marketing manager for FoodSource, a C.H. Robinson Company, says, "Colorado and the Rocky Mountain states are also strong organic markets due to consumer interest in the environment and sustainability. Phoenix and all of Arizona is exploding, as evidenced by organic retailers such as Sprouts Farmers Markets opening up more stores there."

"Second to the West Coast as an organic stronghold is the East Coast," says Addie

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Pobst, import coordinator and food safety officer for CF Fresh Inc., in Sedro Woolley, WA. “There’s a mainstream acceptance for organics in the Northeast. Most of the region’s major retailers carry organics.”

Underscoring this, dollar sales of organic vegetables at retail are highest in the Northeast at 28.2 percent, according to an August, 2012 report, *Vegetable Review (Focus on Organic Vegetables)*, prepared by Bakersfield, CA-based Grimmway Farms with 52-week data ending July 15, 2012 by FreshLook Marketing.

Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral at Kings Food Markets, a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, where 16 percent of produce sales is organic, remarks, “Originally, the main customers were young couples who wanted to eat healthfully. Now, the biggest trend is customers with children. Our customers are highly educated and are knowledgeable about food trends.”

“Beyond the bi-coastal organic bastion, the opening of organic retailers in the Midwest is poised to change this previously untapped market and help organic sales grow,” predicts Grossman. Whole Foods Markets is moving into this region. The chain broke ground on a new location in downtown Detroit in May, and recently opened stores in West Des Moines, IA, and Wichita, KS.

Interestingly, dollar sales of organic vegetables at retail are 14.2 percent in the Great Lakes region, the second highest in the nation after the Northeast, according to the *Vegetable Review* report by Grimmway Farms. What’s more, organic vegetable sales in the Great Lakes grew 9.1 percent over the 52

Top 10 Organic Fruits
Total United States
52 weeks ending 6/30/12

FRUIT	DOLLARS/STORE/ WEEK
Berries	\$316.17
Apples	\$201.08
Bananas	\$100.71
Citrus	\$70.67
Grapes	\$53.48
Avocados	\$26.11
Pears	\$22.86
Stone Fruits	\$21.98
Specialty Fruits	\$19.40
Cherries	\$8.81

Source: Nielsen Perishables Group

weeks ending July 15, 2012, while sales growth in the Northeast was only 5 percent. Bob Scaman, president of Goodness Greeness, in Chicago, IL, explains, “What we are seeing is several new independent retailers in the Chicago area are building a competitive niche for themselves against the low-cost leaders by working the perimeters of their stores and focusing more on organics in produce. We’re seeing this trend filter out from Chicago, Detroit and Milwaukee to more rural communities in southern Indiana and Iowa, locations where there are also established organic farmers.”

Sendik’s Food Markets, a Milwaukee, WI-

based chain that has grown from one to 10 stores over the past decade, is a prime example of a retailer that has always had a focus on its perishables, especially produce. Sean Reynolds, director of produce, says, “The demand for organics has grown over the years and represents a significant focus for us as an organization. We have a very diverse customer base and by offering organics in the community, this allows us to provide for all of our customers’ needs. As the demand for organics grows, so does our volume needs; we are constantly searching for the best organic growers both locally and globally.”

According to FoodSource’s Grossman, one of the newest frontiers for organics is in the Southeast and South Central states. “We’re seeing more interest by retailers in cities such as Atlanta, Miami and Dallas,” she details.

Craig Hope, chief customer officer for Earthbound Farm, headquartered in San Juan Bautista, CA, agrees, “We have some conventional retailers in North Carolina that are averaging 25 to 30 percent of their packaged salad sales as organic.” Substantiating this trend, dollar sales of organic vegetables increased 12.4 percent in the South Central region during the 52 weeks ending July 15, 2012, the second highest growth rate in the nation after the West at 13.3 percent, according to the *Vegetable Review* report.

“With the opening of retailer stores such as Earth Fare and Fresh Market, Florida is the next target,” remarks Pacific Organic Produce’s Holzman. “There’s good opportunity and consumers are receptive to organic product.”

Mitch Blumenthal, president and CEO of



“When organic first started it was two to three times the price of conventional. Now, there’s more supply and a more reasonable cost. We will often substitute and carry organic in place of conventional if the price is close. This is one way we’ve grown our percent sales of organic.”

— Paul Kneeland, Kings Super Markets Inc.

Sarasota, FL-based Global Organic/Specialty Source Inc., which sells primarily to the southeastern U.S. market, says, “The presence of colleges and universities can influence demand in some areas. Of course, many of these schools are located in highly populated city centers, where, obviously, you will see more sales. As one might imagine, we send a lot more trucks to the Miami area than we do right now to Birmingham, Alabama.”

Make The Most Of Merchandising

Take a cue from what retailers in successful organic regions are doing to grow sales. First, identify the customer. There are two markets for organic produce, according to Robert Schueller, public relations director for Los Angeles, CA-

based Melissa’s World Variety Produce Inc. “First, is the long-time organic customer who cares strongly about the environment,” he lists. “Second, is the newer customer who perceives organics as healthier. The health-oriented consumer is the core customer and where the real growth area is today.”


Scott Mabs, director of sales and marketing for Homegrown Organic Farms, located in Porterville, CA, says, “Retailers who look at organics not as a specialty, but as a healthful option at a reasonable price, see growth across the board.”

Secondly, have a strategy and merchandise well in order to sell. Todd Linsky, vice president of organic sales at Grimmway Farms, points out, “There are the ‘have-to’ retailers



who throw a few organics on a shelf in the corner, and the ‘want-to’ retailers who really invest time and effort and realize that they can really make money with organics. Obviously, the latter group is more successful.”

Don’t forget the merchandising basics, provided in four succinct points below. Hope of Earthbound Farm emphasizes, “Carry the right products; give them good placement in



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a highly visible area; price them right; and understand the customer.”

1. Stock Enough Variety And Volume

Mainstream retailers have really picked up on organic. CF Fresh’s Pobst reports, “Instead of 12 items or less, they are now carrying a large variety of several dozen or more items, and there is more parity in the conventional and organic mix.”

New Seasons Market offers its customers a wide selection of organic fruits and vegetables. Fairchild specifies, “Mainstream retailers usually target the ‘dirty dozen’ and root vegetables and stock these in organic. We tend to offer just about everything organic.”

Similarly, just about any produce item is available in organic at Kings. Kneeland details, “We’ll carry every berry and every apple variety one-to-one in organic and conventional, for example. After that, we’ll carry several varieties in lead categories like tomatoes, carrots and citrus. Even organic tropical like mangos, pineapple and bananas are popular.”

Sendik’s, too, has increased its volume and variety of organic offerings over the years. Reynolds notes, “We carry a large selection of

**Top 10 Organic Vegetables
Total United States
52 weeks ending 6/30/12**

FRUIT	DOLLARS/STORE/ WEEK
Packaged Salad	\$531.49
Carrots	\$170.14
Lettuce	\$156.44
Tomatoes	\$116.46
Onions	\$84.13
Cooking Vegetables	\$63.10
Cooking Greens	\$58.22
Potatoes	\$55.91
Celery	\$55.03
Value-Added Vegetables	\$34.79

Source: Nielsen Perishables Group

organic leaf lettuces, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, squash, red peppers, lemons, limes, apples, pears, grapes, berries and more.”

Organic vegetables represent 4.6 percent of total vegetable sales for the 52 weeks ending July 15, 2012, according to the *Vegetable Review*. Of this, the Top 10 organic vegetable categories accounted for 80 percent of total organic vegetable dollars. Carrots

rank No. 1, contributing 21.8 percent dollar share, followed by lettuce at 14.8 percent, and tomatoes at 12.5 percent. Vegetables with the largest dollar sales gains over the past year included kale at 92.9 percent, beets at 32.8 percent, and beans at 32.5 percent.

Many retailers have developed their in-store organic program to reach a critical mass. David Posner, president and CEO of Awe Sum Organics, a Capitola, CA-based details, “They have gone from box to pallet quantities, which means there is enough movement and turns to assure freshness.”

Value-added will play a larger role in organic in the future, says Randy Bache, CEO of Skyline Potato Co. LLC, in Center, CO. “I think we’ll see an organic version of potatoes in a steamer bag in the future,” he predicts. “If you give people ideas how to prepare a product, they will try it.”

2. Integrated Versus Segregated Displays

The jury is still out on what is the best way to display organic produce: segregated into a separate organic section or integrated with conventional produce. Grimmway’s Linsky confesses, “I’ve always been a big proponent of integrated. It gives customers a choice.

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However, today, we're seeing fancier segregated sets such as at Kroger stores in Southern California with more variety and promotion."

The question of integrated versus segregated depends on the retail customer. Earthbound Farm's Hope explains, "If you've got a group of shoppers who know and exclusively buy organic, then a segregated spot offers them the convenience of going to that exact area where they can find what they want. For the vast majority, however, an integrated set can produce higher sales of organics. It presents choices in front of consumers at once and doesn't force them search out the organic section."

Kings' Kneeland says, "In my career, I've tried it 15 different ways and found that integrated is the best way to get the cross-over or on-the-fence customer."

Similarly, Fairchild at New Season's Market also builds integrated displays that are segregated. "Since we predominantly offer organic, we'll, for example, display conventional red peppers with plastic dividers to prevent co-mingling on the shelf below the organic. This way, product isn't separated, it's segregated and signed within the produce category. Green signs mean organic and blue is conventional."

"We utilize both integrated and segregated sets at Sendik's," tells Reynolds. "Depending on the store, and in turn, the marketing area, we will segregate and integrate our organic offerings, making sure to follow good organic retailing practices. We have found that by offering both types of sets, we can provide our customers with the best selection and options possible."

Pacific Organic's Holzman adds, "You can have effective segregated displays like Safeway and equally effective integrated displays like at Whole Foods. The key is to make a commitment and do it well."

3. Price & Promotion

Price is no longer the barrier it once was to organic trial. Kneeland explains, "When organic first started it was two to three times the price of conventional. Now, there's more supply and a more reasonable cost. We will often substitute and carry organic in place of conventional if the price is close. This is one way we've grown our percent sales of organic."

The organic versus conventional price gap was highest at 41 percent in both the West and South Central regions for the 52 weeks ending July 15, 2012, according to the *Vegetable Review*. This gap was lowest in the Southeast at 13 percent, followed by 33 percent in the

Northeast, and 36 percent in the Midsouth.

"To grow organic sales," Homegrown's Mabs recommends, "treat organic and conventional with similar margins and number of ads."

Sendik's Reynold's says, "Not only do we provide a wide selection of organic offerings in our stores, but we also provide our community with several organic ad items each week as well."

Kneeland also advertises two to three organic fruits and vegetables weekly at Kings.

"When on ad," he says, "we'll match the conventional in price. This pricing strategy is another way we've grown organic sales."

At first, promotional prices build demand, agrees Holzman. "Then, as demand builds, you can get the higher prices needed for organic," he says.

4. Value Of Education

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“You can have effective segregated displays like Safeway and equally effective integrated displays like at Whole Foods. The key is to make a commitment and do it well.”

— Greg Holzman, Pacific Organic Produce

sales. “Organics are no longer for the elite or wealthy or a particular class of consumers, says Samantha Cabaluna, director of communications for Earthbound Farm. “There is an educational element. For example, we see organics sell well in retailers near college campuses.”

Grimmway’s Linsky agrees. “Consumers make a conscious decision to get into the category and want to engage with the products they buy,” he says. “Retailers need to recognize that they have a relatively captive audience with the organic consumer and that this customer is hungry for information. That’s why we’ve developed a strong website and added QR codes on our packaging.”

Suppliers do provide several tools to help retailers educate their shoppers on organics. Mabs details, “We offer 7x11-inch cards that list the benefits of organic. We also have display bins for citrus and stonefruit that highlight the fruit as organic and explain what organic means.”

CF Fresh posts produce and grower profiles on its website for retailers who want to educate their customers about organic products and where their produce comes from, whether domestically or internationally.

Finally, in a show of how eager consumer are for education, Earthbound Farm’s *Take an Organic Step Forward* program, which was launched April 16th via a POS and on-pack promotion, signed up over 80,000 users by mid-August, way more than the 50,000 the company hoped to reach by the end of 2012. The program, which is designed for people who want to learn about organics, but don’t have a lot of time, sends an e-mail a day with recipes and other information to interested customers. In addition, program customers receive a coupon a week for organic produce. Cabaluna says, “There are not that many coupons out there for organics and these coupons can make organic products cost-accessible and encourage trial. In fact, coupon redemption is as high as 27 percent.” **pb**

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Halves Or Pieces, Pecans Sell Well In Produce

With dedicated merchandising efforts and a bit of consumer education, paying attention to pecans can go a long way toward boosting sales. **PAULA HENDRICKSON**



Pecan halves — shown as part of a larger nut display — are thought to be the smartest and most versatile merchandising option.

As tree nuts, pecans grow on trees just like apples, cherries, peaches and oranges. Pecans pack plenty of nutritional power, just like the fruits and vegetables sold in produce. The similarities don't end there. "There are so many varieties of pecans," says Putt Wetherbee, vice president of sales and marketing for Schermer Pecans, in Glennville, GA, and board member of the Tifton-based Georgia Pecan Growers Association. "Pecan flavor tones are as variable as those of apples," he adds.

Place Pecans In Produce

Recent studies indicate pecans have more antioxidants than other tree nuts, and the American Heart Association just gave pecans their official Heart Check-mark certification, further bolstering growers' argument that pecans should be sold alongside other fresh produce. Even before science proved the nutritional power of pecans, smart retailers knew they belonged in the produce department. Yet some retailers still stock pecans only in the baking aisle.

Brandon Harrell, sales manager at

Camilla, GA-based Harrell Nut Co., says there are three basic reasons pecans sell well alongside fruits and vegetables: 1) consumers desire freshness; 2) the produce department is for healthier food options, while baking aisles are associated with sweets; and 3) positioning pecans in produce reminds consumers of their healthfulness and freshness. "We've been awarded the Heart Healthy label approval from the American Heart Association, and antioxidant studies are coming out that show neurological benefits from pecans," he specifies. "There's a vast array of health benefits that are becoming more prevalent now, and that's one of the key things for our industry. It goes back to why it's important that we're in the produce department and not just in the baking aisle."

The hurdle, according to Wetherbee, is that "Pecans need to make the leap from 'ingredient' to 'healthy snack.'"

An interesting thing happens when pecans are moved from baking aisles to produce departments, according to Paul Joseph, vice president of sales for South Georgia Pecan Co., headquartered in Valdosta GA. "The perishable nature of those products demand

attention from the store staff, which helps with the merchandising of the product," he points out. In other words, produce workers pay closer attention to turnover than their counterparts do with center-store products.

While some grocery chains have yet to discover the benefits of stocking pecans with produce, others figured it out a long time ago. "During my 27 years in produce, we have always merchandised pecans in the produce department," reports Kevin Hurley, manager of produce merchandising at the 104-unit Tampa, FL-based Sweetbay Supermarket. "Pecans displayed in fast traffic areas are where customers make purchases out of impulse." He notes that shoppers are more likely to hit the baking aisle for pecans when buying specific ingredients for a recipe, but are more apt to buy pecans on impulse in the produce department.

"Pecan halves and pieces are stocked in the baking aisle as well," Hurley adds. "Most items sell extremely well when tied into the produce department, as they have a much 'fresher' perception."

Growers believe the new Heart Healthy designation and the AntioxiNUT campaign

have changed how pecans are perceived. “This has enlightened retailers and provided the proof that pecans do belong in the produce department,” says Tammy Merritt, who with her husband, Richard, co-owns Merritt Pecan Co., in Weston GA. “Richard has always encouraged our buyers who sell shelled or in-shell product to move them to the produce department for several reasons: better storage, more visibility and increased sales due to more traffic in the produce aisle as opposed to the baking aisle.”

Halves vs. Wholes; Bagged vs. Bulk

In-shell pecans are more likely to be displayed in your local produce departments during the holidays, and while they make eye-catching displays, the fact is consumers prefer the convenience of shelled nuts. “Bagged, shelled pecans present very well,” says Harrell of Harrell Nut Co. “You have a lot less shrinkage, too, because you can properly track the links of how long it’s been in the bin since it’s a unit, as opposed to a bulk item. Plus, there is less waste because it’s packaged and protected. With bulk bins, products get broken, cracked and dropped on the floor.”



“In the past, Sweetbay has carried bulk pecans, but moved to carrying bags in recent years because of the high cost of pecans compared to other in-shell nuts,” Hurley says. “Bagged pecans offer a cleaner display and lessen the chance of misidentification at the register.”

In-shell pecans are protected by their shells, but some consumers — and some retailers — don’t realize shelled nuts are perishable and can be damaged. “Of course they’re not as perishable as your thin-skinned fruits; they don’t bruise and damage like a tomato would,” says J.W. Christiansen, long-time grower and

DRIED FRUITS AND NUTS

consultant with Albany, GA-based Nut Tree Pecan Co., and board member of the Georgia Pecan Commodity Commission, located in Atlanta. “Pecans won’t bruise, but once they’re in a package they need to be kept cool. That’s the main thing to keep them fresh.”

Harrell says pecan halves are better sellers than pecan pieces, but sees potential for pieces, too. “As an industry, we feel the pieces could be a much bigger seller because of the price difference. Pieces are generally less expensive than the halves.”

Christiansen thinks it could bring more stability to the market. “The halves are most merchandisable because you can make chopped out of halves, but you can’t make halves out of chopped,” he points out. “That makes halves more merchandisable.”

Merchandising, Promoting And Pricing Move Pecans

“Sweetbay promotes pecans by building large displays of holiday nuts — bagged in-shell nuts and trays of nut meats — utilizing in-store signage and weekly circulars,” Hurley says.

“Pecans displayed in fast traffic areas are where customers make purchases out of impulse.”

— Kevin Hurley, Sweetbay Supermarket

Growers agree that pecans deserve eye-catching displays and a little extra promotion at other times of the year, too. “Merchandising pecans is just as important as pricing is for boosting sales,” says Richard Merritt of Merritt Pecan Co. “When consumers see a prominent display of fresh pecans, they are more likely to buy pecans on impulse, compared to viewing a small bag of pecans placed on the shelf in the baking aisle.” He also notes that displaying pecans in a dump bin for long periods is a bad idea, since it doesn’t help maintain freshness.

While most pecans are bagged, Merritt says pecans are packaged in clear, airtight, water-proof and tamper-evident acetate containers that Tammy Merritt says offer an advantage beyond safety. “They also make a nice presentation and allow the customer to clearly see the product,” she says.

Joseph of South Georgia Pecan says pecans that aren’t readily visible are harder to sell,

especially in larger mega-marts. “It’s easy for pecans to get lost without good displays and merchandising,” he notes. “They need to be stacked so the consumer can see the nuts. When

you have to search the department to find six bags of pecans stuck in a shelf under the walnuts, you do not have confidence in the freshness of the product.”

Nearly 15 years ago, after listening to retailer complaints about their old bags accidentally tearing open and causing shrinkage and waste, Harrell Nut worked with its film manufacturer to develop stronger bags. Then a retailer said they had problems transferring the bags to shelves. “We worked very closely with this retailer’s produce buyer and developed a one-touch box,” Harrell says. “It was ready for display shelves, or you could simply pull the top off the box and it’s ready to go.” The retailer still uses it today.

Christiansen with Nut Tree Pecan would like to see an industry-wide effort to educate consumers while they’re in the store. “We might want to look at having some POP literature available for the stores to have in their produce department to pass on to the



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but 16-oz. packs in grocery stores, but now retailers are going for 12- and 8-oz. packs. It gives a similar price point, but the end-consumer is paying less at the cash register, which keeps pecans as a profitable item for the store. But at the same time, consumers are more willing to pay for a \$5 bag as opposed to an \$8 bag.”

South Georgia Pecan Company’s Joseph says merchandising pecans makes a huge difference to the bottom line. “Pecans have a lot of competition from lower-priced nuts that can be used in many of the same recipes,” Joseph says. “If pecans are not merchandised well and if they do not appear fresh, many people will choose a less expensive alternative.”

Because the pecan industry is smaller than those of competing nuts, it has a much smaller marketing budget. Harrell says that means the competition gets more prominent displays, too. “Not because they’re any better, but because they have more money to spend,” he says. “Despite the limited budgets, we’re working together to promote what we have and get the awareness out there that we’re good, too. Those efforts aren’t just on the grocery or retail side, but as an industry as a whole, and have really helped boost our sales.”

pb

consumer — information on how to store pecans to keep them fresh; how long they’ll be good in a refrigerator; something about the nutritional value, and maybe a couple of key recipes on the same brochure. On a fairly small piece of literature you can pass a lot of information on to consumers.” He adds the Georgia Pecan Commodity Commission

already has worked on some POP literature, but he’d like to see more.

Offering different sized packages would give consumers more price points to choose from, which Harrell thinks will help move more product. “Going forward, I see more and more retailers going to smaller pack sizes,” he says. “Years ago, there was nothing

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BACK TO BASICS



As we move from summer into fall and schools are back in session, our interest turns to football, soccer, and other fall sports. The teams having early success are the ones that put in the extra efforts during training camps in the summer. These activities centered on conditioning and the basics of the game, from blocking and tackling in football to dribbling and passing on the soccer field.

The focus on these fundamentals is the building blocks of success in these and all sports. Just as in the sports world, in produce, we also have basics — the form and foundation for everything we do in the retail store to be successful.

In our world of cost control, we sometimes lose sight of the importance of instilling these basic skills in our produce personnel. Many times, when presenting a training program for management, I would receive a blank stare as there was no recognized way to justify the cost of the training. No matter how hard or how passionately I argued the point, nothing seemed to get through. Once again, it was another case of “They just don’t get it!” This type of perception seems to permeate the entire produce world as well as it does in the business world. With the present emphasis on cost control in retail, many things are sacrificed for the sake of the bottom line, including training personnel in the basics of produce operations.

The truth of the matter is that the teaching of these basic skills is the foundation of a smoothly operating and profitable produce department. The key teachings on product care, rotation and culling, temperature control, trimming and crisping, proper storage, and basic merchandising can make the difference between an average or sub-par produce operation and a good one that offers customers excellent choices of fresh and appealing produce. Produce management, of course, “gets” it, as to the vital importance of such training. However, the present environment with management only views this activity as a cost with no appreciable return. Having faced this challenge numerous times, it is difficult, but not impossible, to change management’s view of the value of this training. It simply requires logical thinking and a presentation of the benefits that can be derived from

well-trained produce personnel.

The major benefit of teaching and learning these basic skills can be summarized as protecting the product. Since our fruits and vegetables are living, breathing organisms, once they are picked, they begin to die. The basic skills described above are strategies to combat the degradation of the product and prolong its salable life. Each one has individual benefits that replenish, protect, or enhance the salability of the product. Each of these skills makes it possible to increase sales and lower shrink. These are two measures that management understands. If the connection can be made between the training benefits of these skills and the increase in sales and the control of shrink, a strong case can be made for the necessity of basic skills training.

Making this case is very important, as recent observations at retailers across the country illustrate a lack of these skills. Worse than

that, it shows an ignorance of the skills in many occasions where the produce personnel just don’t know what to do. This results in produce departments that have variable quality and a jumbled, disorganized presentation. While this is not to say that basic training is the cure-all for this situation, it is to point out that the investment in this training would allow for immediate improvement in the presentation, operation, and profitability of the produce department. This would establish those key building blocks that allow for

good produce operations. It is a fact that the most successful produce operations in the United States invest heavily in training their employees to master these basic skills.

In our efforts to please management’s expectations of controlling the cost of running the produce department, we must not lose sight of the responsibility that we have as produce management to train our employees so they can have the tools to be successful. In spite of the pressure to keep costs down, we must utilize the beneficial factors gained from training to motivate upper management to make the investment for the betterment of the employees and the total operation. The worst thing we can do is to throw up our hands and say, “Management just doesn’t get it,” when we meet with resistance to our proposals. For if we do, we will pay the price in terms of declining product quality, salability, and presentation of the department, which will have negative effects upon sales, shrink, and ultimately, profitability.

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In our efforts to please management’s expectations of controlling the cost of running the produce department, we must not lose sight of the responsibility that we have as produce management to train our employees so they can have the tools to be successful.

By Don Harris

Don Harris is a 38-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com

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EUROPEAN ECONOMIC CRISIS TRANSFORMS SHOPPING BEHAVIOR



The economic crisis in Western Europe has reached the shelves in supermarkets. As consumer wallets grow thinner, growers and retailers are increasingly offering smaller package sizes and simpler products to help reduce consumers' weekly spend.

Europe Sees Emerging Market Strategies Appear On Its Shores

After years of declining and stagnating revenues in Western Europe, consumer goods manufacturer Unilever is following strategies it originally applied in developing markets in Asia. "Poverty is returning to Europe," Jan Zijderverld, Unilever's top European manager, recently told *Financial Times Deutschland*. "If a Spaniard only spends EUR17 (USD21) per shopping visit, you cannot sell him washing powder for half of his budget," he added. As a result, Unilever has begun offering smaller, less expensive, packages, so as to limit the strain on shoppers' increasingly limited budgets, while it is increasingly committed to invest overseas.

Leaner Times Ahead

Unilever's change of strategy in Europe seems to make sense. According to a recent report from the European Commission, there was a sharp rise in the numbers of households experiencing financial distress across the EU during early 2012. These households struggle to meet their everyday living requirements and are either running into debt or drawing on savings. The pressure on the consumer budget might not come as such a surprise given the austerity measures implemented in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy, as well as their persistently high unemployment rates. As a result, growers and retailers need to revise their strategies to meet demand and achieve growth.

Change Of Shopping Habits In Western Europe

Shopper behavior has changed, too. Sainsbury's, a UK grocery retailer, found that customers are visiting more often, but buying less than before. The picture in France is similar. Bruno Witvoet, president of Unilever France, said: "The value of the average shopping basket tends to decrease, while the frequency of purchases tends to increase."

While consumers, are demanding more affordable products, they also tend to increasingly plan their shopping prior to visiting a store, a trend often referred to as the "professionalisation of shopping." In the UK for instance, consumers have largely scaled back purchases on organic products, fruits and vegetables since 2008. While the purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables have declined overall, some retailers like Waitrose, however, have bucked the general trend by capturing families who have traded down from eating out.

Smaller Portions And More Emphasis Of Origin

Until recently, grocers and retailers mainly tried to achieve growth

in Western Europe through larger package sizes and also ecological products. However, the dire economic situation and negative growth forecasts are increasingly encouraging them to find alternate ways for growth. In Europe, branded suppliers are seeking to offer entry-level products with smaller quantities, less ingredients or simpler packaging.

Retailers are also seeking to invest in their private label brands, which are rapidly increasing sales. In some countries, retailers are emphasizing their commitment to specific markets by stressing the localized origin of products and suppliers.

Clash With Private Label Brands

While smaller package sizes and entry-level prices would meet consumers' demand for more affordable products, this would also place groceries in direct competition with retailers' private label brands. In Portugal and other crisis-torn markets, the economic downturn has made price a crucial factor in the customers' shopping decisions. This, together with the fact that shoppers are increasingly seeing private label products as delivering good value for money, is fueling sales growth. Retailers themselves are also becoming more innovative to cater for the more cash-challenged budget. In France, Aldi Süd is offering capsicum in mini portions. Spanish grocer, Mercadona, has reintroduced loose packaging for fruit to reduce handling and packaging costs. Inevitably, we will see both private label and branded consumer goods adapted to shopper needs even more in the future.

New Breadth Of Assortment To Meet Consumer Needs

The impact of retailers' and suppliers' initiatives on consumer behavior is backed by Aimia, a global provider of loyalty solutions, which conducted an analysis across a range of product categories at a number of retailers it works with. David Hamilton, Analytics Solution Director for Aimia, said: "We've seen that retailers and manufacturers are providing a new breadth of assortment and promotions to provide their customers with more choice suited to their needs. Retailers who have a better understanding of their customer segments through data analysis are providing more suitable product choices, which are helping customers through the recession, whether that's in buying larger pack formats for better value or helping customers reduce their consumption and product waste by providing smaller pack sizes."

Adjusted package sizes and more basic products, however, will also be increasingly demanded in countries less affected by the Euro-crisis. In many European countries, such as Germany, there are more and more single or two-person households, following decades of falling birth rates and the spread of more individualistic lifestyles. These consumers demand more suitable product quantities, especially in essential categories such as bread and vegetables, for their consumption needs (a factor that has also been behind the recent pressures on the hypermarket format in Western Europe). As such, there remains plenty of scope for both brands and private label manufacturers to achieve growth by launching more tailored products to their customers.

pb

By Niklas Reinecke

Niklas Reinecke is an associate analyst at Planet Retail, in London, England.

EARTH-SAFE SOIL: INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITY, PLANET NECESSITY



I could babble on about ozone and mycorrhizal fungi for hours, but I am not a plant biologist and do not want to pretend to be one. So, here's the punch line: Our soil can save our planet and our lives. This has been a long time coming, but it's a rapidly growing movement and everybody wins. First, some basics: fertilizers contain salts that block natural organic elements; fertilizers are highly

dominant and allow a grower complete control by making the soil a neutral (inert) component. Essentially, the soil is dead other than a mass to absorb and retain nutrients. Organic farming uses sprays and fertilizers. There is no live food soil web. This yields consistent product as quickly and inexpensively as possible, or does it?

Rockey Farms [in Center, CO] recently received a national award for soil conservation. They do not spray their plants any longer. Their water retention is greater. They use cover crop and compost and natural predators to put nutrients back into the soil and keep it healthy. Their costs are down and their yields are up. They are not certified organic, but what they do is better. They take care of the soil and soil takes care of the plants. This soil is live and open.

Jeff Lowenfels and Wayne Lewis wrote a book called *Teaming with Microbes*, which covers living soil and the soil food web. It covers fungal and bacterial biomass and how to use compost, insect and green manure to create a live food web containing all the necessary ingredients for nutrient-dense crop. This soil is live and open.

Peter Byck produced a movie called *Carbon Nation* talking about the danger of greenhouse gasses. The film reviews alternatives including, water, wind, sun and soil. It refers to the compacting of our soil, its inability to hold any biomass and is basically dead soil holding nothing. The soil this film refers to is dead.

Stanford University just released a study reporting there is little nutritional difference between organic and conventional produce. While that may be true, it is the process of farming and the health of the soil that will determine nutrient density. That is what makes our produce its best, and supports clean air. The soil condition and the process that is used in farming are the questions we should be asking. What is the condition of the grower's soil?

So here's the thing: A lot of growers use these natural procedures for their crops and many do not. Organic farming allows sprays with

salts, and sustainable farming could be very compacted. Above the marketing of organic, sustainable, transitional or even local farming and the good crops they produce, there is a huge, huge fringe benefit. Good, open or live, healthy soil (call it what you like) has a significantly greater absorption of carbon wherever it comes from. Whether it comes from cover crop or cash crop, healthy soils reduce and retain greenhouse gasses in the air. Whether you believe in global warming or not does not matter. Healthy soil cleans the air we breathe, and there is no downside to that. So while good soil management improves crops and keeps the ground alive, we should let customers know when they are eating produce from open soils, they are actually helping save the planet. This is measurable.

There should be some form of certification for these Heirloom soil procedures and results quantifying the greater absorption and retention of carbon in soil. There are numerous other benefits of natural or Heirloom farming including reduced water usage, increased crop yield, more nutrient density and reduced growing costs. Not to mention that when consumers understand that eating soil-healthy foods helps save the planet they live on, they should significantly increase their consumption of produce. Good for us; good for

the human body; good for the ozone layer; good for the nematodes and water supply as well.

Instead of certifying the ambiguity of organic or understanding the meaning of sustainable, transitional or even local, let's come up with something consumers can understand and relate to. Earth-Safe Soil tells a story our industry can get behind. It can be organic, sustainable, green and local.

"Eat a potato, save the planet," or "Eat a carrot and breathe better," are not bad tag lines to start. If we get behind this as an industry — *wake up PMA and United* — it will quickly increase produce consumption in every market. Isn't that what produce marketing is all about? It will also drastically reduce greenhouse gasses affecting our environment. Is there a better message for our industry? No one company can do this; we need the voice and action of our industry as a whole and we will create change. That's big!

When Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado scheduled a visit to Rockey Farms to congratulate them for their soil conservation achievements, he also inquired about increased carbon retention in the soil. The government, the farms, the books and the movies are all starting to get this. This is happening, and if we join in, it's only win, win win.

pb

It is the process of farming and the health of the soil that will determine nutrient density. That is what makes our produce its best, and supports clean air. The soil condition and the process that is used in farming are the questions we should be asking.

By Richard Leibowitz

Richard Leibowitz is president of Culinary Specialty Produce Inc., in Mountainside, NJ



40 UNDER 40

NINTH ANNUAL

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PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Ninth 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, 1973).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by March 1, 2013, 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 _____
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 E-mail _____

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

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:

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

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Canadian Produce Marketing Assn.	68	613-226-4187	www.cpma.ca
Canadian Produce Marketing Assn.	78	613-226-4187	www.cpma.ca
Canon Potato Company, Inc.	68	719-754-3445	www.canonpotato.com
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	78	515-981-5111	www.capitalcityfruit.com
CarbAmericas	148	954-786-0000	www.carbamericas.com
Castle Rock Vineyards	88	661-721-8717	www.castlerockvineyards.com
Champ's Mushrooms	134	866-666-6666	www.champsmushrooms.ca
Chilean Fresh Fruit Assoc.	INSERT	916-927-1217	www.cffausa.org
Christopher Ranch	123	408-847-1100	www.christopheranch.com
Coast To Coast Produce Co.	42	877-836-6295	www.ctcproduce.com
Columbia Marketing International	129	509-663-1955	www.cmiapples.com
Community Suffolk, Inc.	48	617-389-5200	www.community-suffolk.com
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	136	610-268-3043	www.countryfreshmushrooms.com
The Cranberry Network LLC	59	715-422-0410	www.thecranberrynetwork.com
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Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	800-333-5454	www.salads.dole.com
dProduce Man Software	34	888-PRODMAN	www.dproduceman.com
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Joseph Fierman & Son, Inc.	43	718-893-1640	
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Florida Department of Agriculture	73	850-488-4303	www.freshfromflorida.com
The Florida Tomato Committee	76	407-894-3071	www.floridatomatoes.org
Fresh Origins, LLC	82	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com
Fresh Produce Association of The Americas	120	520-287-2707	www.freshfrommexico.com
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Hess Brothers Fruit Co.	89	717-656-2631	www.hessbros.com
Highline Mushrooms	134	519-326-8643	www.highlinemushrooms.com

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Idaho Potato Commission	29	208-334-2350	www.idahopotato.com/retail
Inline Plastics Corp.	55	800-826-5567	www.inlineplastics.com
International Hotel Motel & Rest.	157	800-272-SHOW	www.ihmrs.com
IPR Fresh	117	520-281-2351	www.iprfresh.com
J-C Distributing, Inc.	121	520-281-2967	
Jacobs, Malcolm & Burt, Inc.	149	415-285-0400	
Johnston Farms	90	661-366-3201	www.johnstonfarms.com
J.R. Kelly Company	83	888-344-4392	www.jrkelly.com
Kerian Machines, Inc.	66	701-352-0480	www.kerian.com
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	143	661-854-3156	www.kernridge.com
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	149	717-597-2112	www.keystonefruit.com
LarMar Foods/Garlic Expressions	123	419-874-2369	
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	114	800-796-2349	www.lgssales.com
Malena Produce, Inc.	116	520-281-1533	www.malenaproduce.com
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	13	800-884-6266	www.veggiesmadeeasy.com
Maxwell Chase Technologies, LLC	56	404-344-0796	www.maxwellchase.com
MIXTEC Group	34	626-440-7077	www.mixtec.net
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Produce for Better Health Foundation	155	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Produce Marketing Association	161	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
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Product Protector LLC	46	877-768-3287	www.productprotector.com/results
Progressive Marketing Group	149	323-890-8100	www.pmgstrategic.net
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	11	805-981-1839	www.redblossom.com
Rocky Produce	141	313-841-7780	www.rockyproduce.com
Rosemont Farms Corporation	149	877-877-8017	www.rosemontfarms.com
D.M. Rothman Company, Inc.	50	718-991-4920	
SAGARPA - Embassy of Mexico	118-119	202-728-1727	www.sagarpa.gob.mx
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O. C. Schulz & Sons, Inc.	63	701-657-2152	
Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Inc.	140	313-841-8300	www.benbdetroit.com
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Southern Produce Distributors, Inc.	71	800-688-9267	www.southern-produce.com
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Spice World, Inc.	122	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
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Sunlight International Sales, Inc.	9	661-792-6360	
Sunshine Bouquet Co.	93	305-599-9600	www.sunshinebouquet.com
Sunview Marketing International	89	661-792-3145	www.sunviewmarketing.com
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Triple J Produce, Inc.	71	252-205-2936	www.triplejproduce.com
Uesugi Farms, Inc.	89	408-842-1294	www.uesugifarms.com
United Fresh Produce Association	57	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
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Vick Family Farms	70	252-291-8880	www.vickfamilyfarms.com
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— Ray Connelly



SHARING COMMON GOALS



To say the late Chandler Copps, who passed away early last year, was a legendary figure in the produce industry would be a vast understatement. As the great-grandson of E.M. Copps, much of his early career was spent working with his family's business — the Stevens Point, WI-based Copps Distributing Co., which continues to operate 26 stores in the state. Among many volunteer positions and numerous awards and accolades, he also served as president of the Produce Packaging and Marketing Association (now the Produce Marketing Association) and helped steer the organization toward a greater retail emphasis.

Yet his most lasting contribution to the produce industry was most certainly the Copps Share Groups, a number of networking groups developed for leaders in different areas of the produce industry. These groups brought together non-competing members of the same industry who could share their common interests and challenges in the business. Some groups were devoted to retail, while others focused on the fresh-cut, wholesale, distribution, and specialty retail fields.

Charlie Gallagher, (pictured at center in the photo above) a member of the United Distributor Council and chairman of the board for United Fruit & Produce Inc., emphasizes the importance of these groups. "I've

been involved for almost 20 years, and I can attest to the advantages of these meetings," he says. "A combination of good camaraderie and good leadership has carried us through all of these years. Our bond came from our shared experiences in the produce industry. We would discuss anything that was affecting us and our businesses. We walked away much smarter and greatly benefited from the meetings."

The photo above, sent in by Jeffrey Abrash of Andrew Brothers Inc., in Detroit, MI, shows a gathering of the Copps Share Group's United Distributor Council in the early 90s at the United Fruit & Produce Inc. facility in St. Louis. Pictured from left to right are: Frank Wiechec, Hunter Bros. Inc., Philadelphia, PA; Herb Abrash (Jeffrey's father), Andrew Brothers Inc., Detroit, MI; Stephen D'Arrigo, D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York Inc., Bronx, NY; Charlie Gallagher and Stanley Greenspan, United Fruit & Produce Inc., St. Louis, MO; Chandler Copps, facilitator for the United Distributor Council; and Alan Siger, Consumers Produce Co. Inc. of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA.

Copps' hard-held belief in open, effective lines of communication continues to this day as his legacy lives on as the share groups are now facilitated by Jim Prevora, founder and editor-in-chief of PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine.

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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