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# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



## Deconstructing 30 Years of Industry Improvements

**INSIDE**

THINKING AFRESH IN THE AMAZON AGE • FLORAL MARKETING  
GREEN ZEBRA GROCERY • WHOLESALERS • PACKAGING  
WEST MEXICO • FLORIDA FALL PRODUCE • RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES  
CALIFORNIA CITRUS • SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES • IMPORTED BERRIES  
APPLES • ORGANIC REGIONAL PREFERENCES • SALAD TRENDS • PECANS  
PMA AISLE BY AISLE BOOTH REVIEW



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**CORRECTION**  
 In the "Corporate Social Responsibility" cover story for our September 2015 edition, PRODUCE BUSINESS mistakenly reported that the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Summer Internship Program is a beneficiary of the full-scale housing upgrades currently being made by Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation for its employees at Ag-Mart Mexico. While Procacci Brothers is a proud financial supporter of the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Summer Internship Program, it does not directly provide housing to any interns or supporting staff. For more information on the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Summer Internship Program, please visit [Facebook.com/NMSHSA](https://www.facebook.com/NMSHSA).

*Sweet Scarletts are consumers'  
#1 pick.*



**OUR GRAPEFRUIT** brings unexpected sweetness to the breakfast table. So consumers are sayin' the sweetest things about us. They rate our Sweet Scarletts Texas Reds the best tasting\*. Which is why we'll be supporting our premium brand with three national freestanding inserts (FSIs), a digital campaign, public relations and in-store point-of-sale materials throughout the season. Of course, our Sweet Scarletts will also have the biggest merchandising team in produce behind them. So gear up and get ready for grapefruit season. It's sure to be sweet, y'all! Call your Wonderful Citrus sales representative in California, 661-720-2500, or Texas, 956-205-7400.

\*Source: April 2014 Grapefruit Taste Test

**Come see us at PMA, Booth 3634.**

**SweetScarletts.com**

Healthy Holidays



POM  
WONDERFUL

POM  
WONDERFUL



# Healthy Sales.

Time to get jolly this holiday season with POM Wonderful sales. In fact, a third of all pomegranates are sold in December alone.\* Now, that's the gift that keeps on giving. Just like our multimillion-dollar marketing effort featuring holiday-themed bins, in-store POS, a Dec. 6 FSI, 1.5 billion anticipated PR impressions and displays that generate three times more sales per square foot than the category average.\* It really is the most wonderful time of the year.

**To order bins and take advantage of the largest merchandising team in produce contact [CustomerService.POM@Wonderful.com](mailto:CustomerService.POM@Wonderful.com) or call 877-328-7667.**



# produce quiz

## THIS MONTH'S WINNER



**DANE LEGENDRE**  
Produce Supervisor  
Market Basket  
Nederland, TX

This month, Dane Legendre (pronounced Lu-zhon) will be celebrating a produce anniversary of his own. Back in 1974 on October 31, he was promoted to produce manager at the Beaumont, TX, Market Basket. He was 19 years old at the time, and started working part-time at the store a couple years earlier handling stock, bagging, etc.

"Bruce Thompson, now chairman and chief executive, interviewed me at the time, and I fell into my niche," says Legendre.

A couple years later, Legendre was

promoted to produce supervisor on July 4, 1976 and began working in the corporate office located in Nederland, TX.

As supervisor, he oversees all 34 stores throughout Southeast Texas and Louisiana. "No two stores are identical in regard to produce needs as well as demographic."

The average square footage of the produce department in each Market Basket store is about 2,500 square feet. Legendre says you can have prettiest-looking displays and wetrack, but if the customer service and freshness are not there, then the customers won't return.

At 60 years old, he says he has about 10 more years in him before he wants to retire so he will have more time to be "Paw Paw" to his nine grandchildren.

**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.

### WIN A PORTABLE CARRY-ON CLOTHING SHELF

Ideal for those meetings away from home or trade shows, this bag creates an easy way to stay organized on the road. When you arrive at your destination, the lightweight bag (less than 4 pounds) transforms into a shelf system that hangs from any closet rod. Your clothes stay clean, folded and organized in traverse. The bag features a removable shoulder strap, zippered shoe pocket, and laundry compartment made with durable polyester construction.



### QUESTIONS FOR THE OCTOBER ISSUE

- 1) What does Dole call its "boxed lunch" salads? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What fresh-cut item does Kern Ridge showcase in its ad? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What kind of vegetable snack line is new from Duda? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What is the name of the Asian-style soup shown on the ad for Mann Packing? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What citrus company is boasting a "One Stop Shop" with a lemon, orange and lime? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) How many avocados are required in the "Rockin' Guac" recipe shown on the ad for Avocados From Mexico? \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:  
 OCTOBER QUIZ PRODUCE BUSINESS • P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425

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The Association of Business Information Companies



# SCORE BIG WITH FRESH & DELICIOUS AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO

Touchdown  
amigo.

## RO\*TEL ROCKIN' GUAC

### INGREDIENTS:

3 ripe Avocados From Mexico, pitted, peeled, mashed

1 can (10 oz each) Ro\*Tel® Original Diced Tomatoes & Green Chilies, drained

½ cup chopped onion

1 tablespoon lime juice

½ teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper

Tortilla chips, optional

### DIRECTIONS:

Mix Avocados From Mexico, drained tomatoes, onion, lime juice and salt in medium bowl until blended. Season with pepper to taste.

Serve with tortilla chips, if desired.

TASTIEST  
TAILGATE



Watch your category sales score a touchdown with the Tastiest Tailgate promotion! Our national partnership with Ro\*Tel® is capitalizing on football season and encouraging the consumption of guacamole by promoting the Rockin' Guac recipe. Retailers can score too by creating winning displays. Contact your Regional Director today to learn how!

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IN SEASON

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US!

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# Speaker Vacancy Could Be Positive Development For Produce Industry, But Abbreviated Calendar Poses Challenges



BY JULIE MAINES,  
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

In announcing his resignation from Congress, House Speaker John Boehner added an altogether unexpected development to an already jam-packed and brief legislative calendar for 2015. Inspired during a period of self-reflection after meeting His Holiness, Pope Francis, in Washington, D.C., last month, Boehner's decision generated a flurry of talk on Capitol Hill and in the news.

While divine intervention may have played a role in Boehner's decision to step down, political insiders see Boehner's decision a mere distraction among the rank-and-file members of Congress and not an outright disruption. Committees and staff members, after all, continue to work at a feverish pace to reauthorize federal programs and move legislation preventing a government shutdown.

In television interviews following his announcement, Boehner expressed a desire to "clean the barn up a little" in his final month and not leave his successor with a lot of unfinished business — though he wasn't clear on specific legislation that would become top priority.

A number of food-related bills are still on the docket, including country-of-origin labeling (COOL) requirements and genetically modified organisms (GMO), in addition to broader policies impacting agriculture such as the transportation bill, with the Senate having passed a long-term bill this summer, but that remains an outstanding item in the House.

With just 30-plus working days remaining on the House calendar, Boehner's successor will be up against time in an effort to

**As of press time, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) has been the sole contender to replace Boehner. Hailing from an agriculturally rich state, McCarthy has a unique understanding of issues of importance to the produce industry and appreciates the economic, environmental and regulatory challenges facing fresh fruit and vegetable growers. Should he become the next Speaker of the House, it would be easy for our industry to expect him to lead on agriculture policy.**

gain support, collaboration and agreement from 434 fellow members of Congress — a difficult process often depicted by observers as frustrating as "herding cats." Exactly how Boehner's successor manages time and the divisive group of hardline Republicans credited with ousting Boehner, could also set the tone for the second session of the 114th Congress in 2016.

As of press time, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) has been the sole contender to replace Boehner. Hailing from an agriculturally rich state, McCarthy has a unique understanding of issues of importance to the produce industry and appreciates the economic, environmental and regulatory challenges facing fresh fruit and vegetable growers. Should he become the next Speaker of the House, it would be easy for our industry to expect him to lead on agriculture policy.

Though drought-relief legislation already passed the House, McCarthy's leadership style could also be judged on







whether or not the Senate moves its own version of drought-relief assistance.

But, while these expectations are optimistic, they may not necessarily be completely realistic. In addition to serving as a member of Congress and representing California's 23<sup>rd</sup> District, he'll be second in the line of succession to the President with a host of new responsibilities. Activities like meeting foreign heads of state, serving as "the" House spokesman and identifying with constituents across the country are just some of the major functions that must be fulfilled by the Speaker.

Ultimately, 30 days may not seem like a lot of time when considered in the perspective of a calendar year. In some ways, however, it's equivalent to 15 minutes of play in a football game that actually translates into 30 minutes. Therefore, it is possible that the House could move bills that not only keep the government running but also significantly impact the viability of businesses in the produce industry.

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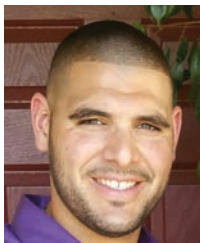
Come see us at PMA, Booth 3634.

[halosfun.com](http://halosfun.com)



TRANSITION

**MANN PACKING  
SALINAS, CA**



Mann Packing announces the addition of **Gabriel Gonzalez** in a newly created position as data systems specialist for sales operations. Gonzalez will support Mann's business through product information management, data governance, category management and data

analytics. He will also be responsible for managing the company's product registration process.

**Kane Palacios**, a former intern at Mann, joins the company as a marketing assistant reporting to Kim St George. A Salinas native, Palacios is a recent graduate of Yale University. He will concentrate on the company's social media channels, and assist in packaging projects, website content management, marketing collateral materials and general support to sales and marketing.



TRANSITION



**PRO\*ACT  
MONTEREY, CA**  
PRO\*ACT produce distributor announces the addition of **Danny Krow** as director of client services. He is responsible for strengthening and raising the awareness of benefits PRO\*ACT brings to produce supply chain management for existing and prospective clients. Krow has extensive

experience in all aspects of the food supply chain, including several years with FreshPoint, the produce subsidiary of Sysco Corp., in sales, operations and transportation.

ANNOUNCEMENT



**ALSUM FARMS PARTNERS  
WITH GREEN BAY PACKERS**

Through the end of October, Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc., Friesland, WI, is partnering with the Green Bay Packers to invite fans to share a photo of their best tailgating dish. The grower, packer and shipper of locally grown potatoes and onions will give away a prize package that includes a gas grill and accessories, and a \$100 gift card to a retailer grocery partner to purchase meat, potatoes and other vegetables for their next tailgate party.

**PMA  
NEWARK, DE**



Produce Marketing Association (PMA) announces the addition of **Natalia Gamarra** as the new global business development manager. Gamarra has international business experience and a proficiency in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. Gamarra will work with PMA's membership from many countries including Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Australia, China and South Africa, to support the development of key research and discover emerging trends in the fresh produce industry. Previously, she worked for the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau.

TRANSITION

TRANSITION

**MARKET FRESH PRODUCE  
NIXA, MO**

Market Fresh Produce announces the addition of produce veteran **Jeff Jones** as managing partner. In his new position, Jones' focus will be the sourcing department. Jones brings more than 30 years of produce experience with a background that includes retail and wholesale experience at Publix, Associated Wholesale Grocers, Banta Foods and Martinous Produce.



TRANSITION

**ALLEN LUND COMPANY  
LA CAÑADA, CA**

Allen Lund Company, Minneapolis-division, announces the relocation of **Toni Rooney** as manager in its upper Midwest office. Rooney started with the company's Los Angeles office in the dry van division in 1999, with an extensive background within the transportation industry. Before her present position in Minneapolis, Rooney also worked in the Louisville and Memphis offices.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**HLB IMPORTS GOLDENBERRIES  
WITHOUT COLD TREATMENT**

HLB Specialties, U.S. importer and tropical fruit specialist based in Pompano Beach, FL, resumes importing fresh Colombian Goldenberries, also known as Cape Gooseberries. Previously the fruit had to undergo a 14-day quarantine treatment mandated by USDA before being distributed in the U.S., which dramatically reduced shelf-life and increased costs. Now shipments from verified "fruit fly free zones" can enter the country without undergoing the cold treatment.



TRANSITION



**LIMEX  
MISSION, TX**

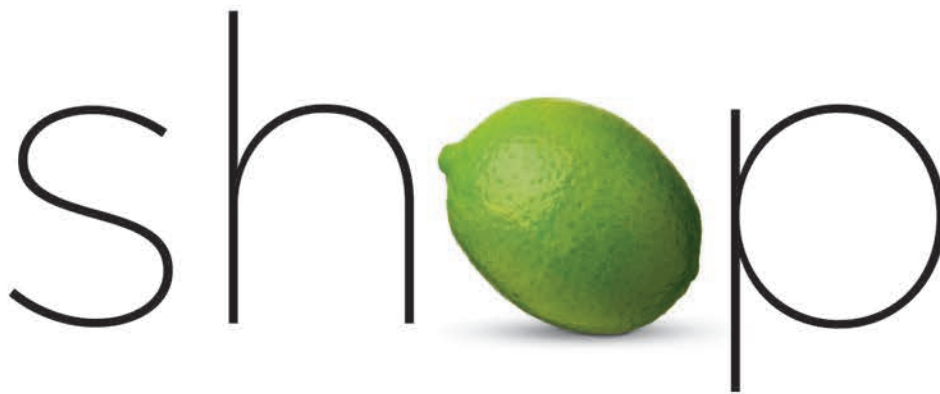
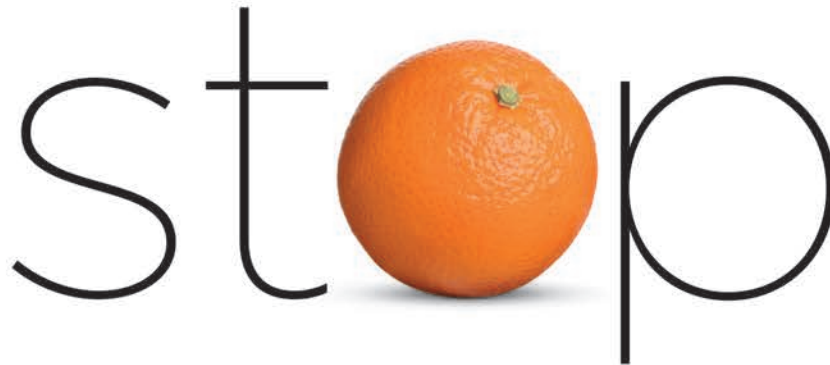
Limex Sicar & Ltd Co., a grower, packer and shipper of fruit and greenhouse commodities, announces the addition of **Dan Edmeier** and **Eduardo Herbst** to the sales team (pictured left to right). In his new position as vice president of sales, Edmeier will manage Limex's tomato program and sales operations in Mission, TX. As Limex's key sales account manager, Herbst will be responsible for tomatoes, pineapples, limes and avocados.

ANNOUNCEMENT



**CMI'S SUPERHERO  
ENTICES KIDS TO EAT FRUIT**

Columbia Marketing International, Wenatchee, WA, introduces its HERO brand snack-sized apples in 2-pound pouch bags. Coming from a crop trending toward smaller fruit, HERO is designed to be included in school lunches. With the help of its target audience — fourth graders — CMI developed packaging that features bright colors, a heroic cartoon character and key words such as "yum," "sweet," "juicy" and "tart."



- We're the largest vertically integrated grower of citrus in North America.
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Wonderful citrus.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**SIDE DELIGHTS: NEW OFFERINGS AND EXPANDED PACKAGING OPTIONS**

Side Delights Gourmet Petites from Fresh Solutions Network, San Francisco, adds two new products, Sweet Fingerlings and Choice Russets. The winner of the PMA Impact Award for Excellence in Packaging in 2014, Side Delights Gourmet Petites also added four new packaging options, in addition to the 1.5-pound stand-up pouch bags. All eight varieties of are also available packed in lay-down mesh pillow packs and in mesh bags with "wine labels," both in 1.5-pound and 3-pound sizes.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**READY PAC ADDS MORE SNACK OPTIONS**

Ready Pac Foods, Irwindale, CA, adds new on-the-go snack options to its Ready Snax and Snack Cup offerings. The four recent additions to the Ready Snax category are Caprese (tomatoes and mozzarella); Apples with yogurt and trail mix; Caramel apple crisp; and Veggies with hummus and flatbread. The new low-calorie Snack Cup options come in Antioxidant Berry Blend; Kickin' Veggies; Protein Power; and Spinach Parmesan and Veggies.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**NATURAL DELIGHTS SPONSORS TOUR DE FRESH RIDERS**

Natural Delights, Bard Valley, CA, is the premier sponsor of Tour de Fresh cyclists Jennifer Gerard and Michael Deusebio. Gerard, director of nutrition of Monterey Peninsula Unified School District, and Deusebio, senior director of C&S Wholesale Grocers, will cycle approximately 300 miles from Hickory, NC, to Atlanta on October 18 to 22. The cyclists plan to raise \$10,000 for salad bars through nonprofit organization, Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools.



Produce & Floral 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

ANNOUNCEMENT



**DEL MONTE PRESENTS HALLOWEEN COSTUME PROMOTION**

Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, FL, is hosting its fourth annual "Go Bananas!" Halloween costume giveaway, in an effort to encourage healthy eating and living and to promote Del Monte premium bananas as alternatives to traditional Halloween treats. The sweepstakes will give consumers the chance to win a Del Monte branded banana costume, awarded randomly to 1,000 Del Monte social media fans that enter online.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**HOUWELING'S GROUP LAUNCHES RECOVERY SYSTEM**

Houweling's Group announces the launch of its patent pending waste heat and CO2 recovery system implementation at its greenhouse farm in Mona, UT. While designed to complement Houweling's patented Ultra Clima greenhouse, the unique recovery system will have applications in any controlled agriculture environment that would otherwise require supplemental heat and CO2 from other sources. The ability to utilize wasted thermal energy is a benefit for any building or operation that requires heat.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**CONCORD FOODS PARTNERS WITH DISNEY**

Concord Foods, Brockton, MA, is offering consumers a savings of \$5 by mail when they purchase Disney's Cinderella Blu-ray Combo Pack, plus any two Concord Foods' guacamole or salsa seasoning mixes. Offer is good through Dec. 31, 2015. The rebate offer will be promoted on 1.2



million packages of Concord Foods' guacamole and seasoning mixes. In addition, picture-themed in-store displays will be available.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**GENERAL PRODUCE ACHIEVES GREEN CERTIFICATION**

General Produce, Sacramento, CA, a family-owned and -operated produce distributor, announces its "green certification" through Green Plus, a nationally recognized third-party certification company. Sustainable efforts were already in place at General Produce, however Green Plus helped the company to evaluate and identify areas that could be enhanced and expanded, as well as focus on new opportunities in the sustainability arena.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**NEW LIMECO EARNS NON-GMO PROJECT VERIFICATIONS**

New Limeco, LLC, Princeton, FL, announces its avocados, coconuts and guavas under the Powerful Harvest label, have become Non-GMO Project Verified. New Limeco's verified products are produced in compliance with the Non-GMO Project standard, which means rigorous best practices for GMO avoidance, including segregation and traceability to prevent contamination, must be followed.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**DOMEX SUPERFRESH PEAR BAGS FEATURE SESAME STREET CHARACTERS**

Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, WA, debuts a new line of 2-pound gusseted Superfresh Kids-themed pear pouch bags with Sesame Street characters in support of the Eat Brighter! campaign, a partnership of Sesame Workshop and the Produce Marketing Association, in collaboration with the Partnership for a Healthier America. The goal of the campaign is to encourage kids, ages 2 to 5 years old, to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.





# CALIFORNIA

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# Hispanic Acculturation And Its Impact On The Path To Purchase

BY MARISSA ROMERO-MARTIN, PRESIDENT/CHIEF INSIGHTS OFFICER AND  
LUVIA CARRILLO, QUALITATIVE GROUP MANAGER, SENIOR MODERATOR & FACILITATOR

**T**here is growing interest to understand U.S. Hispanic shoppers within their cultural context while uncovering what drives their decisions. The Hispanic population is growing exponentially, but it is also transforming into various shades of acculturation. To obtain a deeper understanding of the U.S. Hispanic shopper, retailers and brands must recognize that segmenting Hispanics on the basis of language and demographics is ineffective, because it does not account for the distinct value systems and cultural identities that shape the U.S. Hispanic mindset.

Culturati Research & Consulting, Inc. developed an attitudes and values-based U.S. Hispanic segmentation model allowing marketers to maximize their Hispanic marketing investments by developing strategies to target these segments. A new collaboration with Nielsen (the Nielsen-Culturati Hispanic Segmentation) combines the power of Nielsen's Homescan Panel data with Culturati's attitudes and values-based U.S. Hispanic segmentation model.

Leveraging the segmentation model and additional quantitative and qualitative shopper insights, Culturati developed a framework enabling advanced understanding of the Hispanic shopper by looking beyond the numbers to reveal the values and cultural mindset that drive behavior.

The segments identified include:

**Culturally Hispanic (Latinistas)** – Driven by a traditional value system and Hispanic-centered cultural mindset; the least focused on blending cultures.

**Bicultural Hispanics (Heritage Keepers and Savvy Blenders)** – More progressive than Culturally Hispanics and more culturally diverse. Most Heritage Keepers are first generation Hispanics, prefer to speak in Spanish, and are focused on preserving their heritage. Savvy Blenders are bilingual and are focused on preserving their heritage and blending cultures.

**Culturally American (Ameri-Fans)** –

Take most of their values from American culture and have a significantly diluted Hispanic cultural connection. The majority prefers to speak in English.

## Path-To-Purchase Snapshot

Culturati took an in-depth look at the Hispanic segments along with a Non-Hispanic benchmark sample to uncover insights that represent opportunities for brands and retailers. The result was a Path to Purchase model that reveals how cultural mindset and value system impact shopper behavior. The category purchase behaviors can be tracked by the Nielsen-Culturati Segmented Household Panel data and brought down to the store level through Nielsen Spectra data.

**Culturally Hispanic (Latinistas)** believe shopping is a form of relaxation and personal reward for their hard work. They are the most likely to buy on impulse, but are also the most loyal of all segments. They look for Hispanic brands, because they "feel" familiar and are the segment that spends more at Hispanic tailored stores, because they value a comfortable Hispanic environment. To be considered, retailers need to offer the right cuts of meats, fresh produce and Hispanic brands that they use.

- 70 percent - Always buy the same brands they know and trust
- 77 percent - Seek out stores that sell Hispanic products

**Bicultural Hispanics** value authenticity, are open-minded and less risk-averse than Culturally Hispanic shoppers, but differences exist between the two bicultural segments.

**Heritage Keepers** are deliberate in what they take from Hispanic and American cultures and are intent on preserving their heritage. They value social connections and

warmth and appreciate store environments that allow them to connect with other shoppers and the store/retailer. Therefore, they are the segment that spends the most at Club stores. They do not necessarily feel that Hispanic or American brands are better; they pick the best of each and shop at multiple retailers to find them.

- 59 percent - Always buy the same brands they know and trust
- 60 percent - Seek out stores that sell Hispanic products

**Savvy Blenders** are the least brand loyal of all Hispanics. They look for new experiences, and if they choose an ethnic product (not only Hispanic) it has to be authentic. They also seek an efficient shopping experience and are the most diverse in how they choose to spend their dollars. They shop at multiple retail channels and are most likely to shop at specialty grocery.

- 51 percent - Always buy the same brands they know and trust
- 37 percent - Seek out stores that sell Hispanic products

**Culturally American (Ameri-Fans)** shoppers are the most similar to Non-Hispanics in their independent nature, practical and price-focused mindset. They value efficiency, so they tend to spend most of their dollars at mainstream grocery and are the least likely to shop at Hispanic stores, because they are not looking to connect with the Hispanic culture.

- 59 percent - Agree price is more important than brand names
- 17 percent - Seek out stores that sell Hispanic products



### About Culturati

Culturati is a full-service market research and consulting agency with cross-cultural and general market capabilities. Culturati is redefining how Hispanics are segmented and how acculturation is measured through its U.S. Hispanic Landscape Segmentation Model. Culturati helped many Fortune 100 companies to uncover consumer and shopper insights with cultural sensitivity that inspires meaningful connections between their brands and consumers.

# Deeper Dive Needed Into Hispanic Produce Shopping

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

**T**his piece leaves us in a quandary as to what produce retailers should do. It is, of course, true that as immigrants acculturate they behave differently, which means they shop differently and eat differently. And certainly in marketing and retailing, one should be aware of these differences. So this segmentation is useful. But the difficulties abound.

To start with, the importance of segmentation into broad buying groups may pale before the importance of knowing what countries the Hispanic shoppers come from. So, while it is useful for a retailer to know that the culturally Hispanic cohort overwhelmingly looks for Hispanic brands and always buys well known and trusted brands, those brands can be very different if the customer is Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican or Guatemalan. So even knowing the segmentation, a retailer needs to know a lot more about the customer to be able to effectively use the specific knowledge to procure and merchandise effectively.

Another important consideration is income. Surely even within these segmentations, behavior differs by income. And what about geography? Individual behavior can be reinforced or deemphasized based on community. An immigrant from Mexico may pass the psychographic test as a “Latinista,” but his behavior is likely to be very different if he lives in a border town filled with first generation immigrant Mexicans or if he is in rural Maine without another Mexican — or Mexican food store — in sight.

Then comes the fact that people know how to protect their interests. Just as highly acculturated Jews might shop at Costco year-round and then circle back to a store that sells Jewish ethnic foods at Passover, Hispanics are perfectly capable of buying at Aldi, and then going to a store with broad ethnic offerings when preparing a feast for friends and family on Cinco de Mayo.

Indeed one of the things that distinguishes the present day from days gone by is that consumers have such an array of

**Chain retailers looking to be successful with ethnic minorities need to allow stores the opportunity to micro-market.**

choices that they do not have to ally themselves with one store. It is easy to imagine Hispanic consumers using the long tail of Internet shopping to buy difficult-to-find ethnic foods and then stocking up on more standard fare at the local Aldi.

Oddly enough, all the focus on ethnic merchandising and marketing plays out in produce in an unusual way. Stores focused on Hispanics will carry special grocery brands that are not familiar to Anglos or Asians, so these stores probably won't be the primary shopping venues for non-Hispanic shoppers. Yet, most produce departments are perfectly acceptable to Hispanics and non-Hispanics. There may be a few Hispanic specialties, but Hispanics of all segments enjoy many fruits and vegetables eaten by people of different ethnicities, so the produce departments of mainstream retailers and Hispanic retailers have similar assortments.

Hispanic-oriented grocery stores may not be much of a threat to mainstream grocers when it comes to pulling Anglos and Asians into their stores for grocery items, but these retailers often buy produce at value prices off terminal markets and, as a result, can be very powerful competitors when it comes to fresh produce. Mainstream supermarkets may find produce sales vulnerable in areas with many ethnic specialty stores, as non-Hispanic consumers who won't buy groceries at Hispanic stores will happily buy fresh produce from stores focused on the Hispanic clientele. Equally, of course, without the assortment of Hispanic grocery items necessary to attract Hispanics, conventional supermarkets can still compete on fresh produce and draw Hispanics in with a dynamic produce offering.

These types of segmentations are good

to keep in mind, but they are often difficult to turn into powerful merchandising strategies. After all, if a store is located in a very homogenous area, say a border Mexican town filled with mostly recent immigrants, then segmentation is not necessary, because the store is mostly going to tailor to its local community — as stores always have. On the other hand, if one is in a highly diverse community, then how is a retailer to segment out shoppers?

And for shippers, what precisely is an apple shipper supposed to do with the knowledge that Hispanics have varying degrees of interest in ethnic foods and Spanish culture?

Another issue is that within marketing for every action, there is a reaction. While it is great to know “Bicultural Hispanics” may prefer to speak in Spanish, this tells us little about whether offering signage in Spanish and having bilingual employees will boost business. Even if the “Bicultural Hispanics” are attracted by this marketing, many Hispanics offended by being identified as just off the boat or over the border will be repelled by such efforts, and who knows what Anglos or Asians will think?

Ethnic retailers are often successful because of a razor sharp focus on a specific group. It is often not obvious to an outsider, but shoppers know the store is targeted toward Hondurans from a particular city or Peruvians from a port district. Segmentation data is important background, but chain retailers looking to be successful with ethnic minorities need to allow stores the opportunity to micro-market and focus on the segment within 3 miles of the store. That is the winning segmentation when marketing today.

# Thinking Afresh In The Amazon Age

It was back at London's City Food Lecture in 2014 that Doug Gurr, then global vice president at Amazon U.K. and now president at Amazon China, implied that Amazon would be bringing its grocery delivery service to the United Kingdom:

*"I don't have the answer for you in the U.K. today. Ours is predominantly an ambient route to market. We wanted to get the fresh supply chain absolutely right in the U.S. before rolling it out, even outside of one city. History would suggest though that once we typically rolled something out across the U.S., it is followed by international expansion."*

Now, as Andrea Felsted reported in the *Financial Times*, in a piece titled "UK Grocers Brace For Launch of Amazon Food Delivery Service," the thought is that Amazon Fresh will reach the U.K. sooner rather than later. Amazon leased an old Tesco warehouse and has, in general, been building up its logistics capabilities in the U.K. and, especially, in London.

This is a matter of great concern to U.K. retail executives, and it should be. And not just for the obvious reason.

Yes, of course, a major company opening an online presence is basically an oligopoly-buster. It would take years for a retailer to open a critical mass of large size stores. One reason Aldi and Lidl are such a formidable threat is they don't need these large sites; they can grow in small sites that are more readily available. Online retailers don't require any sites at all! So the threat is existential — an attack on all the customers that a bricks-and-mortar retailer serves rather than a slow retail rollout of bricks-and-

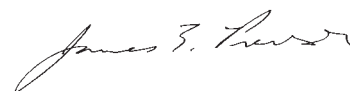
mortar stores.

The real challenge that Amazon will pose, though, is the difference in motivation for Amazon to do this as opposed to a traditional food retailer or even an online food retailer such as Ocado.

Many years ago, when Wal-Mart began its rollout across America, the fear among grocery retailers was that Wal-Mart was unbeatable, not because it was a great merchant or had efficient supply chains. The fear was that it would be a fierce competitor because its priority was to make money on things other than food. The fear was that Wal-Mart would be focused simply on offering food and, especially, fresh foods in order to increase the frequency of visits to its high margin general merchandise stores.

In other words, if consumers visited general merchandise stores, say, once a month, but visited grocery stores twice a week, if Wal-Mart could just attract consumers into its supercenters two or three times a month, even if it broke even on food, if consumers would purchase a high-margin toy or towel or other item on each trip, the expansion into food would be a winner for Wal-Mart, regardless of whether Wal-Mart ever made a penny on food.

As it happens, the theory never really got a test. It quickly turned out that Wal-Mart was so successful in food that it could not be indifferent to profitability in the section. In fact, if you want to encapsulate Wal-Mart's problems in one thought, then think this: Wal-Mart's food sales are its low-margin products, and each year Wal-Mart has a higher percentage of its sales in these lower margin products and a smaller



**JIM PREVORA**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

percentage of its sales in higher margin products.

Amazon may play out differently. Executives at Amazon believe it could sell much more of its non-fresh product if it could get it to consumers faster, ideally with same day delivery. One of its motivations in building a perishable supply network for consumers is to have that network cover the cost of this delivery network. If Amazon Fresh can roll out and sustain such a network, the rest of Amazon can piggyback on the break-even distribution network and Amazon will make a killing.

Using logistics as a way to gain an edge in business is not, of course, novel. This columnist was once the "Coconut King" in America, though we never made any money on coconuts.

We had a large public warehouse in New Jersey where we stored many low-volume produce imports, such as Greek figs, Italian chestnuts, French Granny Smith apples, Belgian endive, Salsify and Mâche, Juan Canary melons from Spain and much more.

The products were limited in demand, and we would send out mixed loads to travel as far as Oakland, CA, clear

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across the country. But the volume was small, and we would sit with standing orders from Minneapolis and cities across America and be unable to get the one skid to the customer.

We decided to make a deep dive into coconuts simply because they are big and bulky and filled up the trucks. We never made a dime, but by defraying the transportation costs, they allowed us to find a way to deliver to customers nobody else could deliver to. So coconuts sustained the transportation system, and we made the profits on the Italian chestnuts and other items.

Amazon's ambitions are very similar in the consumer space.

Now, 'there's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip,' and it is not at all clear that Amazon can create a break-even rapid-delivery network; one could easily imagine food being a big success for Amazon on the top line but a big drain on the bottomline. But as long as the stock market believes in the project and is willing to support a high multiple on the Amazon stock, Amazon can do a lot of damage to competitors even if the plan never works.

## The challenge of Amazon is really for conventional retailers to reimagine business and see if they can make the online operations something more than an old grocery delivery service done via the web.

This is especially true because there is some sense that many retailers are uncertain about how to think about the online space. Recently, there has been a move to increase delivery charges and minimums. It makes perfect sense, as these are additional expenses incurred for these orders. They are visible and easy to quantify. Yet it is not clear the

degree to which — or even if — the costs of delivery are higher than the costs of serving consumers through retail stores.

Sure, if one views the brick-and-mortar as a fixed cost and imagines delivery as meaning rolling out a pound of grapes to a consumer, then, of course, delivery is more expensive. But if you imagine a retail world where you don't need the store at all, and you imagine every house on the block ordering something — whether it is food, books or dry cleaning delivery — then the relative costs are not so clear.

We have to avoid getting caught up in settled expectations. Take something such as credit cards. Because they charge the merchant a fee, there is an obvious and explicit cost to the retailer in accepting credit cards. But if one reflects on the costs of accepting cash — the training, the equipment, the security, etc. — it is not obvious that credit cards, fees and all, don't cost a retailer less than accepting cash.

The challenge of Amazon is really for conventional retailers to reimagine business and see if they can make the online operations something more than an old grocery delivery service done via the web.

Brick-and-mortar retailers have many advantages. There are many indications that consumers often prefer click-and-collect to delivery, for example, and conventional retailers are better positioned to execute on this than an all-digital concept.

Amazon has many advantages: it's a good brand; the stock market believes in the company and allows it to invest; it is experienced at making online sales work; it offers a diversity of product, etc. But the primary advantage Amazon has is it sees things fresh, so Amazon isn't thinking about compelling a new business model to fit into old ways of doing things.

The challenge for conventional retailers as they seek ways to prosper in the digital age is to find ways to overlook legacy costs and concepts and to imagine things afresh. That is a leap not all retailers will be able to make. But for those that are able to recreate, uncommon success awaits.

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# Indebted To Those Who Stand Up And Speak Out

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

One score and 10 years ago, we launched *PRODUCE BUSINESS* at the PMA Convention in San Francisco. A lot can happen in 30 years. I gained a wife and two strong sons, but lost my father. I've seen good friends pass, one, literally, in my arms. I learned that time is the medium for the truly important achievements of life.

My brother and I were always close, I thought, and then when we had to fight desperately to help our father, first with Leukemia and then Pancreatic Cancer, I learned what being close really meant. My old college fraternity brother and I were friends when we began down the path that led to the launch of the magazine you hold in your hands. Three decades of journeying side by side, and you realize that the walk is itself an achievement, one to be as grateful for and proud of as any commercial success.

Our country itself is a different place. Aging is not just a matter of the passing of years. It is the accumulation of experience. After going through 9/11, one tries to remember a time of innocence, when we thought ourselves invulnerable. We were all, as the song says, callow. But the song ("Try to Remember" from the musical, *The Fantasticks*) says more, it reminds us that "without a hurt, the heart is hollow."

As a boy, my mother always imbued me with adages. She cautioned that one caught more flies with honey than with vinegar, and so does it sound silly to say we have always tried to be sweet? And a tear comes to my eye when I realize she thought her son worthy of a warning against intellectual arrogance, gently reminding a young boy struggling to find his way that wise men learn more from fools than fools from wise men. And she would urge great effort on small things, on everything, as she pointed out that great oaks from little acorns grow. And, how much wiser than her son she was — and is — for from the launch of a simple magazine to serve the produce trade has grown a trans-continental enterprise serving to elevate the industry in print, online and in person.

My grandfather believed that reputation was everything. So perhaps my greatest pride is not that we have done much, but that what we have done, we have done at a high level. We set upon ourselves a substantial obligation from the beginning: to initiate industry improvement. So it means a great deal that wherever we go, we are

pulled aside and asked to do more.

As we look ahead to the next 30 years, we seek to deconstruct what, precisely, made the industry advance throughout the past 30 years. This is an ongoing project, and, as the case has been since the beginning, we do not do this alone. We fight the good fight with those also seeking to make the future better than the past. In this issue alone, we are joined by a roster of industry luminaries — Tonya Antle, Karen Caplan, Roberta Cook, Greg Drescher, Dennis Gertmenian, Cindy Hanauer, John Pandol, Bruce Peterson, Bryan Silbermann and Tom Stenzel. These friends and supporters have been close to the topics that shaped the industry as it is today. As always, we are in the debt of those willing to stand up and speak out. We have always aligned our operation with the truth and have seen that frankness as the basis for industry improvement.

Past is always prologue, but extrapolation is dangerous. So as we look at the past and the present day, it is important to recognize that things did not work out as they did because they came about naturally. They worked out as they did because individuals asserted leadership. They did this through their companies, they did this through associations, they did this via the media, but they fought to move things to a better place, and we are all in the debt of those who stood up for the right.

We are proud of the role this magazine plays as well. In the course of the past 30 years, we often stood up and said what individuals in the trade did not feel in a position to say. We absorbed blows, as some boycotted advertising or pushed vendors to boycott advertising if we didn't keep quiet. We did not, and they didn't advertise — at least for a while. Yet, in an age when print has been supposedly dying for decades, *PRODUCE BUSINESS* magazine has grown for 30 consecutive years. Plus, we created so many new ways to contribute digitally and in person.

Which might mean this enterprise, dedicated to bringing insight to the trade, can contribute one more service on the occasion of our 30<sup>th</sup>. Whether industry members agreed or disagreed with our thoughts, we have always been "protected," because those who know best know that all we produced was with intelligence, with diligence and with love. It is a strong foundation to build on for the next 30 years of service. Many thanks for journeying with us into the future. **pb**

**We set upon ourselves a substantial obligation from the beginning: to initiate industry improvement. So it means a great deal that wherever we go, we are pulled aside and asked to do more.**



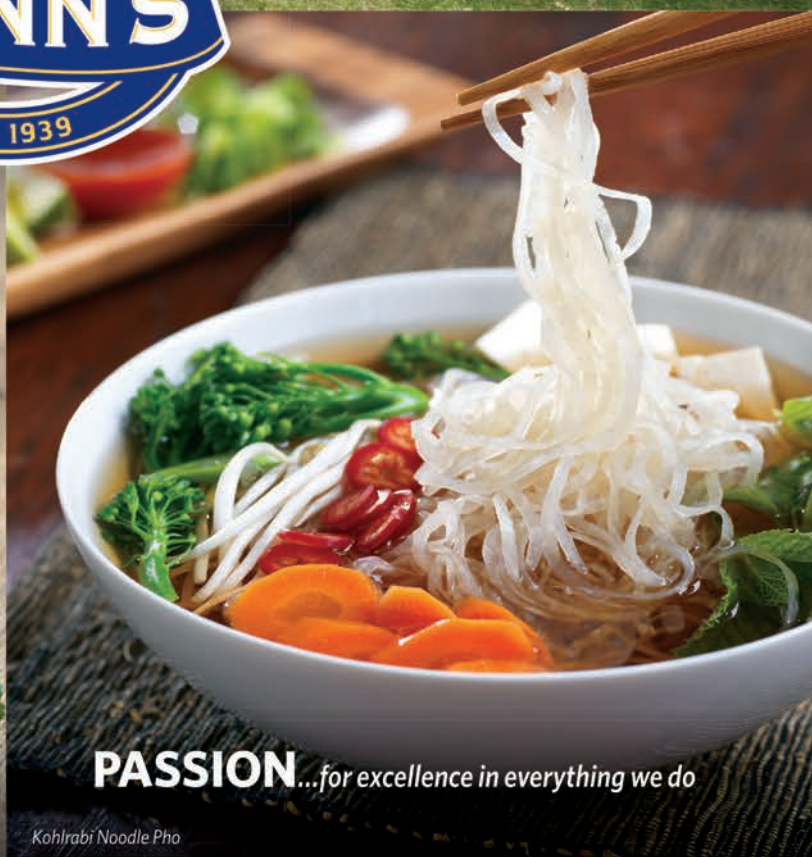
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 Association - Miami, Miami, FL

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Email: afb@naylor.com

Website: americasfoodandbeverage.com

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 Growers Association, LaGrange, GA

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Email: skilgore@asginfo.net

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## Deconstructing 30 Years of Industry Improvements

In celebration of 30 years in the produce industry, the editors of PRODUCE BUSINESS select 30 revolutionary topics and 30 industry influencers who share their expertise and experiences.

# 30th Anniversary Issue

## 30 Improvements And 30 Industry Influencers

We begin our journey with our Anniversary issue and continue exploring these ground-breaking topics in a series that spans our October, November and December issues. Our first installment of 10 improvements: Communications Technology, Floral Relevance, Free Trade, Fresh-Cuts, Organics, Produce In Schools, Restaurant Produce Menuing, SKU Proliferation, Wal-Mart Effect and Women In Produce.



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# Communications Technology

## ‘The Flintstone’s Task with the Jetson’s Tools’



BY JOHN PANDOL,  
DIRECTOR OF PANDOL BROS., INC.

In the early 80's, our communication tools were Telex, telephone, telephone answering machine, two-way radio, CB radio, snail mail and chalk boards. The Telex, used for instantaneously received written communications, was replaced by the fax, later replaced email, and now replaced by a combination of email, text and group chat apps like WhatsApp.

Telephone was fixed and expensive. Calls from a hotel-room phone often cost more than the lodging. Dedicated long distance "L.D." lines, WATS lines (wide-area telephone service) and collect calls were all methods used to encourage

**“Creating, manipulating and distributing communication is now cheap and easy. It also is sloppy and wasteful. Just because a message was sent doesn’t mean it was received and understood by the right people.”**

contact by reducing the cost to the caller.

One of the biggest shifts in our business culture came at the realization that phone calls weren't expensive anymore. Our fixed lines were now forwarded to our ever-present cell phones. Receptionist (or secretaries) could be friends or foes, so the art of leaving a message that would get through was important. Secretaries who were good filters and reliable relayers of information were golden. The strategies and tactics one once used to get past receptionists now apply to 'cracking' the automated telephone and voicemail system.

Two-way radios on the farm are now alternated with cell phones. When a truck checked in, he was told to park in the yard and monitor a CB Radio channel. Now the driver leaves his cell number and is told to chill at the truck stop. Mail, which was economical and reliable (and its cousin, the courier service) are still used in the same way, but for many less things — supplanted by the electronic kind.

A chalkboard was used to establish and update a set of information that a group of people needed to know. A group that needed access to the same information either had a chalk board on the wall that was updated continually or a written report that was updated periodically.

The "Lotus 1-2-3" spreadsheet that was updated on a PC came next, and finally networked Excel spreadsheets, proprietary software displays, or Internet-based trading platforms. Updating these databases is largely automated. A generation of telephone salesmen was taught to "call in the passing," and then start the conversation for the next order. When passings were automated, these old dogs needed to learn new tricks.

The tools are new, but the challenges are the same. How do I identify and get to the decision maker? Who gets boilerplate information, and who gets customized communications? How many hours did I need to be by my office phone became how many hours a day do I respond to my smartphone?

Creating, manipulating and distributing communication is now cheap and easy. It also is sloppy and wasteful. Just because a message was sent doesn't mean it was received and understood by the right people. Anyone else delete more messages than read? And don't get me started on social media. The fundamental questions of who is the audience, what is the message, and what is the best means to deliver it apply now more than ever. **pb**

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1995



2005



2015



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# Floral Relevance

## ‘The Evolution of Floriculture’



BY CINDY HANAUER,  
FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
OF GRAND CENTRAL FLORAL

“Well, look at you — you haven’t changed a bit!” It’s funny how these words, when spoken in an interpersonal exchange, are given (and taken) as a compliment; however, when speaking in the context of business, these same words, “you haven’t changed a bit,” are definitely not complimentary.

When recalling the progression of relevance and consumer connectivity of supermarket specialty departments over the years, I have a vivid memory, which has stayed with me for many years. Circa 1970s, in-store pharmacies were brand new to the supermarket world. The first time I asked my nurse to move my prescription to the supermarket I worked in, she laughed mockingly as she walked away and muttered under her breath, “Now, I’ve heard it all!”

Indeed, the breadth of services and products, which were originally segmented into individual buildings, became widely accepted under one roof with supermarket floral departments following suit. Today,

the convenience of one-stop-shopping continues to evolve with the savviest of retailers now adding online shopping and same-day delivery. Thirty years ago, our customers (and my nurse) were surprised by a big revolution taking place in the way they ultimately learned to shop. Today, the convenience of one-stop shopping — both online and offline — is expected.

Secondly, we’ve shown our customers over the years that they need variety. Yes, they need it! There was a time when customers were thrilled with an offering of daisy bouquets, pot mums and a foliage plant. But the business needed to grow, and there was no time to wait for customers to ask for orchids, tulips, delphinium, cyclamen and dieffenbachia. We showed customers what they wanted, and they soon wanted it on their own and never went back. Lucky for us, and thanks to the many farmers who risked their own livelihood to grow along with us, the customer of today enjoys 70 times the SKU assortment that was available to them 30 years ago.

Finally, the most significant strides in relevance over the years came to us by using the tools and discipline to run great businesses. Years ago, the financials of our floral departments were blended into the produce numbers, making it nearly

impossible to track the success of individual floral departments, let alone the ability to roll individual floral department numbers into a corporate success story. The onset of UPCs, category management, and daily analysis provided us with the opportunity to highlight our collective successes, repair what was wrong, and maintain the best product assortments for our customers based on real financial data.

Indeed, the floral industry is all about change. The floriculture industry *is* change. Individual floral departments within our stores have certainly earned the gold medal of revolution within the supermarket industry. E-commerce floral maintains a stronghold in the Top 10 of all online categories, and our traditional florist partners have raised their level of social media and other technologies to wave the banner of sophistication, custom design and personalized service.

With the proliferation of non-floral gifting options growing at warp speed — both online and offline — we can all claim victory when any individual segment of the floral industry wins. And, if we all get a little better than we were yesterday, then we win individually. We also win as an industry to stay relevant in the eyes of our customers. **pb**





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# International Trade

## 'NAFTA Creates Biggest Free Trade Agreement in the World'



BY DR. ROBERTA COOK,  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION  
MARKETING ECONOMIST FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL  
AND RESOURCE ECONOMICS AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

The growth in world trade since 1985 has earlier roots, which we would do well not to forget. Global trade has expanded inexorably since WWII, and many pinpoint the nexus of growth stemming from the Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1948. However, harsh lessons had to be learned in order to pave the way toward GATT. Just a few years earlier during the 1930s, crippling protectionist measures were implemented by many countries (the Smoot-Hawley Act in the case of the U.S.), further exacerbating the Depression and expanding its global reach.

Protectionism lowered global economic growth and by most accounts contributed to the economic chaos that led to WWII. In the aftermath of WWII, the Allies recognized the need for a multi-lateral institutional framework for trade. The GATT enabled world trade to be conducted under a clear set of rules and to be progressively liberalized.

By the time PRODUCE BUSINESS was launched, it was clear that GATT was producing economic benefits, and more and more countries sought to join GATT. That year, Mexico announced its intent to join, becoming a member in 1987 and initiating a process of trade liberalization, often unilaterally (without obtaining reciprocal benefits from the U.S.). Whereas the U.S. was a relatively open market, Mexico was very protectionist. It sought to lower consumer prices and develop a more market-oriented economy. This led to rapid growth in U.S.-Mexico bilateral trade, including in fresh produce.

As the mutual benefits became clear, Mexico and the U.S. sought full trade liberalization by following the model initiated in 1989 between Canada and the U.S. in the Canada-U.S. Trade Agreement (CUSTA). In 1994, NAFTA subsumed CUSTA, creating the biggest free trade area in the world at the time. By 2014, trade had been fully liberalized (with some exceptions) between all of the parties.

The growth in agricultural trade in the NAFTA region has been remarkable, outpacing the rate of growth in trade with the rest of the world. In 1993, total intra-regional agricultural trade was \$16.7 billion vs \$82 billion in 2013. In 1993, Mexico exported \$1.1 billion of fresh produce to the U.S. vs \$8.5 billion in 2014, while Canadian produce exports to the U.S. grew from \$1.3 to \$3.6 billion.

Although both the U.S. and Canada are large net importers of fresh produce from Mexico, nevertheless, trade has grown in all directions. Mexico has become the third largest market for the U.S. with exports of fresh produce up from \$133.6 million in 1993 to \$726 million in 2014. Canada always has been and remains the United States' largest fresh produce export market, but as a relatively mature market, exports to Canada grew at a lesser rate, from \$1.3 in 1993 to \$1.8 billion in 2014.

Today there is a high degree of integration in the fresh produce market in the NAFTA region, benefiting consumers and growers in all three countries. Consumers, retailers and foodservice operators benefit from a much wider array of fresh produce available over extended seasons and a more efficient supply chain. Growers benefit by expanded market access for their products but may also face higher competition. Over time, investment moves to the locations where it is most efficient to produce fruits and vegetables in specific seasons of the year.

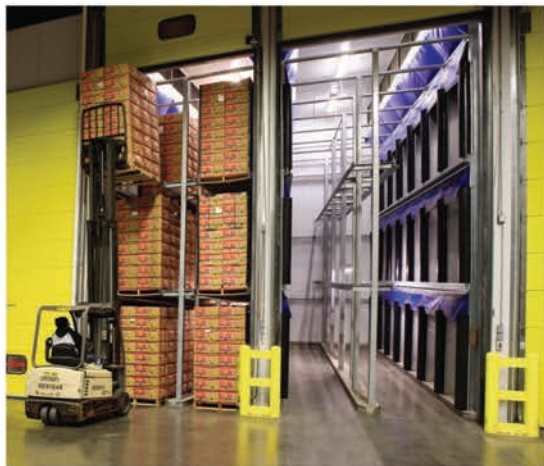
Many U.S. grower-shippers have partnered with Mexican growers to produce supplemental supplies during the off-season, or they market produce from Mexico seasonally when necessary to create a seamless supply. Several Canadian and a Mexican hothouse vegetable grower have invested in operations in the United States, as have Chilean berry producers, all designed to service the NAFTA region.

Over the past 30 years, offering year-round supply became a key aim of growers and their marketers. NAFTA came along at the right time and has contributed to a major expansion and transformation of the fresh produce market from a markedly seasonal to a more stable year-round industry. While trade disputes still exist, there is a formal framework for resolving them and the future is bright. **pb**





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# Fresh-Cut Produce

## 'Looking Back Through the (Anti-Fog) Window'



BY DENNIS GERTMENIAN,  
FORMER CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
OF READY PAC FOODS, INC.

**W**hen *PRODUCE BUSINESS* magazine was founded 30 years ago, the fresh-cut category had already grown from its infancy in the 1950's with a few companies making coleslaw and chop suey mix. In the late '60s demand from fast food chains spurred the category to take off.

Shelf life and quality were the limiting factors then, with product lasting just a few days. Ready Pac achieved seven days by introducing vacuum packaging in 1974. Food safety wasn't a big concern. In fact produce was still delivered in open trucks – refrigerated produce distribution didn't take off until the late '70s.

Quality and food safety became key in the mid '80s when there were about 200 fresh-cut companies nationwide, some packing in corners of warehouses where food safety conditions were less than ideal. In the past decade, the Spinach Crisis of 2006 heralded a whole new issue of food safety for fresh-cut, because prior to that the industry was focused on post-harvest. That crisis was about how the produce was grown in the field, how we selected our

land and agricultural processes ensuring the products were safe. Plus, the significant advancement in pathology testing technology created a whole new era in fresh-cut food safety.

In the 1990's the category went through a huge transition from being focused on foodservice to including retail and catering to the consumer. More than 40 percent of American consumers' meals were being eaten or prepared outside of the home; convenience was king. Retail fresh-cut produce was introduced, spurring a huge sea change in the consumers' opportunity to have more salads. But supermarkets weren't geared up for it. Between 1985 and 1995, retail merchandising transitioned from produce cases at 55 degrees to upright cases maintained between 35 and 38 degrees.

It was a huge investment and learning curve for retailers, but once that happened we could ensure higher quality and better variety. More delicate items, such as spring mix and fresh-cut fruit, were introduced. However trial was a challenge because American consumers weren't familiar with these items. At Ready Pac we worked with progressive retailers such as Dick Spezzano from Vons, who observed the category in France and was determined to carve out a place for it in the U.S. market.

Another impressive game-changer was the packaging Europeans used. While

film in U.S. would cloud up, in Europe it didn't. So we formed a relationship with a Swiss company that had anti-fog film. We also opened up the view of the salads with a larger "window" not covered with graphics. Packaging innovations improved shelf life with film breathing capability and the introduction of inert gas to improve quality and shelf life.

Packaging played a critical role in a more recent category development: salads that also offer protein. This had been tried unsuccessfully in bags, but rigid bowls and trays with divider components revolutionized the product. It took 10 years to perfect that technology.

Now let's look forward to what is likely to occur by the time *PRODUCE BUSINESS* celebrates its 40th anniversary. Fresh-cut sales will continue to grow in "market share" and "stomach share." Food safety outbreaks won't go away despite the outstanding progress and efforts being made by the entire industry because pathogens will continue to reinvent themselves. We will see a number of big food producers enter and remain in the fresh-cut business. Technology and advances in data-driven information will play a significant role in all aspects of the fresh-cut industry. Within 15 years a billion dollar market will emerge, offering micro veggies with vitamin sources and proven benefits superior to pills in a bottle. **pb**





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# Organics

## 'From Niche to National Norm'



BY TONYA ANTLE, PRINCIPAL AT TANIMURA & ANTLE AND RETIRED VICE PRESIDENT FOR ORGANIC SALES AT EARTHBOUND FARM

**W**hen I was first asked to write this article I couldn't help but feel a sense of nostalgia. Reflecting back, I replayed the more than 30 years of blood, sweat and, yes, even tears that all of the early "O" (organic) pioneers gave lovingly to bring organics from a counterculture niche to where it is today.

It is so gratifying to know I played a role helping to bring organic produce to the forefront of consumers' minds and buying patterns. Ghandi once said, "Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others," and this is so true. It's especially true for those of us who were passionate about gaining a place at the consumers' table, believing there was a small and committed but growing group of shoppers looking for an organic alternative for their families' tables.

### From Niche to Mainstream

In the mid-80s, the majority of organic produce was sold through natural foods distributors, local mom and pop natural

**"The turning point came when mainstream supermarkets in these cities started to take notice of a small but increasingly concerning decline in sales and figured out their core customers were starting to discover these alternative channels."**

food stores and regional natural food chains such as Bread and Circus in Boston, Whole Foods in Austin, TX, Alfalfa's in Boulder, CO, Nature's - A Wild Oats Market in Portland, OR and Mrs. Gooch's in Southern California.

The turning point came when mainstream supermarkets in these cities started to take notice of a small but increasingly concerning decline in sales and figured out their core customers were starting to discover these alternative channels.

So, the forward-thinking produce leaders — such as Harold Alston of Stop N Shop, Dick Spezzano of Vons, and Dan Hamilton of HEB — truly led the way by opening their produce shelves up and

creating the first organic destination sections in mass market supermarkets in North America. Then the next wave of chains began following suit by testing small organic sections. And, as they say, the rest is history.

### National Standards

As organic sales started to take root, the multi-state operators were struggling with organic regulations. At that time, there were approximately 33 different organic certification standards (created by states and private certification agencies). While there was a lot of overlap among the standards, they weren't identical, and this lack of a common definition created a lot



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## 30 IMPROVEMENTS AND 30 INDUSTRY INFLUENCERS

of consumer and retailer confusion. So the food industry came to the organic community and requested we create a national and uniform law.

Rarely does an industry ask the government for regulation, but in our case, it was essential to enable growth. With full and enthusiastic participation by the organic community, the first set of regulations were written into the 1990 Farm Bill, which in turn, paved the way for the National Organic Program (NOP). Full implementation of the program commenced in 2001. This created a uniform national law, which quickly boosted retail sales and consumer confidence.

### Scaling Up

While there are some who think only small operations can be organic, many organic pioneers always saw a future where organic producers of all sizes pro-



pered and some even scaled up to meet a surging consumer demand. We had the goal of bringing the benefits of organic food to as many people as possible — serving as a catalyst for positive change.

This entailed scaling production, automation in packaging, and field technology — all with a commitment to organic leadership and integrity. This enabled us to get organic salad on store shelves at a small price premium to conventional, which helped drive the share of organic in the salad category to 23 percent overall and 59 percent in baby leaves -- the biggest organic share of any category.

Today the future continues to be bright. More people than ever have joined the good food movement. These health-conscious consumers seek out whole/fresh/pure food, with a real concern for who is producing their food and how it's produced.

Organic plays a leading role in this movement. What was once a very small niche segment is now mainstream and food for everyone, everywhere. It's gratifying to have played a role igniting this evolution. **pb**

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# Produce In Schools 'A Fresh Revolution in School Foods'



BY TOM STENZEL, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

“It’s a revolution in school foods, but an even bigger revolution for the produce industry as tomorrow’s shoppers become lifelong lovers of fresh fruits and vegetables.”

It wasn’t long ago that fresh fruits and vegetables in schools were most prevalent on days when kids brought an apple to their teacher. When fruits and veggies did find their way into the lunch line, they were most likely soggy beans warmed up from a 10-pound can, or maybe a scoop of applesauce.

Today, millions of kids choose from a variety of fresh fruits and veggies on school salad bars. They enjoy fresh produce snacks in the morning to perk up before lunch. They enjoy healthy fresh snacks from school stores and a growing number of refrigerated vending machines. And, many are embracing fresh produce by growing fruits and veggies in their own

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school gardens.

It's a revolution in school foods, but an even bigger revolution for the produce industry as tomorrow's shoppers become lifelong lovers of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Certainly, the changes in school foods follow some of the same trends we see in the growth of fresh, healthy foods in every part of society. But most importantly, the growing crisis of childhood obesity these past 30 years galvanized the public health community and the fresh produce industry. With today's children — potentially the first generation not to outlive their parents — our mandate was urgent to use public policy and social change to increase kids access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

I remember the day in 2001 when Senator Tom Harkin asked our Washington Public Policy Conference what would happen if schools gave a free fruit

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or vegetable snack to kids every day. The debate was whether they would even eat it. But we soon learned the answer when Senator Harkin created a pilot program in the 2002 Farm Bill doing just that.

Schools lucky enough to be in that first four-state pilot program never looked back, hanging on to the new Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program ever since. With strong support from public health advocates and our produce team, the program expanded repeatedly and now reaches low-income elementary school kids in every state of the union.

More recently, Congress finally directed that school meals should reflect the Dietary Guidelines for Americans — if health authorities recommend people make half their plate fruits and vegetables, shouldn't school meals begin to move in that direction? The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (passed in 2010) required school

lunches to contain a half-cup of either a fruit or vegetable. It's hard to believe that such a modest requirement wasn't always



part of the rules. Even now, we hear push-back from some that this is too hard.

The solution is as plain as the salad bar in school cafeterias across the country. Kids love making their own choices from salad bars and trying a whole host of new produce items — the fresher the better! Our industry helped pass the new school food standards, and we also put our money where our mouth is by donating salad bars to more than 4,000 schools the past few years. The United Fresh Start Foundation continues to lead this charge.

Today, snacks and vending machines are the new horizon, with apple slices and cut veggies beginning to compete in earnest with chips and cookies. We see schools across the country continuing to drive the fresh produce revolution. As exciting as today's successes, I can't wait to read what's new in schools when we get to PRODUCE BUSINESS' 60th anniversary! **pb**

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# Restaurant Produce Menuing 'Produce Stars as Center Plate'



BY GREG DRESCHER, VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP FOR THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

**P**roduce has always played an important role in American foodservice, but 30 years ago it didn't have nearly the visibility — and star power — it has today. Three decades ago we had largely lost the sense of seasonality we all previously shared about produce; there wasn't the emphasis on freshness and flavor we see today; and produce was often relegated to a side salad or garnish. It was a time of asserting cosmetic appeal over taste, and chefs hadn't yet weighed in on driving food trends, let alone produce trends.

Many factors contributed to the rise of produce in foodservice, among them: the farm-to-table and local/seasonal sourcing movement spreading nationally; advances in nutrition research having spurred the U.S. government to recommend that half our plates be composed of produce; and a broad-based food marketing megatrend highlighting global cuisines, world flavors and such healthy, traditional food patterns as the produce-centric Mediterranean Diet.

Over especially the past 10 years, the high-volume/multi-unit foodservice sector, from quick service restaurants and fast

casual to campus and corporate dining, has quickened the pace with which culinary leaders have moved produce front

and center on menus. Despite growing momentum around healthier menus among consumers stretching further back

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than a decade, one of the main reasons more produce-centric menu items didn't catch on earlier is because, quite frankly, many of those early efforts weren't very good. Reminding people they should eat more produce — indeed, much more produce — is a lot easier than conceiving of and preparing truly craveable and healthy produce dishes.

Most promisingly, today's leading chefs are obsessed with produce, and over time, their obsession will transform our industry. Chefs are getting traction with entirely reimagining the role of produce in the professional kitchen; pairing produce with a wide range of flavors from Southeast Asia and India to North Africa and the Middle East to Mexico and Peru; and, in many cases, charging as much for produce-centric cooking as meat preparations.

Chefs spent more time traveling abroad researching the best of these produce-forward flavors (along with general culinary research), as well as getting dialed into these menu strategies through their smartphones and tablets.

For many operators, interest in small-plate formats and encouraging diners to share plates and bowls of many sizes has gone from novel innovation to widespread practice. This has lowered the bar for diners to experiment with plant-forward concepts with which they may not be familiar.

The rise of healthy halos around specific produce items has not escaped chefs, as operators have liberally added blueberries, darker leafy greens from arugula to kale, a wider range of citrus, avocados, heirloom tomatoes, and so many other produce items to their menus.

In order to accelerate the inclusion of more produce on American menus going forward, chefs and operators need a next-generation partnership with produce industry leaders. A wish list for the future, looking to our produce industry collaborators, would surely include the following:

1. We need produce growers, and distributors, to not simply function as suppliers but also menu trend co-incubators. For that to happen, we invite produce companies to take more ownership for understanding food and flavor, not



*Sandwich with beet, cheese, avocado and arugula*

just produce, and acquire more culinary expertise, and develop a stronger culinary culture. Hire a chef, retain a chef, and/or invest in your employees to gather that culinary expertise and food trend sensibility.

2. Broaden your, and our, horizons: Millennials and other younger generations have only known a big, wide world of flavor — and they are all about culinary adventure. Many of these global food cultures are at their heart produce-centric. From Asia to the Mediterranean, meat has often been a luxury as an everyday food, so cooks in those cultures got really good at preparing produce. We are just scratching the surface of what those traditions can do for the foodservice and produce sectors, and the health of American consumers. We need produce marketing campaigns and educational efforts that reflect the fact our future customers are indeed citizens, explorers, and diners of the world.

3. Understand the future of dietary advice is only going to accelerate around the integration of health and sustainability,

and that means years of disruptive innovation advancing plant-based cooking. Just look at the technical report of the 2015 US Dietary Guidelines Committee: everything points to this convergence. But just as we need to encourage our consumers to experiment and seek out new food experiences, we also need to meet them half way. That's why we are so excited at the CIA about our R&D partnership with the Mushroom Council to create and popularize an umami-rich meat-(ground) mushroom blend, for burgers to taco filling. It's delicious, it's healthier and more sustainable, and it's a runaway hit in high volume foodservice.

4. Finally, bring chefs to the table to enrich your company's dialogue about future product development, and the flavor and quality standards you are pushing in your research.

Working together, produce industry leaders, chefs and other foodservice sector leaders have the potential to deliciously remake the future of American menus.

**pb**

# SKU Proliferation 'It Begins and Ends with Consumer Demand'



BY BRYAN SILBERMANN,  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF PRODUCE  
MARKETING ASSOCIATION (PMA)

Stock Keeping Units (SKUs) in the produce department grew significantly in the past 30 years. The backstory to this growth hinges on consumers' demand for convenience, flavor and choice driving an explosion of new items in what's become a steady stream of new SKUs that offer shoppers greater selection and taste profiles. This trend also reflects an industry changing its mindset from production- to market-driven.

The most obvious reflection of consumer demand on SKU growth has been the burst of value-added products. Everything from sliced apples to diced onions, and a wide range of other slightly processed products in between, make eating fresh fruits and vegetables fast and easy for consumers. Examples of this influx now include the addition of proteins (salad kits with meats), cut veggies with hummus dip, or sliced apples with peanut butter.

All these value-added items require greater refrigeration, which changed the look of the produce department. Cases went vertical, maximizing space and better protecting and displaying value-added SKUs.

Packaging innovation went far beyond value-added. Once limited to Styrofoam

trays with plastic overwrap, packaging of whole items has become more sophisticated. The result has been more SKUs

and new ways to merchandise. Consider handled pouch bags packed with whole peppers or plastic clamshells for straw-

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berries.

New SKUs also reflect both smaller and larger-sized packaging. Whether it's a single-serve handful of blueberries or similar pack of grape tomatoes, we responded to consumers' needs for kids' snacks, produce on-the-go, and produce in vending machines. New packaging

accommodates smaller household sizes and also home delivery channels. Meanwhile, club stores pushed changes at the larger end of the size-spectrum.

More packaging and PLU labeling made better data available to the industry. These building blocks for data collection and product identification, facilitated



More flavorful varieties in well-known categories also added to the flourish of produce SKUs.

by the Produce Electronic Identification Board (PEIB), were necessary ingredients for retailers to carry more SKUs.

We tip our hat to farsighted PMA leaders in the '80s — Dick Spezzano, Chuck Tryon, and Harold Alston — who identified the need to create a better tracking system for all the new produce SKUs they saw coming. The PEIB was created to develop and administer standardized Price Look-Up (PLU) codes — making it easier for retailers and suppliers to improve efficiency of retail pricing and to know what consumers are buying. Better data that flowed from standard PLUs also helped speed the proliferation of SKUs.

Finally, more flavorful varieties in well-known categories also added to the flourish of produce SKUs. Think Pink Lady or Honeycrisp apples. Tomatoes also come to mind.

Incidentally, PMA's Fresh Summit is the launching place for many of the SKUs introduced over the decades. We're going to see the same affect this year in Atlanta and in the years ahead as suppliers and marketers showcase new packaging and choices that meet the needs of expanding home delivery and other emerging channels of distribution.

pb



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## The Wal-Mart Effect 'Major Retail Phenomenon'



BY BRUCE PETERSON,  
PRESIDENT OF PETERSON INSIGHTS

It would be fair to say that the most significant impact on grocery retailing in the 1990's was Wal-Mart's decision to accelerate the roll out of the supercenter format in the U.S. With over 3400 supercenters in the US alone, it would be easy to think the Wal-Mart invented the format. But actually, both Meijer and Fred Meyer had combination general merchandise/food stores long before Wal-Mart explored the format. And Carrefour, Auchon, and Hyper Marché had stores

in Western Europe prior to that. And even K-Mart was looking at the format when the company opened American Fare. But while Wal-Mart did not invent the supercenter, it was the decision to aggressively expand the format that changed the retail landscape forever.

To put this in perspective, when I joined Wal-Mart in October of 1991, the company had 6 Supercenters, no grocery distribution centers, and was being serviced by Fleming and a few Malone and Hyde divisions. When I left the company in March of 2007, we had over 2300 Supercenters, 115 Neighborhood Markets, 600 free standing Wal-Mart Stores that sold food, and 42 grocery distribution centers!

We went from being a "blip" in terms of penetration in the retail food business to its most dominant factor by a significant margin. And in terms of Wal-Mart's evolution, the company went from a general merchandise retailer that sold some food to a food retailer that also sells general merchandise!

Aside from its sheer size, Wal-Mart had a significant impact on how produce was bought and sold in several ways.

Wal-Mart established a contractual model for procurement that, previously, had been used predominately in the food



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on page 49



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“Aside from its sheer size, Wal-Mart had a significant impact on how produce was bought and sold in several ways.”

service arena. As opposed to negotiating price and quantity on a daily basis, Wal-Mart engaged in seasonal and yearly contract pricing.

Wal-Mart was the first retailer to establish vendor co-managed replenishment in its distribution network. Instead of the stores' inventory responsibility being solely on the retailer, suppliers now shared responsibility and were tasked to replenish warehouse stock according to rules and metrics set by the retailer.

Wal-Mart was the first retailer to share point-of-sale (POS) data directly with its suppliers. A supplier had the ability to



PHOTO COURTESY OF WALMART.COM

examine actual movement of items at the point of access and had the same data as the buyer with whom they were working

with. Movement could be retrieved by store, by item, and by hour if needed.

Wal-Mart was one of the first retailers, if not THE FIRST, to incorporate digital photography in its distribution centers. Again, this provided total transparency to issues that would arise at the distribution center.

Wal-Mart was the first U.S. retailer to aggressively incorporate RPC's into its supply chain. In fact, Wal-Mart was the major influence in adopting a metric standard and for RPC's as opposed to a North American standard.

Wal-Mart was the first retailer to incorporate computer-based training for produce associates.

Wal-Mart was the first grocery retailer to apply RFID technology to the produce supply chain.

To say that Wal-Mart had an impact on the produce industry would be a major understatement! One could argue that because of Wal-Mart's accelerated growth in the food business, mergers and acquisitions ramped up. So now, the entire grocery industry evolved from a privately held, regional business, to a consolidated, publicly held business.

Wal-Mart's expansion into the food business via the supercenter format was a phenomenon that has never been seen before in supermarket retailing, and one that will never be seen again. **pb**

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# Women In Produce 'We've Come a Long Way, Baby'



BY KAREN CAPLAN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF FRIEDA'S INC.

**W**hen I think back over the past 30 years and how things have progressed for women in our industry, I can only say we live in the most exciting of times.

In 1985 I had only been in the produce industry a few years. What I remember most is how few women there were, especially in positions of responsibility and power. Most females in our industry worked in marketing or personnel (it wasn't called Human Resources back then). A few were in sales, but not in leadership positions of their companies. When I attended trade shows such as United Fresh and PMA, most people working the booths were men with the exception of a few women hired to do sampling. Virtually 100 percent of the buyers were male.

The shift to bigger roles for women in our industry was at first gradual then sudden. Initially, women were hired as field merchandisers for the commissions (Avocado, Apple, Lettuce, and Tree Fruit). Then more women joined the ranks of FOB sales desks. Daughters joined the family businesses on the wholesale produce markets across the U.S.

In 1993 the "Women in Produce



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRIEDAS.COM

(L-R) Karen Caplan, Frieda Caplan, Jackie Caplan Wiggins and Alex Jackson. Frieda's Inc. is one of the many women-owned companies now in the produce industry.



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## 30 IMPROVEMENTS AND 30 INDUSTRY INFLUENCERS

Reception" was launched. Someone told me there were only 35 women on the registration list for PMA that year. Now, I would guess at least 40 percent of the registrants are female and 100 percent of the companies bring significant numbers of women players.

What have women in produce brought

**“Clearly, they didn’t get ahead because they were women. They are acknowledged performers and leaders, who also just happened to be women.”**

to the table? First, the consumers’ perspectives. It never made sense to me

that buyers at supermarkets were always male, when women made 90 percent of the buying decisions in the stores.

I believe the largest CPG companies first recognized the power of women in business. As the industry started recruiting CPG executives to run produce companies, these females brought their insights about the role of women in business.

Executives began to notice attractive qualities such as:

- Attention to detail
- Great follow up skills
- Passion and excitement
- Compassion
- Willingness to do the right thing
- Not driven by ego

Fast forward to 2015. Do the names look familiar to you: Mayda Sotomayor (chief executive of Seald Sweet Growers), Maureen Torrey Marshall (president of Torrey Farms), Dan’l Mackey Almy (president of DMA Solutions), Heather Shavey (general merchandise manager of Produce for Costco Wholesale), M. Marnette Perry (senior vice president of Kroger)? Each one of these women started at the most entry-level position in their company when they began their careers. During the course of the past 30 years they have all risen to one of the most senior level positions in their organizations.

I’m only guessing, but I suspect male bosses that respected their strong work ethic and outstanding performance mentored these women. Clearly, they didn’t get ahead because they were women. They are acknowledged performers and leaders, who also just happened to be women.

I would say in closing one of the biggest hurdles for women 30 years ago was the “good ol’ boys network.” How times have changed — I’m proud to say women have built their own networks and now are supporting each other to advance their careers. Yes, we’ve certainly come a long way baby.

**pb**



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## RETROSPECTIVE

### A **60-YEAR** RETROSPECTIVE BY **DAVE DIVER**, FORMER VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCE FOR HANNAFORD BROTHERS

**U**pon beginning my retail produce career in 1958, the transitions of retail outlets to larger sized supermarkets was only partially completed. Some chains had raced ahead of the pack while others were at a crawl. The great A&P, once the largest of all chains, was among the slowest to adapt and gradually headed for its long-term demise.

Kroger's Toledo, OH division, where I was first stationed, was a typical example of retail store development. The division's weekly sales per store of around \$35,000 was second or third among the company's 30 or so divisions. The largest store, recently opened, had an average volume of over \$100,000 per week. Five others were in the \$55,000 to \$75,000 range with the remaining 28 stores having sales ranging upwards from a low of \$15,000 weekly. Physical size likewise ranged upwards of 10,000- to 60,000-square-feet with the produce department sales area, especially in smaller stores, often occupying little more than five percent of the space.

Often these smaller departments, usually located near the end of the traffic flow, were rarely larger than two 20-24 foot rows of partly refrigerated facing cases supplemented with limited shelving for potatoes and onions. Rarely did these stores offer the consumer more than five dozen SKU's of fresh produce receiving only two to three deliveries each week. With ordering that was done at least three days in advance of delivery, is it any wonder the neighborhood grocery store was on its way to extinction as shopping centers were sprouting up with increasing frequency?

This was the time of not only shifting shopping patterns, but also the beginning of a gradual decline of family size and the increase of wives leaving the home for part and full time work. Eventually these changes would also exert pressure on marketing and in-store presentation.

For example, in 1958 the smallest bag of potatoes available in most stores was 10 pounds, with advertising emphasis placed on 25- and 50-pound units except during a few summer months. Promotions for grower/shipper-packaged onions, apples, and citrus



Dave Diver

also followed the theme "bigger is better." No one was looking at the number of units sold in relation to total customers or the effect on future week's sales for the respective item. Values for the increasing number of smaller household units were being overlooked.

As stores grew larger, so did the produce department's overall size with space added for promotional tables. This was the time-spending, numerous-hours-building, eye-catching displays to attract produce customers and, in many instances, the opportunity for produce clerks to win display contest prizes. Big was better, but it also promoted over-ordering, which in some cases led to unnecessary shrink and consumers not receiving the freshest product.

By now, in-store tray overwrapping became a major portion of the daily activity, especially in eastern and central areas of the U.S. In other regions, produce continued to be displayed in bulk, but only supplemented by shipper-packaged merchandise. However, some companies did develop successful central packaging operations to supply stores.

Enhanced by the continual management pressure to control labor costs, department managers were quick to recognize it was much faster to package 10 units of 3 pounds each than 20 units ranging between 1 and 2 pounds. Not only was it faster, but again few larger package sales increased comparative sales volume. As customer dissatisfaction increased, emphasis was placed on having a variety of random-sized units available for sale.

Corporately, "fresh produce" became a major advertising theme. However, the ads

were the "stick" to challenge store produce managers to improve conditions instead of focusing on operational programs to achieve an objective consumers should take for granted. Promoting a product's attributes would have been more valuable.

#### GETTING SUPPLIED

Procurement of product took many avenues. Larger organizations, seeing better efficiencies from purchasing from terminal markets, and countless shippers contacting individual division produce buyers, set about to organize their own centralized buying operations, attempting to control quality, promotions, and cost. Field buyers in major producing areas provided better information about all aspects of the supply equation.

But old habits die hard. Division buyers were difficult to wean from the mother's milk of all-too-willing shipper sales agents not giving up the possibility for additional sales, and terminal market purveyors seemed to always offer competing opportunities, making the transition to central procurement much slower than corporate executives had envisioned.

Of course, nearly every area of the country has some locally grown fresh produce supply. The northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan regions were no exception, providing wonderful opportunities to enhance fresh produce retailing. Varying varieties of fresh vegetables were available for at least six months, summer fruit and melons, and apples throughout the colder months. Additionally there was a grower coop for greenhouse tomato supplies during about eight months of the year. Their flavor was in sharp contrast to the tomatoes packaged primarily in clear wrap plastic tubes.

Nearing the end of the 1950s, conventional rail car transportation was a mainstay for produce delivered to the Midwest, East Coast and South from the primary western production areas. Most shipments of potatoes from Maine and bananas from Gulf Coast ports were also by rail. Just imagine the anxiety of receiving a rail shipment of strawberries picked at least five days earlier! The use of piggy-back trailers on flat cars with somewhat greater

flexibility and faster arrivals did not become a viable option until the decade of the 1960s.

This was the era prior to the interstate road system being more than just here-and-there fragments. Truck transportation was still relatively slow and somewhat unreliable for long distance shipping. Consequently many growers relied on marketing no more than a day's travel distance. With several large nearby growers of items ranging from sweet corn to eggplant, unexpected excess supply could often present unheard of spur-of-the-moment opportunities by having the willingness to quickly react to low cost and sell volume at low markup. When was the last time consumers were able to purchase beautiful large eggplant for 11 cents each, turning a normally slow selling item into a several-truckload success?

### **SUPERMARKETS COME OF AGE**

By the mid-1960s, the supermarket industry had primarily eliminated most of the older small stores so the supermarket designation was universal except for some independents operating in small towns or densely populated inner city areas. Produce departments were expanding and sales analysis was proving sales were markedly better in departments located at the beginning of the traffic flow instead of at the end. Increases in variety and volume were slow but steady. Some of the biggest product improvements came from post-harvest handling, improved varieties, and a faster transportation system with the interstate highway system.

Produce sales percentage was dramatically higher in Kroger's northern divisions than those in the south, leading top management to conclude the difference due to a largely in-store packaged product presentation compared to primarily bulk displays in the south. Since more Yankees had started moving south, cultural and culinary differences were ignored. One size would fit all, but not necessarily with the anticipated gains or without noticeable consumer resistance.

By the decade of the '70s, Kroger found it difficult to achieve profit objectives primarily due to severely reduced dry grocery margins. The consequence was stringent cost controls and a greater dependence on produce operations to increase margins providing little opportunity to pursue innovative programs. Adherence to other-than-centralized procurement was not an option.

Under these conditions, I joined the relatively small Hannaford Bros. Company, which listed on the New York Stock Exchange and proved to be an exciting opportunity. Not only

was there freedom to follow, develop, and institute new procurement and merchandising programs, but also be involved in the overall produce and supermarket industry.

My first PMA convention was in 1975 in Kansas City with about 1,000 attending. Meeting several Kroger produce merchandisers who previously left the company provided an excellent opportunity to become actively involved. By the Boston convention in 1981, the organization was ecstatic when there were more than 4,000 participants. Back then, today's size would have been unimaginable.

Working for a smaller company at the end of the supply chain, the benefit of PMA included the opportunity to quickly have personal contact not only with growers and shippers but also commodity board representatives, previously often reluctant to spend extra time going the additional distance to contact smaller but progressive, rapidly growing retail organizations.

## **Produce quickly climbed to the top of why customers chose a particular store compared to another when several were equally accessible. Quality first; price second.**

Less than a year after arriving in Maine, a major competitor changed to bulk produce, displaying products that were previously packaged. Almost immediately several in the department were on a plane bound for Ralph's in Los Angeles, which had the reputation for being among the best bulk produce operations in the United States.

Relatively quickly we converted, with the knowledge that an increase in spoilage would be overcome by reduced supply cost, less time spent in the back room, quicker setup time, and more floor time to spend with customers. These were advantages a company had with an encouraging, outside board of directors who among them were successful achievers in nearly every business field. Finding suggestions for improvement was always available.

### **PRODUCE COMES OF AGE**

From the mid-1970s, the next decade would witness a fivefold increase in our corporate sales as store size and numbers grew. Fresh fruit and vegetable sales and profits rose even faster, the result of more improved varieties, more imports, better product

handling methods throughout the supply chain increasing shelf life, changing in-store display presentation, and new marketing programs. All led to corporate management's increased focus on the importance of produce to the consumer and to the corporate bottom line.

One of the most notable changes during the decade was the decline in use of display material. In a world where labor costs are always the largest variable, attention was being paid to building and decorating a huge display with less expense and more attention to providing attractive presentations with lower amounts of product for faster turnover by the using display case and table innovations.

All were important contributors to the image consumers had of the produce department. Produce quickly climbed to the top of why customers chose a particular store compared to another when several were equally accessible. Quality first; price second.

Among the most important advancements came one from our friends in the grocery department. With margins so thin, thousands of hours were spent on determining optimal shelf allocations, followed by developing formulas for direct product profitability, and net department contribution to overall corporate results. Borrowing on those concepts, it was relatively easy to adapt the peculiarities of handling fresh produce into parallel measurements. Bottom line, produce department contribution to total net was greater than each of the other departments and higher than previously thought.

The data for individual items made it much easier to determine a satisfactory promotional mix as well as balancing workloads at store level. More attention was paid to the significance of price changes related to cost and product tonnage and the resulting dollar profit contribution. It also became easier to develop a sales, cost, and profit curve relating to seasonal volume changes.

With all of the merchandising and operational changes, perhaps the best part of my six decades in retail was knowing a number of growers and shippers who today have equally capable family members following in their footsteps and continue to expand their high quality business enterprises.

Those entering the business world today are smarter, more capable and better prepared to meet current job descriptions. Although consumers purchasing decisions are affected by the flavor/texture conundrum, they nevertheless believe today's produce departments are better operated and presented than in the mid-decades of the previous century. **pb**

# Celebrating



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# Green Zebra Grocery

This non-traditional retail outlet is planting roots in a bigger idea for its produce department.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREEN ZEBRA GROCERY

Lisa Sedlar had a dream. Some might say she already had a dream job. As a chief executive of New Seasons Market, a popular independent grocery chain in Portland, OR, she was running a company that was true to her values and seeing steady growth.

But Sedlar had long been enamored with the idea of establishing a convenience store/grocery store hybrid that would deliver the best of both worlds. The shop would give people easy access to produce, dry goods, beverage and prepared foods. Instead of offering the unhealthy snacks typically associated with convenience stores, her outlet would sell top-quality items more commonly associated with grocery stores.

Sedlar's dream came true in 2013, when she opened the 5,500-square-foot Green Zebra Grocery in North Portland's Kenton neighborhood. The store owes its name to the Green Zebra tomato, a small heirloom variety that grows very well in the Northwest.

The store carries fresh produce, grocery items, beer and wine, meat and seafood, as well as frozen foods. There is also prepared foods and a coffee bar in the deli.

"At Green Zebra Grocery, we are redefining what it means to be a convenience store," says Sedlar. "For us, that means local and organic produce at a price that is competitive with the big guys."

The man meeting this challenge is 20-year produce veteran, Erik Levi. He spent seven years working at everything from a seasonal produce store to a larger chain's produce department in Michigan, California and Oregon. He found a good home at New Seasons and worked there for 13 years. During that time, he managed and opened several produce departments of the company. He was a natural choice to provide direction to the section at the new Green Zebra stores.

Levi has a total of 300 square feet to work with. He keeps the offerings fairly streamlined with fruits, vegetables and a few miscellaneous

products such as raisins and salad dressings. There are some packaged products, such as bagged salad mixes and clamshells of tomatoes, but most are displayed loose or in bunches. The department has a 20-foot wet rack and two dry tables to showcase items.

Keeping the selection limited makes Levi's job easier, but the department's small size still presents plenty of opportunities and challenges. "The biggest advantage is we can rotate, cull and share product fairly fast," he says.

The drawback to such a small store is that staffing is limited. Levi runs the department with only two other people. Another unique element for the store is that they're able to keep very little back stock on hand. Organically Grown Company, one of the Northwest's largest distributors of organic produce, makes deliveries three times a week. On the remaining days, the store accepts produce straight from local farms such as Groundwork Organics, Deep Roots Farm and Kiyokawa Family Orchards. "Truck-to-shelf is the best



way to ensure freshness and quality, but if a product arrives with poor quality, we kick it back; and we might be out of that product for the day," he says.

Customers seemed fairly unfazed when they walk into the store looking for a Honeycrisp apple and have to walk out with a Crimson Crisp, says Levi. "Our eaters understand that while they won't have all the choices of a large chain, the quality and flavor of what we sell will not disappoint. Shoppers expect to find serious value in both the convenience and quality of our produce," he says.

Levi has long shared Sedlar's vision of supplying people with organic, local food. "I believe sharing the best-tasting and highest-quality produce is paramount to having a great produce department," he says. "Clean, local and organic produce is healthy for our eaters, our environment, and our regional economy."

Over the years, he developed relationships with several farms and is able to purchase directly from them. Between 80 and 95 percent of the produce in the store is organic, depending on the season. "There are a few local farms that have very clean growing practices that are not certified organic that I like to support," he says. That's the advantage of getting to know the farms, farmers and their growing practices — it's far easier to make and defend those decisions.

Produce items are displayed with small signs indicating the state or country of origin, as well as whether they are organically or conventionally grown. Levi sometimes posts letters or other materials from growers, so they can share their story or growing practices.

To combat the notion that organic produce is too expensive, "we offer monthly and weekly specials, so shoppers can find quality produce no matter their budget," says Levi. "We do a weekly promotion to feature seasonal flavors and offer 10 percent off to customers on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program." (SNAP is the domestic hunger support for



**"At Green Zebra Grocery, we are redefining what it means to be a convenience store. For us, that means local and organic produce at a price that is competitive with the big guys."**

— Lisa Sedlar, Owner

low-income families, which is the same program formerly established as food stamps.)

In accordance with the convenience-store atmosphere, Levi had great luck creating grab-and-go and value-added items in the produce department. Fruit cups are the most popular, but he and his staff also package house-made guacamole, chopped seasonal vegetables (such as a butternut squash and yam medley), minced garlic, and chopped onions. His goal is to increase the number of value-added seasonal vegetable products in the near future.

Green Zebra advertises using many conventional methods, including direct mail,

email marketing and social media. The giant zebra painted on the front of the building and the bright green accent color in signage creates an eye-catching structure in the Kenton neighborhood. But the store's most important form of advertising, says Levi, is to offer really great service and an outstanding in-store experience. "That leads to positive word-of-mouth, which is the best kind of marketing you can ask for," he reports.

The company offers Zebra Cash, a loyalty program that provides enrollees with benefits such as 1 percent back on all purchases. The store offers senior discounts on Tuesdays and student discounts on Wednesdays.

The store showed signs of early success — it had its first profitable month only 13 months after opening. Sedlar and her team are currently raising funds for three additional stores. One location is projected for the Lloyd District, which is located on the eastside of the river close-in to Central Portland. It is expected to open in 2016. A second store is planned for Portland's "foodie haven" along Southeast Division Street. Sedlar hopes to open 20 stores by 2020.

"We look forward to increasing access to healthy food in more neighborhoods in the years ahead," she says.

Levi learned plenty of lessons that will serve him well as he opens future produce departments. "When we opened our Kenton store, I tried to carry a little bit of everything," he says. "As time went on, we reduced it to mostly core items. Now we try to have one representative from within each general type of produce. For example, we might only carry rainbow chard, not red, green and rainbow."

Does he envision the produce departments getting bigger as Green Zebra grows? "Not really," he says. "I believe every produce department will be little. It is our goal to provide the best quality and best-tasting produce at all of our locations."

It seems customers are happy to accept quality over quantity.

**pb**

# Wholesalers Relish Mutually Beneficial Relationships With Nontraditional Retail Formats

The diverse talents and advantages proffered by wholesalers make them a perfect fit for servicing nontraditional produce outlets.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**A**mong the many reasons successful wholesalers continue to thrive is their flexibility and willingness to work with all kinds of buyers. Current trends in alternative outlets for produce beyond the traditional supermarket hold great promise for such adaptable suppliers. “Wholesalers are thrilled to be a part of any new form of distribution to customers — however it presents itself,” declares Nate Stone, chief operating officer for Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Inc. in Detroit.

New outlets such as convenience stores, online retailers, drug stores, dollar stores and even street carts are increasing opportunities and building business for wholesalers. “All the different formats are adding to the mix of business,” says Joe Mercurio, owner of Joseph Mercurio Produce LLC in Columbus, OH.

According to the document “Building the Business Case for Produce at Convenience Stores” published in March of 2015 by the Alexandria, VA-based Association for Convenience and Fuel Retailing (NACS, which is formerly known as the National Association of Convenience Stores) and the Washington, D.C.-based United Fresh Produce Association, Nielsen data shows the U.S.’s 152,794 convenience stores account for 33.9 percent of all retail outlets in the country. The report also shows the number of other retail channels including drug stores with 41,799 stores and dollar stores with 26,572 stores (supermarket/supercenters account for 41,529 stores by comparison).

This volume of nontraditional outlets represents a growing customer base for wholesalers. “The potential of these new customers added a new niche to our existing business model,” says Cary Rubin, vice president at Rubin Bros. Produce Corp. in Bronx, NY. “It



**RLB sells bulk produce as well as fresh-cut, value-added items to both convenience stores and various types of online home delivery services.**

puts us right where we like to be — always looking to increase our customer base.”

Point in case, the U.S.’s convenience stores alone serve approximately 160 million Americans every day as reported in the NACS/United Fresh study. The study further emphasizes that, on average, half of the U.S. population is at a convenience store every day.

## ADVANCING THE CHANNELS

As retail channels change, these new options offer a service to time-starved consumers. “These channels aren’t necessarily going to replace the pantry shopping central to the grocery experience, but they are addressing the snacking and immediate consumption needs of consumers,” states Jeff Lenard, vice president, strategic industry initiatives for the

NACS. “Particularly for younger consumers, the traditional three meal times are gone, especially if they are single and living alone. They eat when they want to, and seek out quick, healthy snacks from convenient formats.”

Today’s consumers anticipate their needs will be met regardless of format. “From the consumer standpoint, they expect to find fresh and tasty food in new locations,” says Lenard. “Convenience stores and some other formats (most notably food trucks) have shown for a decade or more how great meals can be had at places without white tablecloth service. That halo extended to fresh snacks and produce.”

This consumer demand drives new sales opportunities. “People want consistent, fresh, high-quality products available whenever and wherever they might be,” says Kelly Jacob, vice



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president of retail and emerging channels for Pro\*Act in Monterey, CA. "As a result, wholesalers or any other distributor of fresh products will lose sales if they don't pay attention to where consumers are moving their food dollars, and the alternate channels trying to support these new fresh demands."

In June 2014, United Fresh formed the Fresh Convenience Task Force with NACS in an effort to advance produce in nontraditional outlets. "United Fresh's interest to help convenience stores sell more fresh produce relates

directly to the overall mission of increased consumption of fruits and vegetables through increased access for consumers," explains Jeff Oberman, vice president, trade relations for United Fresh Produce Association. "This effort is designed to get more fruits and vegetables where America spends a significant amount of its snack dollars."

Caito Foods Service, Inc. in Indianapolis, reports positive feedback with fresh foods marketing in alternative retail formats for several years. "We have successfully devel-

oped and implemented scalable programs throughout North America in some interesting places," says Matthew Caito, executive vice president at Caito Foods. "We enjoy the opportunity to build programs to get more fresh produce into the hands of consumers who have previously been underserved."

## DIVERSE BUSINESS MODELS

Produce is popping up in increasingly unique venues as nontraditional channels evolve. "It seems everybody is handling produce these days," states Stone of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Inc. "Even hardware stores are putting out loads of pumpkins in season. Liquor stores now handle limes and oranges. Gas stations are selling produce. Mobile food carts and trucks are big business in certain cities."

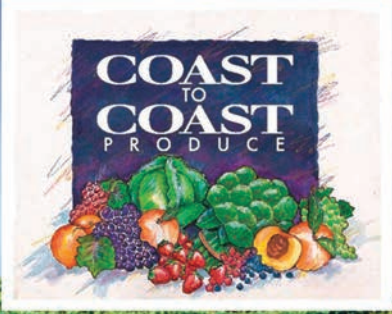
The diversity of new channels yields different business models and produce service needs. Wholesalers report increasing potential with price-impact retailers or dollar stores. "Consumers are exceptionally price-conscious, which makes retail price points paramount to the value offering of these outlets," explains Caito. "Limited assortments of high-volume items make sense here."

Convenience retailers represent another opportunity with different specs. "The challenge is in consumers' rising desire for convenience in obtaining fresh and healthy food," says Rick Feighery, vice president of sales for Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation in Philadelphia. "Convenience stores and pharmacies are capitalizing on this now."

RLB sells to both convenience stores and various types of online home delivery options. "We sell bulk produce as well as fresh cut, value-added items," reports Pat Mele III, executive vice president and chief financial officer for RLB Food Distributors/FreshPro in West Caldwell, NJ. "Many drivers for produce consumption are happening at the nontraditional retail level. These opportunities are leading us to change our approach to deal with various new market channels."

United's Oberman describes some convenience store operators already doing a great job adding fresh produce to their mix. "Kwik Trip, a Midwest chain of convenience stores, is selling a tremendous amount of bananas in each store on a daily basis," he says. "These are small-medium sized regional chains typically selling dairy products and currently serviced by traditional broadline distributors like Core-Mark International, Eby-Brown and McLane Company. They have tremendous potential for selling fresh produce as they have some experience with limited shelf-life products

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and multiple deliveries per week.”

Wholesalers view increasing potential in drug stores driven by health concerns. “All types of stores are looking at health trends and produce is a big part of this,” says Mele. “In some Manhattan drug stores, the floor you walk into now is all fresh.”

Rubin Bros. serves drug store customers by providing value-added salads. “Many drug stores are adding fresh produce to their food sections, trying to make their outfits more of a one-stop shopping experience,” shares Rubin.

While not “new” in many metro areas, produce and juice carts and bars are enjoying an uptick in business. “In New York, we are seeing more food truck juice bars due to several factors,” reports Stefanie Katzman, executive manager at S. Katzman Produce/Katzman Berry Corp in Bronx, NY. “These include a national focus on healthy eating in general, a focus on kale and other greens as a superfood, and of course consumers’ search for the next big fad. Our sales on various items increased as more of these formats pop up

**“Though we see fresh produce popping up in all kinds of new places; the format we see the most growth in is online sales.”**

— Dan Vena, John Vena, Inc.

around Manhattan.”

The explosion of online shopping also provides opportunity as innovative online retailers such as FreshDirect and Blue Apron revolutionized produce home delivery. “Though we see fresh produce popping up in all kinds of new places; the format we see the most growth in is online sales,” asserts Dan Vena, salesman at John Vena, Inc. in Philadelphia. “Whether it is grocery services, meal subscription services or a fruit of the month club, we see this area as being very active.”

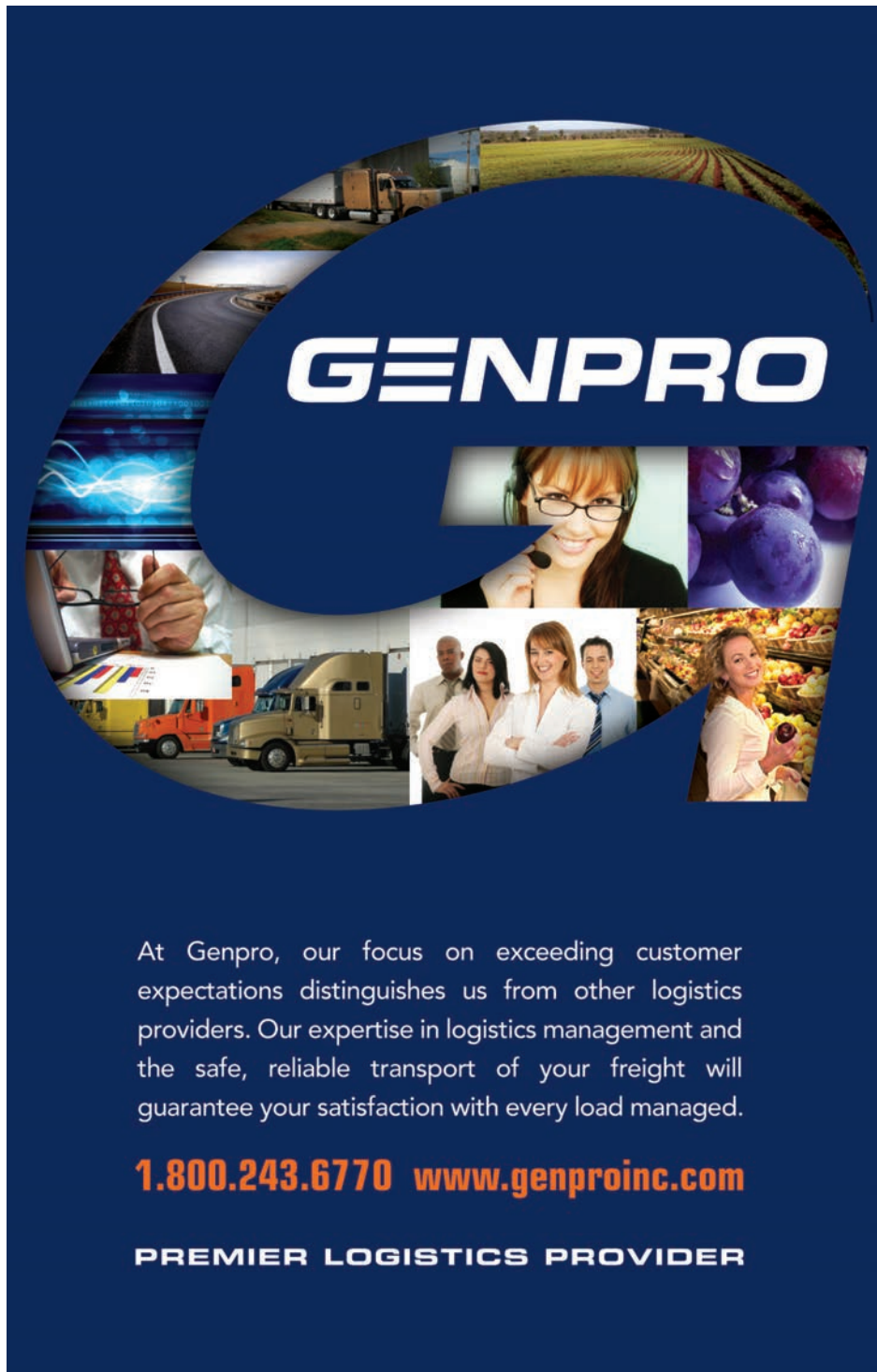
#### GROWING PAINS

Servicing nontraditional formats presents challenges beginning with basic produce knowledge.

“New fresh format customers face the pains of educating themselves on fresh product handling and establishing themselves as a fresh food destination through marketing and other investments,” reports Pro\*Act’s Jacob. “It requires high-quality, food-safe products to let consumers know they are serious. They must be able to offer these items on a consistent basis in clean environments with proper display capabilities. If they cannot meet these expectations, they will not be successful; many tried and failed, but it’s only because they don’t have all the necessary ingredients to win.”

C-stores are challenged to move from a focus on shelf stable to shelf life. “Our stores have excelled at selling packaged items,” says NACS’s Lenard. “You stock it, you sell it, you restock it. The model for fresh is different. You need to carefully manage spoilage but still know you will have it. Out of stocks, in many cases, are worse than having too much product.”

RLB found numerous formats not yet prepared for handling fresh. “We spoke to all kinds of formats, and the one common hurdle is how many [people selling produce] don’t understand produce and are limited in the time and commitment to do it,” says Mele. “There are a lot of pieces to this puzzle. Produce isn’t easy. The big plus side is the higher profit margins in produce — this is the carrot for stores making the necessary commitment.”

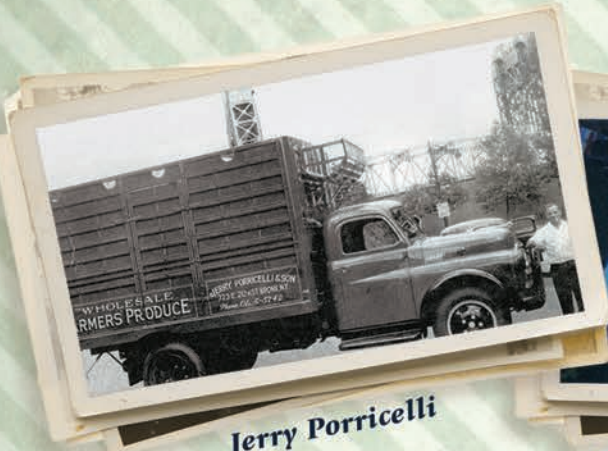


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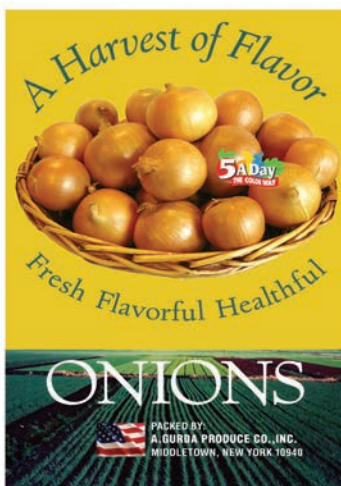
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However, dealing with nontraditional formats helped some wholesalers stay current in a changing retail world. “In many cases we found the people driving these new formats, particularly online retailers, are on the cutting edge or even ahead of their time,” says Vena. “In fact, our first experience supplying an Internet retailer was in the 1990s, using a dial-up connection. That company failed because the technology wasn’t there yet, and the market wasn’t ready, but obviously the idea

was a good one.”

Procacci also reports how the shifting dynamic tasks its business to stay relevant. “It keeps us on our toes and adept to what’s going on in retail inside and outside brick-and-mortar supermarkets,” says Feighery. “We’re all learning how to adapt and stay current to the up-and-coming generations that will dominate the consumer landscape in the near future. It allows us to provide value to our current customers through different means,

## ■ 10 CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADDING PRODUCE IN NONTRADITIONAL OUTLETS

According to “Are You Fit for Fresh?” — a resource checklist published by Alexandria, VA-based Association for Convenience and Fuel Retailing (NACS, which is formerly known as the National Association of Convenience Stores) and the Washington, D.C.-based United Fresh Produce Association — here is a checklist for businesses thinking of adding produce:

### 1. Customer Base

Since women and Millennials seek out fresh products to a greater extent than other demographics, is your store in a high-traffic location for these demographics, in particular? If so, you may want to explore how to market or merchandise specifically to these groups.

### 2. Existing Product Sales

There are several products that go hand-in-hand with produce sales. Strong sales of yogurt and health bars and nuts are good indicators that your customers would support a fresh produce program. Other items may also demonstrate support, like strong coffee sales.

### 3. Traffic Patterns

What time of the day do you have the most customers and what are the demographics associated with each daypart? Are there specific opportunities within these patterns to sell more produce by daypart? And are you in or near a high-traffic area? You may be able to sell more to-go snacks to commuters.

### 4. Location

Are you located near a college/university, hospital or upscale residential area? These groups may be more likely to purchase produce for snacks, particularly value-added produce. Are you in an urban food desert or rural food desert? These areas may be more supportive of some pantry sales/bulk purchases of produce.

### 5. Distribution

Do you receive at least two deliveries per week? Without more frequent deliveries, examine whether you want to seek out alternative distribution from other sources and have the ability to manage this added complexity.

### 6. Store Layout

Does your store have enough room to add an open-air cooler to display produce and other better-for-you items? Do you have enough room for racks or bins for other produce that does not need to be refrigerated? How easily can you reset the store to capitalize on seasonal opportunities?

### 7. Equipment

Do you have adequate refrigeration space for perishable products, whether merchandising coolers or backroom storage for product not yet on display? Is there other equipment that you might use to reduce shrink?

### 8. Cleanliness

Is your store clean? Cleanliness is a strong visual cue to support the sales of fresh items, whether produce or other foods.

### 9. Signage/Marketing

Do you have the capability to offer signage both inside the store and outside — including at the pump or even on the gas price sign?

### 10. Resources/Commitment

Will you have the time and ability to train staff to handle fresh produce? Will you have the tools to train employees about how to manage spoilage? Will the management team be prepared to commit to a program for a minimum of six months, to ensure a proper trial of a new produce program?

SOURCE: NACS/United Fresh Produce Association

be it packaging or marketing or new products we can help them acquire.”

A few years ago, John Vena Inc. was selected to supply the produce, bulk and pre-packaged for an online retailer during its start-up phase. “It was a difficult process for us, but both organizations benefitted,” shares Dan Vena. “It forced us out of our comfort zone and we had to learn ‘on the job’. We are stronger and better positioned to serve them today as a result of the experience.”

Through this venture, Vena realized the necessity of being sensitive to a variety of customer needs. “These newer formats often have different expectations than what we are used to in the produce industry,” he explains. “We needed to develop new processes, deliver options and pack styles to meet their needs.”

Together, wholesalers and nontraditional outlets must learn more about each other. “We’re in the midst of learning more about a sort of new retail segment,” says Frank Paone, director of marketing for Procacci Brothers. “At the same time, we have the opportunity to educate this group on the produce industry to which they’re fairly new. It forces you to be collaborative and creative in product assortment, packaging, merchandising — whatever

**“We’re all learning how to adapt and stay current to the up-and-coming generations that will dominate the consumer landscape in the near future. It allows us to provide value to our current customers through different means ...”**

— Rick Feighery, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp.

you need to do to cater to this emergence. That sort of innovation leads us to open more value and more opportunities for our existing customers and markets.”

#### THE “WHOLE” ADVANTAGE

The variety of wholesaler attributes fits well for addressing the challenge of these nontraditional formats. “Our varied product lines and ability to react quickly to fill shorts or provide substitutes along with shorter lead

times on orders create opportunity for both the wholesaler and these kinds of customers,” explains Vena. “Particularly online merchants or those with very short delivery windows have a business model really requiring quick reaction from suppliers.”

Joseph Mercurio Produce puts great emphasis on maintaining direct contact with these customers on a daily basis. “Service within a very short delivery time makes us valuable to these types of businesses,” states Mercurio.

Caito notes a multitude of details to consider when selling within these channels. “Products need to be fresh, flavorful, priced right, easy to carry, and easily sold by part-time cashiers,” he points out.

Wholesalers report an advantage in helping some formats focus on flavor and quality instead of appearance. “Companies such as juice bars mostly care about flavor,” says Katzman. “Where a traditional retailer needs to be concerned with outside skin appearance, a juice bar can buy the less expensive box, which is equally good in both quality and flavor, but perhaps a little marked on the outside skin.”

The same holds true for prepared meal companies. “In Manhattan, we have seen devel-

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opment of companies making fresh prepared meals daily and delivering them to offices or homes,” continues Katzman. “Since they are cutting the fruit and veggies up for cooking they don’t have to have a perfect shape or skin.”

The wide assortment carried by most wholesalers is another plus for the nontraditional customer. “Wholesalers offer a wide variety of products allowing these stores to obtain an ample selection of fresh merchandise efficiently,” says Mike Maxwell, Procacci president. “We can customize assortment and

distribution to fit the needs of these stores.”

A produce wholesaler’s diverse clientele means an already existing wide array of options for alternative outlets. “These businesses could utilize our specific support to handle local farmers and other fresh product artisans, as well as the ethnic, organic and specialty items we carry for the restaurant trade,” suggests Pro\*Act’s Jacob.

With the C-store focused on serving customers in an immediate area, having products fitting a certain demographic is a

must. “A lot of these alternative food vendors need to source products to serve their specific customers,” shares Stone. For Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Inc., “we carry a lot of items including an extensive selection of exotics and tropicals such as aloe vera, Thai coconut, Indian eggplant, Blanca Malanga and much more.”

RLB offers a full organic program as well as conventional and local products to its alternative format customers. “These are big demand product lines allowing our customers and us to service many different market segments,” explains Mele. “We see more organics in C-stores on the horizon. Millennials are the ones really driving the C-store trend and they want organics.”

### A UNIQUE ROLE

Produce wholesalers also fill a unique role with their expertise. “We act as consultants and supply chain managers for marketers in these new retail channels,” explains Caito.

Top wholesalers provide merchandising support to nontraditional outlets. “We offer a merchandising counselor to meet with C-stores or drug stores,” shares Bob Corey, chief executive of Corey Brothers, Inc. in Charleston, WV. “We look at what they’re trying to accomplish and suggest creative display ideas for mutually beneficial results.”

The NACS/United document references a major challenge for these types of outlets in having adequate resources to handle produce. “However, a local wholesaler can fill that gap,” advises Corey. “An enterprising wholesaler can even work a deal to put equipment in the store on a lease basis. The dairy industry is famous for this.”

Procacci credits its adaptable resources along with retail experience and knowledge for helping customers succeed. “Our internal and field teams are cross-trained and well-schooled in retail merchandising and product quality control, so we can collaborate with our customers on the best ways for them to showcase and sell their items,” says Maxwell.

Wholesalers often serve as a distribution center or warehouse for these customers. “A lot of these stores are regional and don’t have a national distribution chain to work from,” says Rubin. “So as a regional wholesaler we provide a good venue for them. Without the traditional DC for them to pull from, the wholesaler plays a large part in their supply chain.”

Inventory is a crucial consideration for many nontraditional formats. “They don’t want to carry inventory and it makes sense for them not to carry inventory,” says Stone. “With inventory, there is shrink, and with shrink there



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is loss. When an alternative food seller starts throwing away stuff, they soon won't be in business. They want to control their inventory, want to control their shrink and want to carry fresh produce. They can accomplish this with a local wholesaler."

United Fresh found that fostering a collaboration between traditional produce wholesalers and broadline distributors was a potential key to success for growing sales throughout nontraditional channels. "Traditional broadliners have the distribution network and infrastructure to service hundreds of stores through distribution centers and transportation fleets," reports Oberman. "However, produce-specific wholesalers can provide deliveries to these DCs and help at times with DSD programs for convenience stores in some cases to launch a successful fresh produce program requiring expertise in procurement, storage or processing of fresh produce."

Partnerships between larger wholesalers and produce specialists are cited as an effective solution. "Since larger wholesalers evolved to handle mass volume and deal mainly with semi-trucks in their fleets, they have a difficult time handling smaller needs," relates Pro\*Act's Jacob. "As a result, they end up forcing larger minimum orders — usually delivered once a week. This process can never anticipate consumer demand and quality expectations; thus it leads to the slow emergence of fresh programs in these new formats. The best bet for wholesalers that do not possess these smaller order capabilities is to partner with companies that do, and then provide a 'service' to a broader spectrum of their potential customer base."

During the past year, United Fresh reports seeing partnerships grow between United Fresh member wholesalers and major convenience store broadline distributors to help serve the convenience channel as partners.

## THE VALUE OF VERSATILITY

Flexibility represents another crucial advantage of wholesalers in serving alternative retail formats. "Our versatility in everything we do allows us to customize and build programs with longevity for different kinds of customers," says Maxwell. "From sourcing to distribution to packaging, our resources allow us to remain adaptive to these different needs."

Caito credits its flexibility with saving customers valuable time and resources. "We are able to anticipate and successfully maneuver through many of the unique supply chain challenges inherent with these formats," says Caito. "The depth of our resources and flexibility along with our experience provide quantifiable



PHOTO COURTESY OF PRO\*ACT

advantages for our customers."

Many wholesalers believe there is a direct correlation between versatility and success. "This is a key component for start-ups and new entrants to the produce retail arena," adds Vena.

Wholesalers stress the need to adapt to different order cycles, sizes and times for these alternative formats. "Logistics is a crucial part of serving these customers," explains RLB's Mele. "From the timing of orders, to various delivery requirements at the point of delivery, the process can be complex. From a logistics standpoint, we tried to partner with other suppliers going to those same stores so they can make the delivery. It benefits them and us."

Nontraditional formats benefit from flexibility in delivery and ordering. "We can provide greater frequency of delivery because of our close proximity," says Corey. "Also, we may require a smaller minimum order than a larger mainline distributor."

Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Inc. prides itself on being able to get a customer the volume it needs quickly. "It's not unusual how effective we can be at the drop of a hat," says Stone. "Even though our trucks have designated routes, we have extra drivers and extra trucks. We're accessible every day and these customers know it and appreciate it."

## INTO THE FUTURE

The intersection of easy availability and healthy products sets up a lucrative future for alternative produce formats. "Mobility is a big deal," says Stone. "So if you can set your food cart or store up where people are on-the-move, you have a greater chance for sales. These entrepreneurs recognize and are taking advantage of the demand for convenience and health in the market."

RLB counts serving alternative formats as crucial for future success. "With the consumers'

focus on healthy alternatives, and the demand of younger consumers to get what they want when they want it, more diverse produce outlets will arise," says Mele. "It will be important for wholesalers to adapt to serving these to maintain and build their business."

Pro\*Act's Jacob agrees. "Someone will be addressing these demands," she points out. "If some distributors are too large to effectively embrace these smaller formats, they need to create new distribution solutions and partner with local companies with the proper capabilities to deliver fresh products in smaller drops."

According to NACS' Lenard, convenience stores are already evolving. "It was rare to see stores sell bananas and other whole fruit five years ago," he explains. "Today it is rare to not see it. The prevalence of the open-air coolers is also changing not just the product mix and merchandising, but the perception of what convenience stores can — and do — sell."

Industry leaders forecast an expanding opportunity for nontraditional outlets. "There's still plenty of room for growth in both the smaller formats and e-grocery delivery," says Procacci's Paone. "Consumer demand will drive them both to continue the path of growth. It's all about accessibility and if those offering these services can deliver on quality and reliability."

Growth of drug stores and dollar stores in nonperishables may indicate potential. "The drug stores and dollar stores have tremendous opportunity," asserts Corey. "Look at the volume these stores are moving in grocery and dry goods; it only stands to reason if they had produce they'd move volume there too."

Wholesalers remain open-minded even about what formats may yet come. "These formats, along with formats that haven't even been dreamed yet, will continue to proliferate as the demand for fresh foods and fresh produce increases," says Caito.

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# Insights To Consumer Packaging

What to look for when choosing a retail sales tool that gets results.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



There's nothing like the eye-appealing look of a perfectly stacked apple display. Yet, consumer demand for freshness, convenience and information led the produce industry to take a page out of the consumer packaged goods industry's marketing playbook. That is, fresh fruits and vegetables sold in some type of packaging are on the rise.

More specifically, packaged produce represented more than half (50.6 percent) of all produce department dollars and more than a third (37.1 percent) of produce volume sold in 2014, according to the Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group's FreshFacts data. What's more, demand for produce packaging in the U.S. is forecast to grow 3.3 percent annually to \$5.7 billion in 2017, according to a 2013 study, *Produce Packaging*, published by the Cleveland-based market research firm, The Freedonia Group, Inc. The big driver behind packaging's popularity in produce is its role as a potent sales tool.

"There's been a huge increase in packaging during the past few years, and I think we'll see even more growers offering packaged product moving forward," says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets, a Reading, PA-headquartered chain that operates 40-plus warehouse markets and about 20 "quick shoppes" in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware. "That said, we love the extra sales packaging provides. Instead of customers buying one Clementine, they're buying a whole bag full. Plus, packaging also gives us a lot of flexibility with respect to displays. It's easier to build displays with packaged produce, plus it's

easier for our employees to rotate product to maintain freshness and reduce shrink."

Retailers that source packaged product offering customers freshness, convenience and information can maximize the use of this medium as an effective means to grow produce sales.

## THE FRESHNESS FACTOR

"No packaging is going to be worthwhile if it doesn't optimally maintain the integrity of the product," says Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Pompano Beach, FL-based Southern Specialties. "We use different types of film or micro perforation formulations for different types of produce. We may even change the film design seasonally—based on the growing conditions in the region where we source product in order to assure maximum freshness."

Clear Lam Packaging, Inc., in Elk Grove Village, IL, will introduce its new PrimaPak peel and reseal lidding film technology this fall.

"Flexible packaging is gaining ground, but rigid containers are still utilized because of their merchandising benefits, and because they typically provide enhanced protection for delicate products," says Roman Forowycz, Clear Lam's chief marketing officer. "To support this market, our new line of PET lidding films offers significantly improved sealing performance to PET trays along with exceptional clarity. The lidding can be laser perforated to enhance freshness and overall product quality."

Shelf-life extension is a huge area of innovation in developing food-packaging technology for perishables. For example, the

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*Power of Meat* study published in February by Arlington, VA-based Food Marketing Institute in collaboration with the Washington, D.C.-based North American Meat Institute revealed 57 percent of shoppers cite 'reducing food waste' as a primary packing attribute that promotes purchase.

"Fresh and additive-free foods are often sold at a premium price point, but inherently experience a shortened shelf life," says Jim Belcher, director of retail market development in the Food Care division at Sealed Air in Greenville, SC. "Consumers lose confidence in retailers when they have to throw away food and money. To this end, many of our solutions utilize vacuum technology, which can protect products from: oxygen, cross-contamination, microbial growth, and more — all while simultaneously extending shelf life, maintaining taste and flavor of the food, and reducing the need for preservatives to meet consumers' demands."

While packaging adds costs to the final product, it also can produce a sizable cost savings, says Noam Temkin, vice president of marketing for Temkin International, Inc. in Payson, UT. "For the price of, for example, 7 cents more for packaging, a piece of fruit may

**"Baby Boomers still like to take the time to pick their own produce. To the Millennials, time is everything, and they don't want to spend any more time in the supermarket than they have to."**

— Richard Stiles, Redner's Markets

last seven days longer. That means more sales, less shrink, and a longer time for the consumer to enjoy at home."

### THE BIG 'C' — CONVENIENCE

There's a generation gap when it comes to shopping. "Baby Boomers still like to take the time to pick their own produce," says Redner's Stiles. "To the Millennials, time is everything, and they don't want to spend any more time in the supermarket than they have to. They want

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fresh foods that are easy to grab-and-go. That's why sales of our cups of pre-cut fruits are up."

By 2017, Millennials, or people aged mid-teens to mid-30s, will have more spending power than any other generation, according to the 2009-published book, *Gen BuY: How Tweens, Teens, and Twenty-Somethings Are Revolutionizing Retail*, written by Kit Yarrow and Jayne O'Donnell.

"Recent studies on Millennials' food-buying preferences indicate convenience is a high priority in their purchasing decisions," says Jack Tilley, market research manager for the Shelton, CT-based Inline Plastics Corp. "In response, we developed a line of grab-and-go containers consisting of tamper-resistant snack cups, sandwich containers, and 'Hang-ables' containers that can be merchandised on pegboards and racks. All of these are manufactured from recyclable PET plastic. Several of our snack cups are available with vented lids for products that require additional airflow to allow excess moisture of gases to be released, keeping the food contents fresher longer."

Pouch bags — which swept the produce industry by storm in the past few years — used to hold everything from grapes, apples



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEALED AIR

Sealed Air's Cryovac brand uses vacuum and steam-assisted technology to preserve freshness and heat food evenly.

and oranges to mini peppers and cucumbers. To make this type of packaging even more convenient, plus more economical and environmentally friendly, Chantler Packaging Inc., in Mississauga, Ontario, introduced its EnduroPouch 1.6.

"The problem with the first generation of pouch bags was that handles frequently broke — leaving customers frustrated and retailers with wasted produce and profits," explains Grant Ferguson, Chantler's vice president of

sales and marketing. "Our new pouch was reengineered with reinforced handles and 22 percent less packaging material to save on costs as well as the amount of packing going into landfills."

Ready-to-prepare is another way packaging made fresh produce more convenient. "We saw some traction in convenience items like microwaveable packs, flavor-added products and individually wrapped items," says Randy Shell, vice president of marketing and new business

development at RPE, Inc. in Bancroft, WI.

Melissa's/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles, launched its steamed line nearly a decade ago with baby red beets. Since then, the line expanded to 13 products, including baby Brussels sprouts, peeled potatoes, artichoke hearts and red beets in balsamic vinaigrette — all in the past year. Each 6-ounce product comes with an outer high-graphic cardboard covering that allows it to sit upright on the shelf for better visible merchandising. Inside, the product is steamed and vacuum-sealed into

a ready-to-use plastic pack. Shelf life is 60 days.

“The first two products in this line, the baby beets and lentils, continue to rank in our top 20 selling items, and we offer 1,300 products,” says Robert Schueller, Melissa's director of public relations.

One of the latest convenience packaging ideas from Sealed Air's Cryovac brand uses vacuum and steam-assisted technology to preserve freshness and heat food evenly.

“Consumers can have a plated, fully-cooked gourmet meal that can go straight into the



According to Mann Packing's Kim St George, segmenting each product category by color helps retailers to merchandise the products together and aids the consumer in shopping like items.

microwave and be ready to eat in under four minutes,” explains Sealed Air's Belcher.

#### THE BILLBOARD EFFECT

What's for dinner? Consumers often look for inspiration to answer that question when walking through the produce department. Packaging can act as a mini billboard to catch a consumer's eye, entice them with the fresh look of the product inside, and drop barriers to purchase by giving them quick, convenient usage ideas.

“We try to pick the most attractive packaging when suppliers bring it in,” says John Savidan, director of produce merchandising for Bristol Farms, a 13-store chain based in Carson, CA.

Consumers are attracted to packaging that stands out on a shelf. “The package may have a visually appealing design, be packed in a new package format, contain valuable product information, or it could be completely new and innovative — any of these attributes can attract a shopper,” says Kim St George, director of marketing and communications for Mann Packing in Salinas, CA.

As for colors, St George says it's important to choose package colors that complement the product inside the bag. For example, during the company's redesign of its conventional-cut vegetable line, dark green was chosen for the core vegetables; dark blue for specialty vegetables; deep pink for our signature sugar snap

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**“We really focused on what the consumer wants for the brand refresh we launched in October. This includes transparency.”**

— Karen Caplan, Frieda’s Inc.

peas; and purple for slaws. Segmenting each product category by color helps retailers to merchandise the products together and aids the consumer in shopping like items.

Colorful, high-graphic, kid-friendly packaging can also be an effective marketing and sales enhancer.

“Our Kiddie Clems and Mandarina’s have been very well received by our customers,” says Kimberly Flores, marketing director for Seald Sweet, a member of the UNIVEG Group, based in Vero Beach, FL. “This year, we launched another kid-friendly label for our Clementines. While the Mandarina’s packaging, which we launched last year, was primarily for our sweetest varieties of Clementines and Mandarins, our Kiddie Clems packaging is for the conventional varieties which is essentially the majority of our volume.”

It’s important for consumers to be able to

see as much of the product inside a package as possible, says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive at Frieda’s Inc. in Los Alamitos, CA. “We really focused on what the consumer wants for the brand refresh we launched in October. This includes transparency.”

Temkin International increased product visibility by boosting the efficiency of how it applies its anti-fog coating. “Anti-fog is instrumental to creating a modified atmosphere package that presents well on the shelf,” explains Temkin. An increased amount can be applied to keep clear areas crystal clear, which allows the consumer to see the product. Now, with the addition of custom-built equipment, we have the ability to print, laminate and add matte varnish as efficiently as possible. This allows for the best aesthetics while minimizing additional costs.”

Packaging that allows grower/shippers and retailers to clearly communicate to consumers and deliver messaging tailored to regions, or specific consumer groups, is definitely a trend, says Inline’s Tilley. “Designing packaging with multiple panels provides more space from which to communicate.”

On-pack information is the way Stemilt Growers, based in Wenatchee, WA, uses to communicate with customers and enhance sales at retail. A good example of this, says Roger Pepperl, marketing director, is with cherries.

“We saw our website activity go up by 35



percent during cherry season. We attribute this to the sheer volume of cherry bags in the market during this two to three month time frame since we list our website on pack for more information about how we grow and who grows the fruit,” says Pepperl.

Bristol Farms’ Savidan finds most customers look for “grower insights, nutritionals and recipes” on-pack.

“We added ‘Fresh Ideas’ usages on the back of our packages, photographs of recipes on the front and back of the package, along with a QR code that links to our ‘Veggies Made Easy’ website for recipes and cooking demonstrations,” says Mann’s St George. “We received very positive response to these package design improvements.” **pb**

## ■ PACKAGING TRENDS FOR YOUR RETAIL RADAR

The question to those on the cutting-edge of packaging design is no longer whether a customer is going to buy a product. Instead, the question is how do they want to purchase that particular product, explains Grant Ferguson, vice president of sales and marketing for Chantler Packaging, Inc. in Mississauga, Ontario. “It’s all about looking at how a consumer interacts with a product to discover how best to drive sales.”

**Modified Atmosphere Multi-Packs.** Innovations and improvements in modified atmosphere packaging will enable produce marketers to combine a variety of produce in one pack. “For example, we could see pre-cut carrots, squash and mushrooms for a stir-fry each in its own separate sections of the pack to be sure each retains optimal freshness,” says Noam Temkin, vice president of marketing for Temkin International, Inc. in Payson, UT.

**Smart Packaging.** “Materials that can be synced with ovens and refrigerators and that can determine when a product reaches the end of its shelf life is something we’ll see in the future,” says Jim Belcher, director of retail market development in the Food Care division at Sealed Air in Greenville, SC. “We’ll also see smart packaging that will be able to detect pathogens in a product.”

**E-commerce Solutions.** The growth of e-commerce will bring new challenges, says Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer at Elk Grove Village, IL-based Clear Lam Packaging, Inc. “We’ll be hearing more about ‘omni-channel’ distribution. Packaging will have to deliver solutions satisfying all delivery systems.”

**European Influence.** European-developed packaging technology that includes an in-line weighing system makes it easier for grower/shippers to pack fresh fruits and

vegetables in sealed stand-up pouch bags, says Hans Schur, chief executive of Schur Packaging Systems USA, Inc., an Oceanside, CA-based and Horsens Denmark-headquartered six-generation, family-owned business that installed this type of equipment in more than 700 European locations and uses its fill-and-seal bagging system to pack produce for major retailers such as Tesco and Asda. “You don’t see a lot of sealed pouch bags for fresh produce in the U.S. Our Fresh ‘n’ Go bag provides more surface area for branding than a clamshell, and its handle allows customer to pick it up and take it right to the register.” Schur packed mini bell peppers, asparagus, plums, oranges, kiwi and apples in the Fresh ‘n’ Go bag concept. “We see extreme potential and value for the grower with our line of produce packaging and are excited to bring our technology and creativity to the U.S. market.” **pb**



# West Mexico 'Deal' Takes On New Meaning

As seasons and growing regions expand, product entering the U.S. through Nogales merits expanded buyer attention.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**T**he West Mexico produce deal dates back hundreds of years, but in recent decades it experienced a surge of growth. Over the past 20 years, produce from Mexico imported via Nogales, AZ, experienced an increase of 58 percent in volume from 1.69 million metric tons in 2004 to 2.68 million metric tons in 2014, according to the Nogales-based Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA).

"We are crossing approximately 5.5 billion pounds of produce through Nogales each year valued at approximately \$3 billion," reports Allison Moore, director of legislative and regu-

latory affairs for the FPAA.

The volume represented by the West Mexico deal includes many items central to retail produce departments. "The deal provides consistency in certain items crucial to our department such as the tomato category," says Alfonso Cano, produce director for Northgate Gonzalez Markets in Anaheim, CA, with 40 stores. "If you combine the chili peppers, tomatoes and soft veggies (cucumber, bell pepper and zucchini), it accounts for a significant portion of our sales."

FPAA statistics show the top imported commodities in the West Mexico deal include watermelon, cucumber, squash,

tomato, peppers, grapes, mango, honeydew and eggplant. FPAA trade statistics indicate steady growth in both volume and value of most of these major categories during the past 20 years — a trend expected for the future. "I see these top commodity items continuing to grow strong through Nogales," says Alejandro Canelos, director for Apache Produce Imports in Nogales, AZ. "I don't see any of these major commodities going anywhere but up in terms of volume and value."

As the West Mexico/Nogales industry confronts challenges and takes advantage of opportunities, buyers increasingly look to the deal for availability, consistency and quality. "Companies importing produce from Mexico evolve to meet consumer preferences and implement growing methods to produce high quality, consistent supplies while extending the growing season," says Moore. "This is a benefit for buyers and consumers alike."



## MORE THAN WESTERN MEXICO

What traditionally was called the winter West Mexico deal now encompasses much more than just product grown in Western Mexico in the U.S. wintertime. “Back in 1964, Nogales was only importing five months out of the year,” explains Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer for Ciruli Bros. in Nogales, AZ. “With the growth of better seeds and better infrastructure, now something is coming through the border 12 months of the year. Between Nogales, AZ, and Culiacan, Mexico, was traditionally considered the West Mexico deal, but now what’s fueling the extended growth is the move of hot-house structures further into Central Mexico, by Guadalajara and Mexico City.”

The West Mexico deal took advantage of the proliferation of Mexican produce availability throughout Mexico. “You have your traditionally large Mexico production areas of Sinaloa and Sonora, but then you also have areas such as Guanajuato, Jalisco, Chihuahua and Veracruz showing notable growth,” says Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing in Nogales, AZ. “There is not one state in all of Mexico that is not growing its agricultural industry right now. Nogales continues to offer expansion in season and product variety because of this factor.”

Suppliers encourage buyers to expand their thinking of what the West Mexico deal provides and when it provides it. “A lot of buyers traditionally wait to shop here until October,” says Ciruli. “But in reality, new product is crossing sooner. People tend to think of this as a late fall deal, but we’re really going by mid-September. The same is true on the backside. People think of the deal ending at Easter but many products continue to ship until August. There is much more product to be had here than people realize.”

Expanded seasonality and volume afford opportunity in retail sales. “With evolving growing methods and diversity in growing regions resulting in broader availability throughout the year, suppliers of West Mexico produce can offer longer contracts throughout the season,” says FPAA’s Moore. “For example, the expansion in watermelon supplies and in the melon category as a whole provide a chance for buyers to promote these items throughout the year.”

## MIXING IT UP

An increasing mix of product variety through the Nogales entry point delivers additional prospects in the West Mexico deal. “Every year we seem to expand our commodity

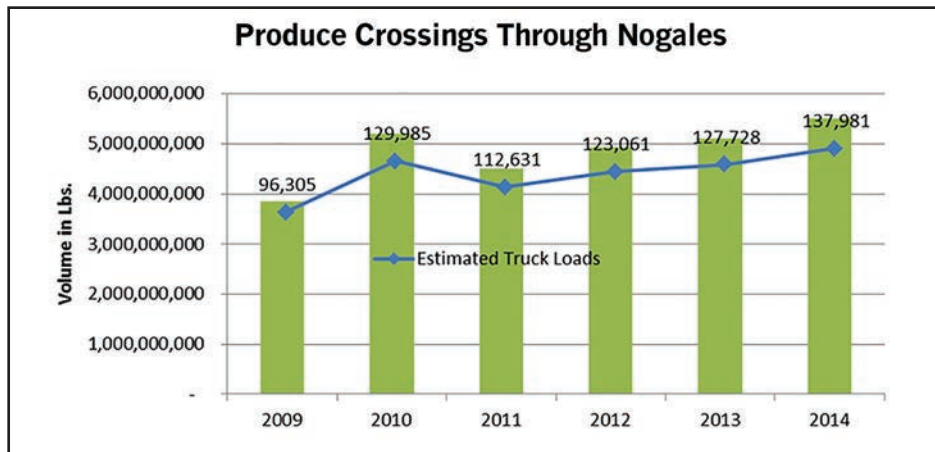


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**“Added retail sales are in the more specialty-oriented products. The way you create sales is by promoting new items, such as the Chinese vegetables. These items add to our sales on the retail side.”**

— Alfonso Cano, Northgate Gonzalez Markets

list of what’s available for U.S. customers,” says Chamberlain.

Suppliers report being encouraged by customers to offer increased product mix to fulfill whole truckloads. “This reduces a customer’s logistics cost when shipping and unloading,” reports Rod Diaz, marketing director for Diazteca Company in Rio Rico, AZ. “Instead of shipping eight pallets of mangos in a particular LTL truck, we ship a mix of mangos, pineapples and Persian limes fulfilling an FTL, resulting in less cost and reduced traffic at the customer’s docks.”

Supermarkets such as Northgate are taking advantage of the increasing mix. “The variety available in Nogales benefits us greatly,” says Cano. “We can pull more out of this area with ease and efficiency.”

Changes within categories offer a different kind of opportunity as evidenced by the continuing evolution of the variety of products within the tomato category. “We are seeing fewer TOVs (tomatoes on the vine) and more Roma and Grape tomatoes,” says Lance Jungmeyer, FPAA president. “All kinds of tomatoes are available here in Nogales, but the weight shifted more to Romas and Grapes.”

Additional options in the garlic category

represent another example of potential variety. “Whereas in the recent past, you saw one or maybe two types of garlic at your typical chain, now you may see three to five,” explains Robert (Bob) Bennen, chief executive of Ta-De Produce Distributing Co. in Nogales, AZ. “Consumers are showing a preference for more natural-colored garlic, rather than the bleached imports.”

Products of historically smaller volume are coming into their own and presenting additional buying opportunity. “What we used to see in small quantities, we now see in larger volume,” says Ciruli. “For instance, we’re seeing more hot peppers, tomatillos, ethnic eggplant (Indian or Italian) and trucks now with 30 or 40 items of Chinese greens.”

Suppliers report an evolving product mix, from mainstream to more specialties. “We are seeing steep growth in Asian specialties such as cooking greens and once-exotics (such as bittermelon) used not only by the ethnic segment but also by Anglo foodies,” says Bennen.

These specialty items represent greater profit potential for buyers. “Added retail sales are in the more specialty-oriented products,” advises Cano. “The way you create sales is by promoting new items, such as the Chinese vegetables. These items add to our sales on the retail side.”

FPAA reports a new Southern Sinaloa irrigation district as impacting the tropical offering. “In the future, we will see more tropical items being grown there and distributed through Nogales,” says Jungmeyer. “This may mean shippers handling exotic items such as rambutan, pitaya, cherimoya, and more.”

## PROTECTED AG AND ORGANICS

Inroads in protected agriculture production methods allowed the West Mexico deal to develop notable volume and consistency in



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## INCREASING VARIETY

Grower Alliance continues to build partnerships with a variety of outstanding Mexican fruit and vegetable growers, increasing an already wide array of available products and extending seasons.

Currently, Grower Alliance offers tomatoes, cucumbers and greenhouse bell peppers from Nogales and McAllen year-round.

Springtime (late March through the Fourth of July) brings watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, green bell peppers, cucumbers and hot peppers into the Grower Alliance portfolio. In summer, the company centers on greenhouse-grown beefsteak tomatoes, Roma tomatoes and bell peppers through McAllen.

The Fall season starts in late September and offers watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/

grey/yellow straightneck squash, and hot peppers through Nogales. Come mid-November, the Winter products expand to include watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, green beans, euro cucumbers, eggplant, and green bell peppers.

## CONTINUING FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY

Grower Alliance is dedicated to continuous improvement in quality and food safety standards. All Grower Alliance growers are both GAP- and GMP-certified, and all fields have been certified for pesticide residue with either Primus Labs or Scientific Certification Systems. Grower Alliance is proud to support its growers in the area of food safety programs and audits. Grower Alliance has two employees who facilitate the audits for its growers. Additionally, the personnel help growers set up their sheds and fields on par with current standards.

## PROVIDING EASY TRACEABILITY

Grower Alliance employs a traceability program through its produce software, Optima Produce. Grower Alliance customers can access traceability information, down to grower-specific and growing-area level, via the Grower Alliance website. Each of the company's growing areas, and in turn each of its growers, has a specific code for identification. Customers can enter the code from the box on the

specified webpage and receive the pertinent information. The software can also provide a report showing when the product was received at the warehouse and when it was shipped out to the customer.

## GIVING BACK TO GROWERS

Grower Alliance's success is founded in the support it provides its growers — helping them grow, prosper and promoting loyalty. By helping growers expand operations and investing in the growing communities, the company ensures high quality, consistent product and good working conditions among its producers.

A major area of support given by Grower Alliance is in expansion of infrastructure. Grower Alliance was able to purchase and install several cold rooms at growers' packing sheds. The company also assisted its growers in the acquisition of more land, and it supplies growers with drip irrigation systems as well as cover for their plants and assists them with the purchase of shadehouse systems.

## IMPROVING LOGISTICS

To better serve customers and meet future growth, Grower Alliance added various services in addition to product sales. With the acquisition of its Nogales building in July of 2011, it began offering in-and-out services to other companies as well as rent office space to them. The company also offers consolidation ser-

**GROWER ALLIANCE, LLC**



vices for companies outside of Nogales that want to load in one location as opposed to picking up in different warehouses. Three years ago, Grower Alliance began shipping through McAllen, TX, to

better serve customers and keep a fluid working relationship with them.

**MAINTAINING INTEGRITY**

The company puts great emphasis on

honesty and integrity in business. Grower Alliance takes its role seriously to ally top-notch growers with successful customers to benefit all parties and provide the end consumer with excellent product.



**GROWER ALLIANCE SALES STAFF**

TOP LEFT TO RIGHT: FRANK HERNANDEZ, JORGE QUINTERO JR, LUIS ALCANTARA  
BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: ALAN DURAZO, JORGE QUINTERO SR, ALEX ANGULO

high-quality products. “During the past 20 years, we saw protected ag products go from niche items to dominant items,” says Apache’s Canelos. “Protected ag completely revolutionized the way things are produced in Mexico. At the end of the day, it [protected produce] yields better products at a lower price with more consistency.”

The industry looks toward even greater investment in protected ag. “Stronger productions of shade and greenhouse are on the way resulting in higher quality and secured year-

round supply,” reports Diaz of Diazteca.

New and innovative products introduced to the marketplace are at times an outcome of the protected ag development push. “An important result of the developing seed technology in protected ag is the development of new products, for example, the bags of sweet small peppers,” says Ciruli. “The challenge comes as there are more items we want to put into a hothouse, but we need for the seed technology to keep up with our ambitions. As we continue to develop seed technology, we’ll

**“Mexican fruits and vegetables represent a great opportunity to provide consumers a real sweet, flavorful and unique experience.”**

— Rod Diaz, Diazteca Company



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see more items become available.”

Eggplant is another example of a developing success story for protected ag. “Historically, in August, you wouldn’t normally see eggplant from Mexico,” reports Ciruli. “It was unheard of a few years ago, but this August we saw some crossings.”

As demand for organic product increased in the U.S. market, the West Mexico deal took a greater role as well. “Organic produce is gaining a strong foothold across the country, and this is true in Nogales as well,” says J-C’s Chamberlain. “A few years ago, you saw only a few Nogales distributors have sufficient availability of organic products; but now across Nogales, there are at least 10 distributors with organic in ample supply. Many distributors are increasing their organic programs at a fast pace.”

**THE CHALLENGE OF DIFFERENTIATION**

While organic and protected ag products present distinct opportunities, retailers can capitalize on various aspects of the West Mexico deal. “The protected ag industry has undoubtedly raised the quality-bar overall, but field-grown still has its place,” says Ta-De’s Bennen. “Retailers learned when to offer field versus greenhouse items based on quality, volume, pricing and shopper demographics. It actually enhances the assortment level for the chain, thus benefitting both them and their customers, because consumers today want choice.”

Suppliers report the West Mexico focus as similar to any other source — the pursuit of differentiation as suppliers and for customers. “We hear a lot of customers saying, ‘we know you have the main items, but give us something unique we can offer,’” says Ciruli.

The West Mexico industry anticipates differentiation with better-tasting product. “For so long the industry focused on producing to last on the shelf,” explains Ciruli. “Now we’re trying to get back to the flavor of tomatoes and melons. Retailers can really separate themselves by carrying items with stand-out flavor. It

comes down to the quality they're carrying and the uniqueness of what they're offering."

The challenge of transportation also offers the West Mexico industry another mode for differentiation. "Transportation is a challenge industry-wide right now, and we're looking for solutions," says Chamberlain. "We're investigating the advantages we can capitalize on, and we're exploring opportunities in rail."

West Mexico distributors continue to explore numerous ways to improve logistics. "We've been trying to bring back rail transportation," reports Ciruli. "When my dad started here, they did a vast majority of business by train; now we do virtually nothing by train. We're looking at how train service can fit our needs. We are also putting product on boats to deliver to the East Coast."

### GENERATE CONSUMER INTEREST

The West Mexico industry shares the challenge of the entire industry of helping generate greater interest in its products. "One of the key challenges impacting the produce industry is continuing to drive an increase in consumer purchases," advises FPAA's Moore. "How does the supply chain, from growers, to shippers, to retailers, create more sales and excitement?"

While many of the Nogales importers and Mexican suppliers offer customer support, the strength in retail promotion specifically comes from cooperation. "Where we really



Rod Diaz is marketing director for Diazteca Company in Rio Rico, AZ.

see success as an industry is when industry promotes together," states Ciruli. "We have great success through promotion boards such as the National Mango Board and the National Watermelon Board. The grape growers are doing a great job promoting too."

Ciruli credits the work of the mango marketing organization with increasing sales. "Since the creation of the National Mango Board, what we're able to cross on a weekly basis has grown amazingly," he says.

Diazteca also coordinates with the mango board. "We work together to support promotional efforts through retailer demos and promotions, plus magazines, newspapers, TV shows and other activities," says Diaz.

Flexible and innovative contracting and

pricing also help promote products. "Buyers should be looking for ad lid prices, so they can place attractive promotions in weekly specials," advises Diaz. "Mexican fruits and vegetables represent a great opportunity to provide consumers a real sweet, flavorful and unique experience."

West Mexico marketers report working with more season-long contracting and negotiating in various ways. "We have month-long, quarter-long and seasonal contracts," shares J-C's Chamberlain. "The pricing structures are becoming more unique in this deal. We are marketing our products in larger volumes for longer periods of time. This benefits consumers with fewer ups and downs in pricing. We are seeing less daily pricing and much more marketing in larger numbers for more consistent periods of time."

The support buyers receive from Nogales is noted as a huge benefit to the West Mexico deal. "The most important factor to our buying in this deal is how all the sales are done out of Nogales," says Cano of Northgate. "There are a lot of comparative advantages, because they give us real-time information. If we were dealing with the farms directly, there would be a lot more time spent in procuring and delivery. Nogales offers us an easier and more efficient way to get the product. It's better for us to know Nogales has eyes on the product and is able to prevent many problems."

Today's retailer increasingly relies on preferred vendors to provide information on product. "The supplier who offers solutions rather than just a sales pitch is in a more favored position," says Bennen of Ta-De. "Education is crucial support for chains. With corporate resources being cut, plus the high turnover rates, there has been decreased effort toward educating produce personnel. This is where the smart vendor can come in with a category review, a promotional test, a consumer outreach campaign, and make a difference." **pb**

## ■ GREATER CHALLENGES FOR WEST MEXICO

by Jodean Robbins


While the West Mexico deal prospered through innovation, hard work and fortuitous seasonality, solutions for certain challenges remain elusive. Difficulties in the U.S. economy represent one of these complex conundrums. "We went through some rough patches in the U.S. economy in recent years and it made business tougher," says Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing in Nogales, AZ. "Solving wider economic issues may be out of our reach, but when it comes to food and what we do in our industry, people still need to eat. So, we need to adapt and find solutions."

Another ongoing challenge facing the produce industry in West Mexico is intertwined with politics — as the Mexican tomato industry learned in years past. "Especially going into a presidential election year, political challenges and issues can get difficult," says Chamberlain. "These are hard to deal with, because there is no

telling what direction they will go."

Also in hand with politics is the accompanying stigma of Mexican produce safety. "The market needs to feel confident Mexican produce is safely grown and in compliance with social responsibility and sustainable resources," says Rod Diaz, marketing director for Diazteca Company in Rio Rico, AZ.

Experienced buyers and responsible suppliers helped instill confidence in Mexico's production. "Twenty years ago, people were concerned about where product came from, but now the stigma is gone," says Alfonso Cano, produce director for Northgate Gonzalez Markets in Anaheim, CA with 40 stores. "We don't see people as concerned about product coming from Mexico. Our expectations and specs from product we get from Mexico aren't any different from other products — we expect the highest quality and consistency." **pb**



# Florida Fall And Winter Produce

Taking advantage of promotions and tools for optimum merchandising can boost bottomlines.

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

**A**s summer turns to fall, all but the nation's warmest regions stop mass-producing many of the fruits and vegetables most popular with consumers. When that happens, grocery store managers trust southern states to keep them stocked with fresh produce.

West of the Mississippi River, the majority of the American-grown fresh produce available in the fall and winter comes from California and Arizona. On the other hand, "90 percent of what ends up on people's plates east of the Mississippi comes from Florida," says Lisa Lochridge, director of public affairs for the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, the primary advocacy organization for Florida growers and shippers headquartered in Maitland, FL.

Florida has always been a major food producer. "We consider agriculture one of the three major legs of the stool that our economy runs on," says Lochridge. (The other two are

tourism and real estate.) Growers are scattered throughout the state, but the lower half of the peninsula sees the highest production numbers. Southern Florida, including Palm Beach County and the area around Lake Okeechobee, is the best area for specialty fruit and vegetable crops. Citrus tends to dominate in central to southern Florida.

"The urban areas are on the coast, but you go 15 miles inland and you're in sweet corn or tomato fields," says Lochridge.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), which is based in Tallahassee, reports the state exports \$4 billion worth of produce every year. Of the 300 different commodities produced in Florida, the best-selling items include citrus, tomatoes, strawberries, bell peppers and sweet corn. "These products are shipped throughout the state, the United States and some 160 nations and territories worldwide," says Dan Sleep, bureau chief of strategic development for the FDACS. Nearly 25 percent of the state's



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FLORIDA CITRUS PACKERS

exports go to Canada.

## FRESH FROM FLORIDA

Given the state's position as a major food producer, it's not surprising there are a number of organizations dedicated to marketing Florida commodities to consumers.

The largest promotion is the FDACS's



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Fresh From Florida campaign. It provides grocery stores and foodservice professionals with a logo to place on signage and circular advertising, recipes, couponing opportunities, market expertise, information about data trends, producer information and opportunities to earn incentives when they feature Florida

produce.

In some areas Fresh From Florida runs television commercials and arranges sampling events. A logo incentive program offsets a portion of the printing costs for companies interested in including the logo on their packaging and cartons.

## ■ FRESH FROM FLORIDA CAMPAIGN AT A STORE NEAR YOU

Many farmers look forward to the winter because it's a time to rest, plan and prepare for the coming year.

That's not true of Florida farmers, many of whom are in the midst of their busiest growing season. And it's certainly not the case for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), which spends the winter months promoting Florida produce all over the world. The department has been working hard in the last year and has much to show for its efforts.

The FDACS focuses its efforts on the Fresh From Florida campaign, which is entering its 17<sup>th</sup> year. "Retail programs entered a higher level of sophistication during the last four to five years," says Dan Sleep, bureau chief of strategic development for the FDACS. "We're concentrating on building layers of marketing activities around key retail partners. With circular advertising providing the foundation of promotional support, chains are having their success augmented with sampling events, recipes, television ads and couponing opportunities."

The program had a banner season in 2014 and 2015. A total of 12,357 retail stores participated in Fresh From Florida, which was the highest number ever. "Long-term partner Publix Super Markets reached their 1,000,000th individual store ad featuring a Florida commodity," says Sleep. "For Florida farmers, that milestone represents the purchase of more than a billion dollars of their goods."

The Fresh From Florida campaign is also available to retailers in other countries. One-third (or approximately 4,000) of participating retail stores come from outside the United States. Canada is the top participant (which is understandable since up to 25 percent of Florida produce goes to that country).

"Our products can be found in some interesting places like Singapore, Barbados, Chile and right off our coast in Puerto Rico," says Sleep. "Quality and competitive price



**Fresh From Florida's Beef and Sweet Pepper Skewers Recipe**

ing continues to give Florida farmers the edge to compete in nearly every market around the globe."

Scandinavian nations, South Korea, the United Kingdom and Japan also import Florida produce. "We're discovering new products that have unique appeal as we conduct international operations and retail campaigns as well," he adds. "For instance, sweet potatoes sell well in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom. Blueberries are big sellers in Asia. Many Florida juices go to Central America."

Fresh From Florida is available to restaurant buyers through the Fresh From Florida On The Menu campaign. Participating entities receive many of the same benefits as retailers, including use of the Fresh From Florida logo, a subscription to a "Fresh From Florida" magazine and newsletter, and the opportunity to participate in special promotions. FDACS staff are working to help restaurant managers more closely align themselves with local agricultural producers and schedule seasonal events to highlight local growers. So far more than 25 restaurants concentrated around Orlando, Tampa, Jacksonville and Pensacola have signed on to the campaign.

Wherever Florida produce ends up, it only means good news for local growers. "For every million dollars in sales back home, Florida adds 19 new jobs, \$80,000 in tax revenues and \$2.6 million in total economic contributions are added to our state's economy," says Sleep.

**pb**





**East Coast retailers can take advantage of the fact Florida produce is grown close to home.**

“Since 2011, we’ve placed a much bigger emphasis on expanding the number of overall stores participating in the Fresh From Florida retail program,” says Sleep. “Today, more than 10,000 stores in 25 to 27 countries, representing about 60 chains worldwide, take part in the department’s Fresh From Florida campaign in each year.”

Publix Super Markets has participated in the Fresh from Florida campaign since its inception, says Maria Brous, the company’s director of media and community relations. Publix is based in Lakeland, FL, and is the largest employee-owned grocery store chain in the United States. “The campaign has done a great job in the past couple of years with their marketing materials, especially their television commercials.”

The Florida Department of Citrus in Bartow, FL, runs various promotions for Florida citrus products including oranges, tangerines, grapefruit, orange juice and grapefruit juice. It focuses on foodservice, mixology, display materials, cross-merchandising opportunities and retail activations.

Citrus fruits are the top-selling item from Florida, which is one of the few states able to supply them. “While oranges, grapefruit and tangerines are available when in season from October through May, 100 percent Florida orange juice and grapefruit juice make excellent beverages year-round and are not just limited to the breakfast table,” says Tammy Wiard, director of retail marketing for the Florida Department of Citrus. “More than 90 percent of Florida oranges are squeezed for juice and Florida supplies almost 60 percent of the nation’s 100 percent orange juice.”

In addition to national programs, the department is launching a retail marketing, foodservice and public relations program in three select cities (Indianapolis, Columbus and Cincinnati/Dayton, OH) this fall to highlight 100-percent Florida orange juice, says

Wiard. “The program, which aims to help consumers distinguish orange juice hailing from Florida versus the rest of the world, will feature coupons, store displays, events, promotions and more.”

### **STRAWBERRIES, TOMATOES BIG SELLERS**

Strawberries are an extremely popular fall and winter export from Florida. The area around Plant City, FL, which is also home to the Florida Strawberry Growers Association,

is known as the “winter strawberry capital of the world.”

Strawberries harvest from November to early April, says Sue Harrell (aka Strawberry Sue), the association’s director of marketing. “We target the Northeast market. Most of our fruit ships east of the Mississippi.”

Harrell plans to present several ideas for retailer promotions at the association’s October board meeting. Check their website for updated information. The one promotion they’ve already announced is a partnership

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The area around Plant City, FL, which is also home to the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, is known as the “winter strawberry capital of the world.”

with the World Food Championship, which takes place in Kissimmee, FL from Nov. 3-10. The top 10 finishers in the dessert category will be required to make strawberries a major ingredient in their recipes.

Florida growers begin harvesting tomatoes in late September and finish in June, says Reggie Brown, manager of the Maitland-based Florida Tomato Committee. The 50 to 75 tomato producers in Florida ship predominantly to East Coast cities and into Canada. The committee shares several merchandising resources on its website. In addition to brochures and other printed materials, consumers can now play a video game that explains why Florida tomatoes are both delicious and nutritious.

Florida grows more sweet corn than any other state in America. Although the season peaks in April and May, corn is available year-round. The Fresh Sunshine Sweet Corn Council provides retailer training videos, printed materials such as posters and price cards, and POS resources.

### TROPICALS BRING WINTER SUNSHINE

Tropical fruits from Florida provide retailers with fun and different foods to showcase in the fall and winter. Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Brooks Tropicals, a grower/packer/shipper of premium tropical produce based in Homestead, FL, says starfruit, guavas, papayas, coconuts, dragon fruit and Uniq fruit are among their most popular sellers. The company ships all over the eastern United States but concentrates sales in the Northeast.

Starfruit has been available in U.S. markets

for a long time but never loses its appeal. When sliced, the pieces have a star-shaped appearance. “Starfruit from Florida is drawing lots of interest,” says Ostlund. “They’re sweeter than imports.” Displaying a sliced starfruit in the produce department is a great way to increase sales.

Guava and Caribbean Red papaya are two fruits that are becoming much more popular, reports Ostlund. “Papaya has lots of health benefits. People see it as a good bang for your buck because of its large size.” Uniq fruit, a cross between a tangerine and grapefruit, is new to many consumers. They hail from Jamaica and become available in November. It’s a popular breakfast treat. “Almost all tropicals do well in the fall and winter,” says Ostlund. “Consumers are interested in eating healthier, and they’re willing to try something new to reach their lifestyle goals. The tropical aisle is benefiting from this new heightened attention.”

### MERCHANDISING TIPS

In addition to participating in promotional campaigns, there’s a lot produce managers can do to merchandise Florida produce in the fall and winter months.

“I think the key is to make it visible,” says Lochridge with the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association. “If people know they can still buy fresh tomatoes from Florida in the dead of winter, that’s going to keep them coming back.”

East Coast retailers can take advantage of the fact that Florida produce is grown close to home. That’s a big plus for consumers who are increasingly interested in eating locally and buying from family farms. It’s also a benefit for people who believe in buying American-grown products.

“As summer produce disappears, eating locally isn’t as easy,” says Ostlund. “Most consumers love the idea of expanding locally grown to domestically grown for fresh produce year round.”

Local means different things to different people, says Lochridge. “It doesn’t necessarily mean eating something that was grown within 150 miles from home. It can mean it was grown in your region or your state. For some people it just means it was produced in the United States. People like to know where their food comes from. If retailers can give that information to consumers, that goes a long way with them.”

Publix chooses to find its fresh produce close to home – “defined as the states in which we operate,” says Brous. “Next, if the product isn’t available locally, we look across the U.S.

If the quality and quantity is not available within the U.S., then we look abroad. It’s been a system that has worked very well for us.”

Produce from Florida is healthier because it’s fresher “than fruits and vegetables from Mexico or China or someplace like that,” says Tom O’Brien, president of C & D Fruit and Vegetable Company in Bradenton, FL. “That’s a huge point nowadays. People want their produce to come from a few states away.”

The FDACS reports the majority of Florida’s 47,000 agricultural producers are small farms like C & D Fruit and Vegetable. The company is managed by a third generation of the O’Brien family. Their main winter crop is strawberries, but they also grow vegetables such as cucumbers, squash, peppers and beans.

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If stores sell products from family farms, that's a very valuable thing to share with customers because they are increasingly concerned about where their food comes from. "When produce comes from a family farm, it makes consumers feel more comfortable," says O'Brien.

The personal touch that comes from working with a small farm can be a big benefit to grocery stores as well. "We give our cards to retailers," says O'Brien. "If a produce manager has a question, call us. If there's a customer in the store and you need a question answered, call us. We'll get the information to you."

Consumers interested in eating seasonally may be interested to know that citrus is at its peak in the winter. "Florida grapefruit tends to be its juiciest and most flavorful between

November and January," says Wiard with the Florida Department of Citrus.

"The key to advancing tropical sales is to provide information," says Ostlund. The same can be said for any other fruits and vegetables consumers aren't used to seeing all the time.

As an example, Ostlund points to whole coconuts, another tropical food seeing increased interest. "People want to know how to select them, open them and cook with them," she reports. "Your consumers want a leg up on how to enjoy this fruit."

Brooks Tropicals has a mobile website consumers can access via text messages and QR codes, says Ostlund. The site provides information about tropical fruits, advice for cutting and serving them, recipes, nutrition

information and more.

Providing recipes and sampling can get consumers thinking outside the box about how to use fall and winter produce. People tend to think about serving fruit desserts in the summer, when berries and stone fruits are at their peak. Tropicals can make fruit desserts a winner in the winter months as well. Since they're naturally sweet on their own, they don't even require much sugar, which fits with the trend toward healthier eating.

"Unexpected combinations can provide new ideas and inspiration to shoppers," says Wiard. "A versatile product such as Florida citrus can be promoted in a variety of ways spanning all parts of the day, from breakfast to cocktail hour." **pb**

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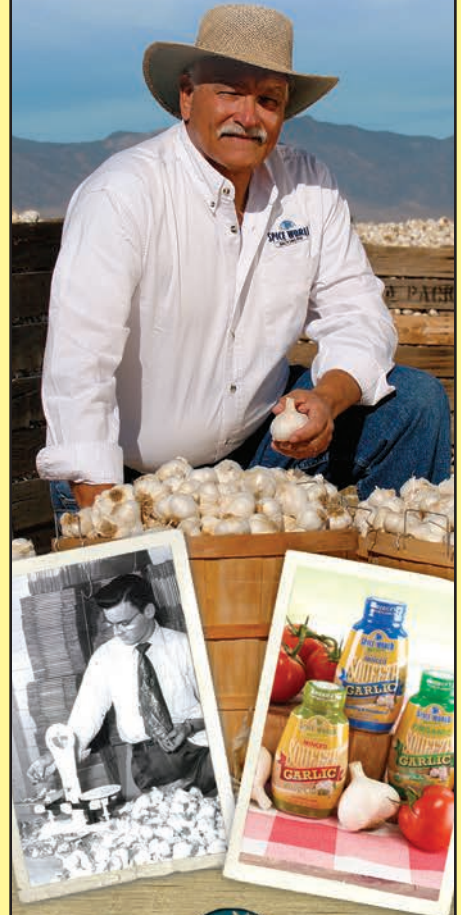


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# RED RIVER VALLEY

## Color Me Potato



### Northern plains' red potatoes rise in popularity. BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

**G**rowers and shippers of the Red River Valley red potatoes invite retail and foodservice buyers to compare their fresh red potatoes to all others produced in any other growing area in the country. The Red River Valley potato industry claims its annual harvest is unparalleled in quality, color, texture and taste. A multitude of buyers appears to

agree, as they look forward to each season's crop.

With more than 250 growers producing more than 40 million hundredweight (cwt.) per year, potatoes grown in the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota are sold either as fresh, chips, seed and processing. Of that total, an estimated 17 percent goes to the fresh market. The region is the third largest

potato-producing area in the nation, according to the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA), based in East Grand Forks, MN.

The colorful spuds reaching the fresh market result from growing conditions that are unique to anywhere else in the world. The results of what used to be a mammoth glacial lake, the rich black loamy soil of the Red River



Ted Kreis of Northern Plains Potato Growers Association Inc.



Dave Moquist of O.C. Schulz & Sons



Randy Boushey of A & L Potato Company



Carl Hoverson of Hoverson Farms

Valley contributes to the brilliant hues of red potatoes, along with an increasing volume of yellow spud varieties. The texture and smoothness of these spuds are added bonuses for the consumer.

Small compared to Russets — which account for almost half of the retail dollars spent in the retail category — red potatoes are gaining market share. According to Ted Kreis, NPPGA's marketing and communications director, Nielsen Scantrack data shows red potatoes account for 18 percent of the fresh

market, which has steadily risen from 15.2 percent in 2011.

Even more noteworthy is the rise in popularity of yellow-flesh potatoes. Five years ago, yellows accounted for only about 4 percent of the fresh total. Today, estimates show that figure has risen to between 9 and 10 percent.

Luckily for buyers, the Red River Valley has both reds and yellows. Several area growers report they increased their yellow plantings to keep up with demand. During the 2015 growing season, timely rains and other favor-



Potato harvest and washing for packing was in full swing in the Red River Valley by September.

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able conditions from Mother Nature resulted in a high-quality crop of both reds and yellows. Growers in some areas were concerned that a lack of moisture toward the end of the growing season would hurt the crop. However, much needed rains did fall over much of the region during the last weeks in August.

“We have a nice-sized crop, with good quality,” notes Mike Rerick, vice president of sales and marketing with Buxton, ND-based NoKota Packers Inc. “Our fields are spread into different areas throughout the Red River Valley, and in two other regions,” to help hedge bets against isolated adverse weather conditions that might cause destruction in specific fields. The company normally packs and ships 700,000 hundredweight (cwt.) of its own crop, plus an additional 300,000 cwt. for growers.

Associated Potato Growers Inc., based in Grand Forks, ND, also offers the advantage of widespread acreage. The cooperative, the largest packer in the Red River Valley, is managed by Paul Dolan. “We have 16 different growers that are bringing potatoes to us,” he points out, “and we have packing sheds in three growing areas. This allows us to be more diversified and it helps with weather-related problems.”

Associated has gradually been increasing its plantings of yellow varieties to meet demand. While reds still comprise the majority of shipments, yellows are now about 7 percent of the cooperative's total volume.

*Continued on page 88*

## ■ WHAT'S NEW IN THE RED RIVER VALLEY? By Sandy Lindblad Lee

### ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWERS INC., Grand Forks, ND —

Paula Sonterre joined the staff as food safety coordinator and employee safety manager, reports Paul Dolan, manager of the co-op, which operates from three locations in the Red River Valley. Sonterre brings with her extensive experience in employee and food safety.

At APGI's Grand Forks location, upgraded equipment includes a new potato polisher. "We have one in our Grafton (ND) location that worked well for us. Now we added one here," notes Dolan.

**A&L POTATO COMPANY INC., East Grand Forks, MN** — Jenni Boushey was added to the A&L sales staff and is also the food safety specialist, according to Randy Boushey, co-owner. In addition, long-time employee Frankie Vargas has been promoted to production manager.

In the packing facility, an upgraded

potato line, which features more precise and accurate weighing and sizing, was designed specifically for A&L by Kerian Machines, Inc. in Grafton, ND.

**NOKOTA PACKERS INC., Buxton, ND** — More upgrades in the packing facility relating to food safety and sanitation now surpass the specifications necessary to earn a superior score in the various audits, notes Mike Rerick, vice president of sales and marketing for the company. "All of our farms are also GAP-certified [Good Agricultural Practices] as well." Food safety is "a huge focus for us," he emphasizes.

**O.C. SCHULZ & SONS, INC., Crystal, ND** — Upgraded equipment was installed as the company dove into the 2015-16 shipping season. Owner and salesman/transportation coordinator, Dave Moquist points out how his company differentiates itself from the competition. "We aren't a commercial

wash plant. We grow our potatoes, and we pack and ship them ourselves. We have total control over our own product. Because of that, we can do a better job of packing."

**KERIAN MACHINES INC., Grafton, ND** — The company continues to expand into specialized sizers for an increasing number of commodities, ranging from fruits and vegetables as small as Brussels sprouts to larger produce items such as cantaloupes. President and owner James Kerian explains the three primary advantages the Kerian's machines offer customers are gentle handling, precision, and simple designs. "We have the only mechanical sizer that is gentle enough to sort vine-ripe tomatoes," he says. "We offer precision sizing down to as small as blueberries, and our simple machine designs are both rugged and affordable." **pb**

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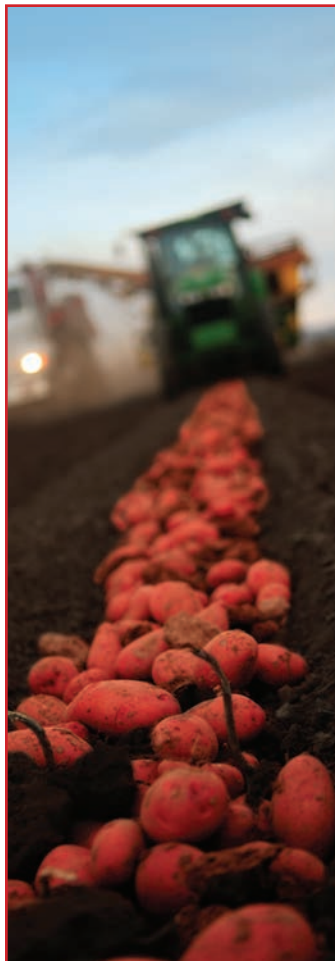
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(L-R) Ron Gjelsness, Mike Rerick, and Carissa Olsen, who are part of the sales and transportation staff at Nokota Packers Inc. in Buxton, ND.



(L-R) Justin Dagen, independent potato grower; Carl Hoverson of Hoverson Farms; and Kurt Holland of Mountain Valley Produce.

Continued from page 86

### VERY FLAVORFUL

“We are known for having a better flavor, along with better nutrition if people eat the peel,” stresses Randy Boushey, co-owner of East Grand Forks, MN-based A&L Potato Co. Boushey also points to the built-in advantages of the high-color reds produced in the Red River Valley. “Since appearance is 80 percent of purchase, it’s hard to ignore how good our potatoes look in retail displays.”

At Associated Potato Growers, Dolan notes the fresh potato producers grow on dry land, which is a key to producing a tastier product. “There are a lot of irrigated red potatoes, but we’re probably one of the few areas that doesn’t irrigate. The reds coming out of other areas in Minnesota (Big Lake and Long Prairie) and the south are irrigated,” he explains.

Boushey adds, “Our non-irrigated reds have higher solids than irrigated, so they are creamier and more full-flavored. When you

have a good-tasting potato to begin with, you don’t need as much enhancement. Because of that, not as many calories are added, since you don’t need to add as much butter or sour cream to improve the great taste that’s already built in.”

Russ Davis Wholesale is a Wadena, MN-based supplier for retail, with five distribution centers in three states. Stephanie Sands, potato buyer and category manager, agrees Red River Valley potatoes are superior to much

**RED and YELLOW** potatoes continue to gain market share; source from the leader.

The Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota is the U.S. leader in red potato production; beautiful yellow varieties too! Visit [RedPotatoes.net](http://RedPotatoes.net) for more information.

A & L Potatoes	800-365-5784
Associated Potato Growers	800-437-4685
Black Gold Farms	800-777-9937
Campbell Farms	800-222-7783
Folson Farms	800-377-1581
Heimbuch Potatoes	701-724-3293
J.G. Hall & Sons	701-894-6112
Lone Wolf Farms	701-248-3482
NoKota Packers	701-847-2200
Northern Valley Growers	888-740-6464
O.C. Schulz & Sons	701-657-2152
Spokely Farms	218-946-2825

**O.C. SCHULZ & SONS, INC.**

*Growers and Shippers of Quality Red River Valley Potatoes*

*Fresh Reds in all Sizes*

Crystal, North Dakota  
 Phone (701) 657-2152  
 Fax (701) 657-2425  
 e-mail: [ocschulz@polarcomm.com](mailto:ocschulz@polarcomm.com)





(L-R) Mary and James Kerian of Kerian Machines in Grafton, ND.

of the company's competition. "They have a consistent, nice color, good texture, and great flavor."

Sands, who is based in Russ Davis' Inver Grove Heights, MN, location, likes working with the shippers in the Valley, because they put in extra effort to deliver a consistent, attractive product. Sands also emphasizes, "consumers strongly prefer the Red River Valley potato. We want to give the customers what they ask for."

Affiliated Foods Midwest, based in Norfolk,



The staff of the U.S. Potato Board strikes a fun pose at the barbecue at Hoverson Farms during the USBP summer meeting in Livermore, ND.

NE, supplies more than 800 stores in the 16-state Midwestern region. Jason Anderson, its produce director, says in addition to its freight advantage due to its location in the Upper Midwest, the Red River Valley and its potatoes provide other plusses. "We just really enjoy the color and clarity of the product. They hit the quality market we are looking for."

### PACKAGING

While the trend toward a wide variety of

smaller packaging continues, NoKota Packer's Rerick points out the company offers "all types of retail consumer packs." While the most popular red potato packaging is in the 5-pound size, the 10-pound option ranks second. The company also offers 4-pound packs, which sometimes become more popular when wider price discrepancies to the Russets occur.

O.C. Schulz & Sons is based in Crystal, ND, toward the northern end of the Red River Valley. Owner and salesman, Dave Moquist

*We've grown and shipped our own potatoes since 1950*

**Sales:** Greg, T.J. and Rodger Hall  
**Hoople:** (701) 894-6112  
**Fax:** (701) 894-6114

FRUIT AND VEGETABLE  
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**GENTLE:** Separates without damaging peaches, apples, mushrooms and fresh tomatoes

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**SIMPLE:** Effective but simple design provides a rugged, low cost, low maintenance machine at a high value to our customers. It can even be used in the field!

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Contact **Don Harris** at:  
 Phone: 269-903-7481  
 E-mail: [Don@HarrisProduceVision.com](mailto:Don@HarrisProduceVision.com)

says the company expects to have good, promotable volume for retailers throughout the season. Although most of his volume goes to wholesalers and repackers, he offers all retail pack sizes. The most popular packages leaving his facility are the 5- and 3-pound versions.

Associated Potato Growers' Paul Dolan agrees. The 5-pounder is the most popular choice he sees as well, although the company packs 4- and 8-pound bags.

A&L Potato offers all of the popular packaging choices, and Boushey says consistency



(L-R) Jeff Lazur, Greg Holtman, and Paul Dolan are shown in the conference room at Associated Potato Growers Inc., Grand Forks, ND.

## LET GO OF YOUR #FOMO

(fear of marketing outside-the-box)



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and quality should be improved this year since the company installed an Odenberg electric grader. He also points out, "one of our advantages is we're one of the only sheds that runs year-round," and claims "our packing plant is cleaner than most kitchens."

### PROMOTIONS ENCOURAGED

The NPPGA is making a concerted effort to get more red potatoes into the school lunch programs and is participating in the U.S. Potato Board's (USPB) "Salad Bar Challenge." The USPB called for "potato-friendly" salad bars to be donated by the industry, and it, in turn will match "one-for-one [salad bar], up to 300 each year for the next five years," according to a USPB press release.

Red River Valley growers purchased two salad bars so far, and one installed at Park River School in Park River, ND, received positive feedback from school administrators and students, according to Kreis. One has also been installed in a school in Grafton, ND. "Others in the area also showed interest, so we expect to expand our support of the program."

For retail, the region's shippers generally set up their own promotions, but Kreis says the association can provide additional assistance and guidance as requested. "The best thing we can do for our shippers is to help get the best market returns," he emphasizes. "We want to do things that are meaningful or significant to our growers."

The Red River Valley group continues to have presence at trade shows and is exhibiting, once again, at the annual Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit, in Atlanta this year. Kreis and area grower-shippers exhibited at the Midwest Produce Show and will have a booth at the New York Produce Show in December. The association also has an advertising program directed toward retailers "letting them know consumers are turning more to red and yellow potatoes than they have in the past — and they should be promoted more," says Kreis.

pb

# producebusiness

## AISLE *by* AISLE

## BOOTH *pma* REVIEW

FRESH SUMMIT  
CONVENTION + EXPO



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## PMA FRESH SUMMIT AISLE BY AISLE

### AISLE 100

**BOOTH #147**  
**MARIANI NUT COMPANY**  
*Winters, CA*



Mariani Nut Company supplies retailers nationwide with a full line of natural, premium California almonds and walnuts, along with an expanded line of all-natural seasoned almonds. Packaging options include clear and foil packs. Attractive retail displays are also available.

### AISLE 200

**BOOTH #257**  
**WESTMORELAND-TOPLINE FARMS**  
*Leamington, Ontario*



When you think of TopLine Farms, think TopLine Specialties. Grower

Direct Greenhouse Specialty Produce is our forté, 365 days a year. Ask about our FOB program. TopLine Farms: the Tasty Difference!

### AISLE 300

**BOOTH #315**  
**ZIPNVENT**  
*Hong Kong, China*



We produce flexible laminated packaging — including stand-up pouches with a zipper — for various fruit and vegetables as well as bags for breathable herbs.

### BOOTH #335

**MARIE'S**  
*Brea, CA*

Marie's, a national leader in refrigerated produce dressing, uses the finest ingredients to create its dressings with the homemade-flavor. Marie's — freshness that inspires.



### AISLE 400

**BOOTH #410**  
**HMC FARMS**  
*Kingsburg, CA*

HMC Farms has been growing tree fruit and table grapes since 1887. We provide fresh grapes the way you serve them.



**BOOTH #425**  
**SUNLIGHT INTERNATIONAL**  
*Delano, CA*



Sunlight International, a progressive packer and shipper of premium California table grapes grown by J.P. Dulcich & Sons, delivers the finest table grapes in the world using the most distinctive brands: such as the new Pretty Lady for Halloween; and innovative packaging, such as the new Pretty Lady zipper-top, bi-color 2-pound bag.

**BOOTH #437**  
**THERMAL TECHNOLOGIES, INC.**  
*Blythewood, SC*

The patented TarpLess ripening room from Thermal Technologies is widely used in the industry, ripening more than 75 percent of all bananas processed in the U.S., Canada and Mexico every day.



**BOOTH #466**  
**PAKSENSE**  
*Boise, ID*



Visit our booth to learn about inbound, outbound, and facility monitoring. We work with companies that want easy access to data and provide simply-to-use technology that doesn't interfere with current infrastructures.

**BOOTH #467**  
**TOMRA**

*W Sacramento, CA*

TOMRA Sorting is a supplier of sorting solutions for a wide range of fresh market applications, such as potatoes, peppers, berries, onions, lettuce and more. TOMRA will showcase two new sorters at PMA: The Blizzard and Sentinel II.



### AISLE 500

**BOOTH #515**  
**RED SUN FARMS**  
*Kingsville, ON*



Red Sun Farms' greenhouse grown produce provides produce grown in Canada, USA and Mexico. Stop by to learn about our new Organic Series, which includes collection of tomatoes, bell peppers and cucumbers organically grown indoors for freshness that lasts. Be sure to check out our fully compostable Earth cycle fiber-base packaging for our sweet organic grapes.

### AISLE 600

**BOOTH #615**  
**HOUWELING'S TOMATOES**  
*Camarillo, CA*



Houweling's Tomatoes is a greenhouse tomato grower with farms in Camarillo, CA; Delta, BC; and Mona, UT. Houweling's grows a wide array of flavorful, locally grown tomatoes and cucumbers year-round. Led by Casey Houweling, the company is committed to growing great-tasting produce.

**BOOTH #625**  
**WILCOX FRESH**  
*Rexburg, ID*

Wilcox Fresh has been growing, packing, and shipping premium Idaho Russet potatoes since 1948. We are committed to sustainable agriculture practices and have a 98-plus Primus GFS food-safety rating.



**BOOTH #659**  
**GOURMET TRADING COMPANY**



*Redondo Beach, CA*

Since 1982, Gourmet Trading Company has provided the fresh blueberries, green and white asparagus year-round to consumers worldwide. We pride ourselves not only on our quality produce but also in the lasting relationships we formed with everyone involved in our vertically integrated supply chain.

### AISLE 700

**BOOTH #727**  
**BORTON & SONS, INC.**  
*Yakima, WA*

A fourth-generation grower/packer/shipper of the high quality apples, pears and cherries in Washington state.



**BOOTH #735**  
**SENSITECH INC.**  
*Beverly, MA*

We are a leading provider of supply and cold chain visibility solutions ensuring food safety and quality throughout the supply chain. Using the latest in cellular technology, the TempTale GEO provides temperature and location data in real-time allowing full visibility, rapid decision making, and continuous improvement for all shipments.



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**BOOTH #747**  
**T. MARZETTI COMPANY**  
Columbus, OH



T. Marzetti Company is a manufacturer of refrigerated salad dressings, dips, and salad toppings as well as the very successful Marzetti Simply Dressed line. See what's new for this year!

**BOOTH #847**  
**CARLSON AIRFLO**  
Brooklyn Park, MN

Carlson AirFlo Merchandising Systems obtain results! See the newly designed AirShelf, AirClean System and Floral displays. Discover more effective, cost-efficient solutions for your produce department.



**BOOTH #1115**  
**BARD VALLEY**  
**MEDJOO DATE GROWERS**  
Bard, CA



Bard Valley Date Growers, established in 1987, is a consortium of growers in the U.S. Because our harvest comes from our own trees, we offer fresh, delicious and best-in-class dates year-round. Visit our booth to try these delicious dates, and sample brand new flavor additions to our Date Roll line.

**BOOTH #1239**  
**USA ONIONS/**  
**IDAHO-E. OREGON ONIONS**  
Parma, ID

USA Onions/Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee ships more than 1 billion pounds of yellow, red, and white Spanish Sweet onions in August through May each season.



**BOOTH #769**  
**VALUED NATURALS**  
Dover, NJ

Valued Naturals is a nut and snack manufacturer designed for produce retail pre-packaged and bulk needs. A "dirt-to-the-bag" company, we import raw materials direct from growers all over the world, eliminating the middleman. Stop by our booth, chat and sample our Toffee Cashews and Pecans!



**BOOTH #857**  
**WHOLLY GUACAMOLE**  
Saginaw, TX

Looking for the most delicious way to grow your sales? Come try America's No. 1 selling branded guacamole and category leader! Our guacamole is hand-scooped, gluten-free, and kosher.



**BOOTH #1200**  
**BOOTH #1217**  
**NASH PRODUCE**  
Nashville, NC

Nash Produce is a year-round supplier of North Carolina sweet potatoes. Specializing in retail and foodservice, we offer electronic-sized potatoes in a variety of basic and value-added packaging. We have private label, customer service and GlobalGAP- as well as Primus-certified product.



**BOOTH #1300**  
**BOOTH #1315**  
**CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY FARMS**  
Watsonville, CA

We know the future depends on the actions of today, so we place concerns for the environment, food safety, excellent quality and service at the core of our business.



**BOOTH #774**  
**NEWSTAR FRESH FOODS**  
Westlake Village, CA



NewStar Fresh Foods continues to innovate the iceless category. Stop by our booth to see how we are reinventing the wet rack and boosting sales and customer experience on all of our offerings. It is a new way to sell flavor!

**BOOTH #900**  
**BOOTH #947**  
**ALLIANCE RUBBER COMPANY**  
Salinas, CA

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



**BOOTH #1221**  
**LGS SPECIALTY SALES**  
New Rochelle, NY

LGS is your year-round source for premium produce from around the world with a reputation for innovation and maintaining the highest standards of excellence in produce quality, packaging, service and food safety. Our core group of commodities includes Darling Clementines, Suavo Avocados, Darling Citrus and grapes.



See our ad on page 102.

**BOOTH #800**  
**BOOTH #829**  
**WADA FARMS**  
**MARKETING GROUP, LLC**  
Idaho Falls, ID

At Wada Farms, a grower/shipper of potatoes, sweet potatoes and onions, we strive to provide our customers with a diverse variety of fresh produce. We also provide innovative packaging, analytical data services and sustainable efforts.



**BOOTH #1100**  
**BOOTH #1135**  
**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 created the well-known "Grown in Idaho" seal, which symbolizes quality, known around the world.



**BOOTH #1328**  
**KEENAN FARMS**  
Avenal, CA

Keenan Farms is proud to be family owned and California grown for more than 40 years. We produce pistachios for health-conscious snacking. Brand new in 2015, we spiced up the pistachio line with Salt & Pepper and Chili Lime inshell options. Visit our booth and sample the new flavors as well as our traditional pistachios — roasted to perfection!



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**BOOTH #1332**  
**THE VISION PRODUCE COMPANY**  
*Los Angeles, CA*

The Vision Companies are proud to announce expansion of our FOB Nogales operations, which includes additional inventory/cold storage, cross-dock and mix pallet accommodations. Grower direct deals for the fall and spring include La Vision Honey Dews, Cucumbers, Chili Peppers and Watermelon.



**BOOTH #1333**  
**FOXY FRESH PRODUCE**  
*Salinas, CA*

Check out the newest Super food — Foxy Organic Broccoli-Leaf! The sweet, tasty leaves of the broccoli plant are available in bunches and now in bags. An excellent source of vitamins A, C and K, as well as Calcium.



**BOOTH #1333**  
**GROWER-SHIPPER ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA**  
*Salinas, CA*

The Grower-Shipper Association pavilion will take you on a tour of Salinas Valley, "The Salad Bowl of the World." Exhibitors include: Andrew Smith Company, BajaSon Growers, Braga Fresh Family Farms, Church Brothers, Foxy Fresh Produce, Ippolito International, Mann's Fresh Vegetables, and Steinbeck Country Produce.

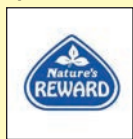


**BOOTH #1333**  
**BAJASON GROWERS, LLC**  
*Salinas, CA*



BajaSon grows and ships premium fresh green asparagus year-round from California and Mexico. Custom packs and private label available. We look forward to discussing your asparagus program requirements and are confident you'll find BajaSon to be the only asparagus supplier you'll need. We are your grower-direct sourcing option.

**BOOTH #1333**  
**STEINBECK COUNTRY PRODUCE**  
*Spreckels, CA*



Steinbeck Country Produce is a third-generation, family-owned grower-packer-shipper of premium fresh produce. Operated by the Huntington Family and headquartered in Salinas, CA, we proudly market our vegetables and strawberries under the "Nature's Reward" label year-round.

**BOOTH #1333**  
**IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL**  
*Salinas, CA*

Ippolito is one of North America's largest Brussels sprouts grower/shippers. Ask about our new value-added packs. We also offer a full line of vegetables, including artichokes, iceberg, broccoli, cauliflower, romaine hearts, green onions, leaf lettuces, asparagus and specialty vegetables.



**BOOTH #1333**  
**CHURCH BROTHERS**  
*Salinas, CA*

Church Brothers, a leading grower/processor/shipper of more than 500 fresh vegetable SKUs, will showcase its Heirloom red spinach along with all new retail packaging.



**BOOTH #1333**  
**BRAGA FRESH FAMILY FARMS**  
*Soledad, CA*

Braga Fresh Family Farms sells Josie's Organics brand premium-quality organic vegetables, inspired by grandmother, Josie Braga. Today, the Bragas farm their home ranch, established in the 1920s, plus thousands of organic acres throughout California and Arizona.



**AISLE 1400**  
**BOOTH #1459**  
**POTANDON PRODUCE**  
*Idaho Falls, ID*

Potandon Produce can provide complete category solutions for retail, wholesale, and foodservice customers.



**AISLE 1500**  
**BOOTH #1525**  
**PERO FAMILY FARMS FOOD COMPANY**  
*Delray Beach, FL*

Pero Family Farms Food Company, LLC is an over 100-year-old, privately owned, family agricultural farming business specializing in the retail and wholesale of high quality produce as a grower/packager/processor/distributor.



**BOOTH #1557**  
**GIUMARRA COMPANIES**  
*Los Angeles, CA*

Experience quality, flavor, and world-class service with the Giumarra and Nature's Partner global line of fruits and vegetables — including Fair-Trade certified produce grown in Mexico.



**BOOTH #1567**  
**SUMMERIPE**  
*Reedley, CA*



Our fruit is grown by family farmers. We continue to lead the industry in research, varietal development, ripening, and food safety. Summeripe is Non-GMO Project Verified.

**AISLE 1600**  
**BOOTH #1614**  
**SAN MIGUEL PRODUCE, INC.**  
*Oxnard, CA*



The Growing Standard of Greens. The vertically integrated grower/processor from California and Georgia celebrates 20 years of the original Cut 'N Clean Greens. Organic greens, Asian vegetables and Persian herbs are available.

**BOOTH #1632, 1633, 1733**  
**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES**  
*Tallahassee, FL*

"Fresh From Florida" is recognized worldwide as the brand representing more than 300 Florida grown commodities. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services promotes Florida produce domestically and internationally to consumers, retail and wholesale customers on behalf of Florida's 47,000 farmers.



**AISLE 1700**  
**BOOTH #1747**  
**SEALD SWEET INTERNATIONAL**  
*Vero Beach, FL*



Visit us to see what's fresh, new and exciting at Seald Sweet! We are a leading supplier of the citrus category and more — including grapes, apples and pears. We are proud members of the UNIVEG Group of Companies.



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**BOOTH #1753**  
**NATURIBE FARMS**  
*Salinas, CA*



Naturipe is more than a trademark — it's a trustmark. Naturipe represents a commitment to be a trusted source of fresh and value-added berries that are vibrant, nutritious and delicious.

**AISLE 2000**  
**BOOTH #2029**  
**NEW YORK APPLE ASSOCIATION**  
*Fishers, NY*

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



**AISLE 1900**  
**BOOTH #1919**  
**DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE**  
*Coral Gables, FL*

Del Monte Fresh Produce offers retailers and foodservice operators an array of innovative solutions to address the changing tastes and lifestyle needs of today's consumers.



**AISLE 2200**  
**BOOTH #2211**  
**CLEAR LAM PACKAGING, INC.**  
*Elk Grove Village, IL*

Clear Lam will showcase: new metalized premium PET rollstock; our SP707 family of films designed for superior wet and contamination sealing to PET trays, cups or platters; and our revolutionary PrimaPak system that produces flexible, stackable, re-closable packages produced from a single roll of film.



**AISLE 2300**  
**BOOTH #2315**  
**NEW YORK APPLE SALES**  
*Gleasant, NY*

As New York's premier sales agency, we team with multiple growers and packing facilities throughout New York State — located in all the major growing regions — to deliver the best selection, competitive pricing, and superior fruit all year.



**BOOTH #2319**  
**TORREY FARMS INC.**  
*Albany, NY*

Torrey Farms is a family farming operation in its 12th generation. Farming more than 12,000 acres in western New York, we grow/pack/ship cabbage, cucumbers, squash, green beans, miniature pumpkins, yellow and red onions, as well as round white and yellow potatoes.



**BOOTH #2439**  
**RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES**  
*East Grand Forks, MN*

The Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota is the largest red potato-producing region in the United States. The area's 24,000 fertile acres of Red River Valley soil are irrigated by prairie rains to produce some of the best tasting potatoes in the world.



**BOOTH #2453**  
**STEMILT GROWERS LLC**  
*Wenatchee, WA*

Stemilt Growers is a leading family-owned, grower/packer/shipper of apples, pears, cherries, summer fruits and organics from Washington state. Visit our booth to see all that is new with Stemilt including: Fresh Blenders apples, Lil Snappers kid-sized fruits, Rushing Rivers pears, and Piñata apples.



**BOOTH #1934**  
**BALL DESIGN**  
*Fresno, CA*



Every day, we think about food — especially produce. How to dynamically design it; how to creatively advertise it; and how to effectively promote it.

**BOOTH #2247**  
**SUNKIST GROWERS**  
*Valencia, CA*

Like a cherished family recipe handed down through generations, our citrus is nurtured by more than 120 years of experience. At Sunkist, we're deeply committed to tradition, but also to innovation and sustainability, both on the farm and in the marketplace — embracing fresh approaches for citrus lovers today and tomorrow.



**AISLE 2400**  
**BOOTH #2415**  
**SETTON FARMS**  
*Cammack, NY*

Producer of "America's Best Tasting Pistachios," Setton Farms offers a full-line of California pistachios and proudly features 100 percent all natural Pistachio Chewy Bites with whole pistachios, cranberries and agave nectar.



**BOOTH #1947**  
**CALAVO GROWERS**  
*Santa Paula, CA*

Calavo Growers continues to be the worldwide leader in the procurement and marketing of fresh avocados as well as the manufacturing and distribution of prepared avocado products, guacamole, and salsa.



**BOOTH #2266**  
**THE TOFURKY COMPANY**  
*Hood River, OR*

The Tofurky Company introduces five delicious flavors of plant-based "Chick'n": Lightly Seasoned, Sesame Garlic, BBQ, Thai Basil and Tandoori. All are 100 percent vegan, non-GMO and ever-so-tasty!



**BOOTH #2418**  
**HUDSON RIVER FRUIT DISTRIBUTORS**  
*Milton, NY*

Hudson River Fruit Distributors is an industry leader, supplying fresh eastern apples for over 50 years. A fourth generation family-owned business, HRFD is the grower/packer/shipper for all your apple needs.



**AISLE 2500**  
**BOOTH #2514**  
**CHANTLER PACKAGING INC.**  
*Mississauga, Ontario*



A leader in flexible packaging and innovative solutions for fresh and frozen produce. Reduce food waste through products like PrimePro Shelf Life Extension film. Check out our EnduroPouch 1.6, now with the gauge engineered to be more cost effective.



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## PMA FRESH SUMMIT FLOOR PLAN





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## PMA FRESH SUMMIT FLOOR PLAN



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## PMA FRESH SUMMIT AISLE BY AISLE

### BOOTH #2522 HARVEST SENSATIONS Los Angeles, CA

Harvest Sensations is the premier quality solution for year-round asparagus, snow/snap peas, beans and world-class specialties. We provide our customers a full line of organic produce and an array of value-added warehouse and logistics services from our premier East and West Coast facilities.



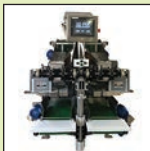
### BOOTH #2553 TEMKIN INTERNATIONAL Payson, UT

Temkin International's standup pouches offer a clean presentation, convenience and protection. They are available in a variety of sizes, feature high-barrier laminations, re-sealable zippers, and self-supporting bottom gussets. Temkin provides some of the fastest, most versatile printing capabilities with inline 11-color printing and improved, industry leading anti-fog coatings.



### BOOTH #2747 AG-PAK INC Gasport, NY

The new Ag-Pak AP7000 Double Wicketed Bagger is fast, reliable and easy to operate and maintain. Designed, engineered and manufactured by Ag-Pak, the AP7000 Bagger offers an optional, internal, fully-integrated check-weigher system, and is backed by dependable Ag-Pak service technicians from coast-to-coast.



### BOOTH #2850 ROYAL ROSE Salinas, CA

Royal Rose is the Italian owners of parent company, CULTIVA. Stop by to learn more about Royal Rose LLC's recent SUPERFOOD certification, and our extensive line of nutrition-packed, colorful, chicories. Royal Rose's commodity line brings innovation to the bagged salad category; our unique retail packaging options provide solutions for the produce aisle.



### BOOTH #2527 FRESKA PRODUCE Oxnard, CA

Freska Produce was formed in 2004 with the intention of providing our customers with the "World Finest Mangos" year-around from the best growers in Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Guatemala. With year-around availability and a superior Food Safety record, we hope to demonstrate our intent to bring high quality, food safety conscious mangos and avocados to the marketplace.



### BOOTH #2570 ATLAS PRODUCE & DIST., INC. Bakersfield, CA

Atlas Produce & Dist., Inc. is a shipper for the popular 100 percent California-grown Caramel Naturel Medjool Dates, Date Coconut Rolls, Date Almond Rolls and Table Grapes. Stop by to taste the amazing flavor of Caramel Naturel.



### BOOTH #2761 CALIFORNIA SUN DRY FOODS Danville, CA

California Sun Dry Foods dries the finest tomatoes in the sun and packs them in oil seasoned with Mediterranean herbs — resulting in an intensely flavored product.



### BOOTH #2866 GOURMET GARDEN HERBS & SPICES Folsom, CA

Have you tried our Gourmet Garden Lightly Dried Herbs & Spices? They are lightly dried to last for four weeks once opened. They completely refresh in cooking, giving you the closest flavor, appearance and aroma to that of fresh herbs — without the wilt guilt.



### BOOTH #2534 SAMBRAILO PACKAGING Watsonville, CA

In today's evolving marketplace, we strive to help customers improve efficiency with a full spectrum of resource management services related to packaging operations; procurement and replenishment; vendor and supplier management; unit-level traceability and compliance; and packaging development, testing and qualification.



### AISLE 2600 BOOTH #2647 CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION Irvine, CA

Early signs point to an excellent California Avocado crop in 2016. Stop by to learn about planned harvest size and timing, about new data confirming preference for California Avocados and the California label initiative.



### AISLE 2800 BOOTH #2814 MOONEY FARMS Chico, CA

It's been an award-winning year for Mooney Farm's Bella Sun Luci Arbequina Extra Virgin Olive Oil. This year brought multiple medals for Mooney, most notably from the Los Angeles International Extra Virgin Olive Oil Competition. The Olive Oil is available to produce departments on a new display rack immediately.



### AISLE 3000 BOOTH #3020 PRODUCE BUSINESS Boca Raton, FL

PRODUCE BUSINESS is where industry leaders turn for information, insight and understanding. Editor-in-Chief Jim Prevor, whose work also appears online at PerishablePundit.com, will be at our booth. Stop by and learn about our online news site, PerishableNews.com.



### BOOTH #2546 FRIEDA'S Los Alamitos, CA



Don't miss the reveal of Frieda's new look! FRIEDA'S ... INSPIRE. TASTE. LOVE.

### AISLE 2700 BOOTH #2735 BLUE BOOK SERVICES Carol Stream, IL

Whether a sales team requires more leads or a credit team needs rating and scores, Blue Book membership gives the business information necessary to grow and protect any business. We have the data to make confident business decisions.



### BOOTH #2817 DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS Oviedo, FL

With nearly 90 years of experience, Duda Farm Fresh Foods is the largest grower and processor of celery in the United States and around the world. Duda's fresh-cut celery, value-added radish products and citrus are marketed under the Dandy brand, which is sold and served in retail and foodservice establishments year-round.



### BOOTH #3020 PRODUCEBUSINESSUK.COM

Produce Business UK is an online publication for fresh fruit and vegetable buyers, providing access to the analysis, data and opinion that underpins the sector. Through our experienced team of journalists around the world, the UK and European market will benefit from our fresh perspective.



October 23-25, 2015  
Georgia World Congress Center  
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## PMA FRESH SUMMIT AISLE BY AISLE

**BOOTH #3020**  
**PERISHABLENEWS.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.



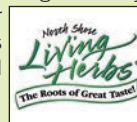
**BOOTH #3020**  
**PERISHABLE PUNDIT**  
*Boca Raton, FL*

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



**BOOTH #3065**  
**NORTH SHORE LIVING HERBS**  
*Thermal, CA*

Come see our expanded Living Produce line. Experts and innovators in our category, we offer healthy flavor options in lieu of salt that consumers love. Retailers like our superior quality and shelf-life. Responsible, sustainable family farm with great story to share with your shoppers. Always in season and sold nationwide.



**AISLE 3100**  
**BOOTH #3134**  
**MAYWOOD FARMS**  
*Corning, CA*

Maywood Farms has pride in producing quality CCOF-certified fresh organic figs. For more than 30 years we've grown Black Mission, Brown Turkey, and Kadota figs that are packed and cooled onsite. Our figs are cooled within minutes of picking to increase shelf life by having our packing shed and cold storage located on our farm.



**BOOTH #3150**  
**MIXTEC GROUP**  
*Glendale, CA*

As the No. 1 executive search firm in produce, we are proud to provide exceptional recruitment and leadership consulting to leading companies in our industry. Stop by our booth and help us celebrate our 30th year in business!



**AISLE 3200**  
**BOOTH #3247**  
**HONEY BEAR BRANDS**  
*Moses Lake, WA*

We are shippers of the finest quality of Washington apples and pears, and we are importers and distributors of New Zealand apples and pears.



**AISLE 3300**  
**BOOTH #3347**  
**MICHIGAN APPLE COMMITTEE**  
*Lansing, MI*

The Michigan Apple Committee engages in marketing, research, education and communications for the benefit of Michigan's apple growers. Michigan ranks third in the nation in apple production.



**BOOTH #3375**  
**RUBY FRESH/JMB**  
*Firebaugh, CA*

Come see and taste Ruby Fresh Jewels Grab-n-Go Pomegranate Arils in convenient 4- and 5.3-ounce snack cups, which are available in handy 2-packs and 4-packs.



**AISLE 3400**  
**BOOTH #3434**  
**WESTROCK**  
*Norcross, GA*

Smart describes the precision mandrel-forming technology from WestRock. Whether it's our high performance Meta Tray 8 — which outperforms most trays in the produce market — or our 2-piece telescoping case design, the Meta System is versatile to meet the needs of your operation.



**BOOTH #3438**  
**BABÉ FARMS**  
*Santa Maria, CA*

Where the "art of the plate" begins! Babé Farms boasts a year-round harvest of colorful baby and specialty vegetables. Family-owned and -operated, Babé Farms is the "couture" label top chefs and fine retailers look to for their gourmet vegetable needs.



**AISLE 3600**  
**BOOTH #3681**  
**COLOUR REPUBLIC**  
*Doral, FL*

Our farms, located in the Highlands in Ecuador, produce exceptional quality roses and other cut flowers. We specialize in sales and full service to mass market customers. In addition to our unique bouquet designs, we offer research, marketing, supply chain, and analytical expertise to develop strategic products.



**BOOTH #3686**  
**CRISPY GREEN**  
*Fairfield, NJ*

Crispy Fruit from Crispy Green is taking a stand at retail. Our new 6-pack stand-up-pouch can still hang on a display rack, but now it can also stand up on a shelf. Crispy Fruit is still 100 percent pure fruit — it just got more convenient.



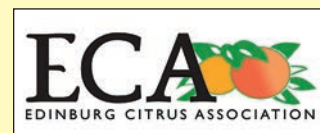
**AISLE 3700**  
**BOOTH #3737**  
**TURBANA CORPORATION**  
*Coral Gables, FL*

Turbana Corporation is a leading importer of tropical produce in North America, including bananas, plantains, pine-apples, and ethnic tropicals. Turbana was the first organization to bring Fair-Trade certified bananas to North America.



**AISLE 3800**  
**BOOTH #3815**  
**EDINBURG CITRUS ASSOCIATION**  
*Edinburg, TX*

Edinburg Citrus Association has been proudly packing quality Texas red grapefruit and oranges since 1932. Our citrus is requested worldwide in our famous Tropic Moon label.



**BOOTH #3868**  
**MICKY'S MINIS**  
*Millstadt, IL*

Micky's Minis is celebrating 25 years of growing/shipping miniature potted plants this year. Come see what's new — including the introduction of our Mini Pot Pal line of "twist-able" turtles and frog. Please visit us in the Floral Pavilion to see this new item, plus much more.



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Atlanta, Georgia USA

## PMA FRESH SUMMIT AISLE BY AISLE

### AISLE 3900

BOOTH #3926

#### GLORIANN FARMS

Tracy, CA



With 50-plus years of family farming experience, GloriAnn Farms is your source for premium fresh sweet corn year-round. To maximize shelf-life, shipments are packed once orders are placed. Shipped under GloriAnn and Majesty brands in a variety of pack styles, GloriAnn Farms offers national distribution of numerous value-added sweet corn product.

### BOOTH #3950

#### EVE'S GARDEN

Land O' Lakes, FL

Eve's Garden is now completing its new 55-acre growing and packing facility. Please visit us to see the new plants and plant-related products we are producing and creating at our new farm.



### AISLE 4100

BOOTH #4160

#### KING FRESH PRODUCE, LLC

Dinuba, CA

Farming with pride for more than 80 years, King Fresh Produce is a vertically integrated company based in Central California with satellite offices in Kansas City, MO, and Yakima, WA. We offer a wide variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, specializing in grapes, citrus, pomegranates, tree fruit, kiwi fruit, and cherries.



### BOOTH #4183

#### PECO PALLET

Irvington, NY

PECO Pallet supplies the best quality pallets and the most responsive service in North America — delivering significant cost savings and improved efficiency throughout the supply chain.



### AISLE 4300

BOOTH #4325

#### COLUMBIA MARKETING INTERNATIONAL

Wenatchee, WA

Over the past 25-plus years, CMI steadily grew into one of Washington State's largest apple, pear and cherry shipper/grower, and it continues to be a pioneer in new varieties, sustainability, creative packaging and growing technologies.



### BOOTH #4346

#### DELTA TRAK, INC.

Pleasanton, CA

FlashLink Cold Chain Export USB Logger is downloaded at any stopping point along a shipping route without special reading devices or adapters. Information is essential when containers are waiting to be loaded at the port or delayed from clearing customs. The logger continues recording temperature up to its final destination.



### BOOTH #4348

#### PRODUCE PRO SOFTWARE

Woodridge, IL

Produce Pro Software provides produce distributors, processors and grower/packer/shippers with the industries' tested software solution. A complete software solution with real-time inventory control, sales, warehouse management, accounting and reporting features.



### AISLE 4400

BOOTH #4433

#### HBF INTERNATIONAL

McMinnville, OR

HBF International sells a wide variety of the freshest specialty berries under the Hurst's Berry Farm brand — from blueberries, blackberries and kiwi-berries to red currants and cranberries. HBF offers premium berries year-round with a commitment of leadership, loyalty and excellence in berries from farm to market.



### AISLE 4500

BOOTH #4515

#### GRAPPLE

Wenatchee, WA

Grapple brand apples reach customers with a new taste and flavor. Try one of the latest juicy, crispy, up-and-coming gourmet Grapple brand apples at Grapple Fruits.



### BOOTH #4521

#### BEACHSIDE PRODUCE

Guadalupe, CA

Beachside Produce, LLC is a year-round grower/shipper, and one of the leading producers and marketers of commodity packed broccoli in the U.S. In addition to numerous grown commodities, Beachside Produce provides a full line of vegetable consolidation for its customer base. Please visit our booth and see what we bring "From Our Family Farms to Your Family's Table."



### BOOTH #4553

#### AURORA PRODUCTS INC.

Orange, CT

Aurora is proud to introduce our original new line of SmoothieFixins! Add our all-natural SmoothieFixins' to your favorite smoothie or breakfast bowl for an added boost of fiber, protein, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. Our whole-food option contains no powders and makes your smoothie not only nutritious, but super delicious!



### BOOTH #4556

#### HAMPTON FARMS

Severn, NC

Hampton Farms is a leading family-owned and -operated processor of nut and nut butter products. The company has a true seed-to-shelf story. The Hampton Farms portfolio includes in-shell peanuts, shelled peanuts and tree nuts, and nut butters. Products are distributed through retail, online, foodservice and ingredient channels.



### BOOTH #4575

#### PURE FLAVOR

Leamington, Ontario

The new type of Fresh, Living Lettuce, from Pure Flavor debuts three different varieties: Boston Green, Boston Red, and Spring Mix. This innovative Living Lettuce allows consumers to continue watering the lettuce to keep it fresh and nourished until it is consumed.



### AISLE 4600

BOOTH #4637

#### WELL•PICT BERRIES

Watsonville, CA

Well•Pict Berries provides 100 percent proprietary conventional and organic strawberries year-round and premium raspberries Spring-Fall. Well•Pict Berries always uses non-GMO, natural cross-pollination and select plant breeding in conjunction with sustainable, environmentally-friendly practices to provide the distinct taste, flavor, aroma, color and shine consumers have come to recognize.



### AISLE 4700

BOOTH #4715

#### AMCO PRODUCE

Leamington, Ontario

AMCO Produce is your one source, full-service, fresh produce supplier. Stop by our booth and learn about our innovative new packaging, organic tomatoes and new "Inferno" Hot Pepper Medley.



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## PMA FRESH SUMMIT AISLE BY AISLE

**BOOTH #4785**  
**NATUREFRESH FARMS**  
*Leamington, Ontario*

Family-owned and employee-managed, NatureFresh Farms ships non-GMO Project Verified greenhouse grown produce year-round to key retailers throughout North America.



**BOOTH #4975**  
**SAGE FRUIT COMPANY**  
*Yakima, WA*

Sage Fruit is a high quality grower/packer/shipper of Washington state apples, pears and cherries. We strive to provide "An Exceptional Eating Experience" for our customers and consumers.



**BOOTH #5333**  
**LACERTA GROUP, INC.**  
*Mansfield, MA*

Specializing in custom packaging for the produce market, Lacerta excels in providing its customers with speed-to-market, low capital investments and innovative solutions. Along with custom packaging, Lacerta carries a variety of stock food products including tamper evident containers, herb clamshells, parfait cups, snack packs and more.



**AISLE 5400**  
**BOOTH #5418**  
**OKANAGAN SPECIALTY FRUIT/ ARTIC APPLES**

*Summerland, BC*  
Stop by to learn more about how the Perfect Fruit Just Got Better! Introducing Arctic Apples from Okanagan Specialty Fruit — the first truly non-browning apples, delivering value from grower to consumer.



**AISLE 4800**  
**BOOTH #4827**  
**DULCINEA FARMS/ PACIFIC TRELIS FRUIT**  
*Ladera Ranch, CA/Fresno, CA*

Delivering the best tasting fruit that consumers love year-round made Pacific Trellis Fruit and Dulcinea Farms respected leaders in the industry. This powerful team is proud to provide the "Fruit of Legendary Perfection."



**AISLE 5000**  
**BOOTH #5075**  
**ITAUEIRA REI MELONS**  
*Fortaleza, Brazil*

Brazil-based Itauera REI Melons will be hosting melon-tasting demos. We promise to amaze all visitors with the great flavor of REI Yellow Honey Dew. Our traceability system uses QR codes on each fruit to assure quality and safety.



**BOOTH #5351**  
**TRANSITEX**  
*Badajoz, Spain*



Transitex is a global logistic operator with a network of offices in the world's main markets. We would like to welcome you at our booth. Our presence in America offers new services, a number of new offices, and a full team.

**BOOTH #5433**  
**FARM RIDGE FOODS**  
*Islandia, NY*

Farm Ridge Foods UnTyPickle Pickles are a stroke of artisanal genius, made with a winning combination of specially selected herbs, spices, and ingredients. *Fresh is Everything!*



**BOOTH #4836**  
**LITEHOUSE**  
*Sandpoint, ID*

Litehouse continues to drive innovation through consumer insights with new product launches of Organics, Greek Yogurt Dressings & Dips and surprising favorites. Please stop by to check out what is new in our house.



**AISLE 5100**  
**BOOTH #5181**  
**GOOD FOODS GROUP**  
*Pleasant Prairie, WI*

GOODFOODS makes delicious, nutritious, high-quality foods with expertise in: guacamole, cold-pressed juices, Greek yogurt dips, and chicken salad. We offer a variety of sizes: single-serve, traditional retail, club store and food-service.



**BOOTH #5362**  
**ROYAL RIDGE FRUIT**  
*Royal City, WA*  
Stoneridge Orchards dips into decadence with a new member of its dark-chocolate dipped fruit line of strawberries. The delectable dried strawberries are dipped in 70 percent cocoa dark chocolate — making them an antioxidant double threat. Dark chocolate is packed with antioxidants and strawberries are loaded with vitamin C and antioxidants.



**BOOTH #5439**  
**ERIEZ**  
*Erie, PA*  
Eriez offers equipment and systems to protect product purity and increase efficiency in food processing operations. Eriez' wide range of metal detectors, magnetic separators, vibratory feeders, screeners and conveyors are designed for the unique needs of the food manufacturing industry.



**AISLE 4900**  
**BOOTH #4957**  
**NICKEY GREGORY COMPANY**  
*Forest Park, GA*

The Nickey Gregory Company is a family-owned, full line fresh produce distributor with warehouse locations in Atlanta, GA, and Miami, FL. We deliver overnight to 12 southeastern states and cover Florida from coast to coast. We are Primus GFS-certified with an extensive food safety program.



**AISLE 5300**  
**BOOTH #5323**  
**APPEELING FRUIT INC.**  
*Dauberville, PA*

Appeeling Fruit, in its 24th year of being in the sliced apple business, is pleased to launch new products and packaging. Sliced organic apples, sliced Honeycrisp, fresh pears along with our red and green slices are available in both retail bags and 2-ounce foodservice packs as well as bulk.



**BOOTH #5375**  
**CIRULI BROTHERS, LLC - Tubac, AZ**  
**HORTON FRUIT CO. - Louisville, KY**  
**GROW FARMS - Louisville, KY**  
**GROW FARMS TEXAS - Donna, TX**  
Through our extensive network, we have access to the most reputable growers to ensure you receive the quality and value that you want — 365 days a year.





Celebrating 25 years  
of excellence in produce quality,  
packaging, service and food safety.





PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNKIST

# CALIFORNIA CITRUS SURVIVING THE DROUGHT

Maybe smaller, and a bit pricier, but healthy as ever.

BY BOB JOHNSON

California Navel and Valencia oranges will be available again this year despite the drought; but water shortages will probably make for smaller oranges and may affect the cost as growers pay heftier prices for water.

"The lack of water is going to affect the fruit size," says Joel Nelson, general manager of Citrus Mutual in Sacramento, CA, which represents 2,200 growers who produce around 60 percent of the state's crop. "We'll have the same number of fruit, but fewer cartons."

This year, like last, some citrus growers will pull out orchards because water is unavailable, too expensive, or of too low quality.

"We're expecting at least 10,000 to 15,000 more acres to be bulldozed," says Nelson. "We already had about 10,000 acres destroyed last year."

Because California sets the market for fresh

oranges, the lost ground will have some impact on this year's prices.

"It may not be a ton more money, but if we've lost 10 or 15 percent of the acreage the price should reflect that," says Davis Roth, president of Orange Cove, CA.-based Cecelia Packing Corporation, which grows 2,200 acres of citrus, and ships 1.2 million cartons. "We personally bulldozed about 100 acres."

## NEW MIX OF VARIETIES

The orchards taken out of production over the two seasons are only around 15 percent of California's citrus acreage, according to California Department of Food & Agriculture statistics, but it still represents a loss.





“You’re basically making a decision that the cost of water is so high, and the quality so low, that it’s not worth keeping the trees in,” says Jim Marderosian, president of Bee Sweet Citrus in Fowler, CA. “We’re talking about 1,000 acres of trees out.”

Tree removal is a strategic move to replace older trees with younger ones, which use far less water, usually of a variety that figures to bring a better price.

“People have land – the land prices have gone up dramatically,” says Marderosian. “If they’re not getting a fair price per acre, they’d look to put something else in. You’d probably put in an exotic, a Mandarin, or lemons.”

Most of the ground bulldozed over the last two seasons is being replanted in Mandarins.

“Mandarins, specifically Clementines, Murcotts and Tangos, are generating the most sales in the citrus category and have surpassed Navel orange sales,” says Bob DiPiazza, president of Sun Pacific Marketing in Pasadena, CA. “The opportunity is to develop late varieties of Mandarins that are also easy peelers.”

Imports fill about a four-month slot with Mandarins, according to Marderosian, but California growers have taken advantage of the opportunity.

“We continue to see growing demand for unique, specialty citrus varieties as consumers become more adventurous with food and eager to try new produce items,” says Joan Wickham, manager for advertising and public relations at Sunkist Growers in Valencia, CA. “Cara Cara Navel oranges, Minneola Tangelos and Meyer lemons are fantastic examples of varieties that are quickly becoming consumer favorites because of their unique taste profiles.”

Pulling Navel and Valencia oranges during the drought and replacing them with Mandarins is continuing a process that was already

## “Meanwhile, Mandarins continue to be a fan favorite; their easy-to-peel feature and sweet taste make them a go-to snack for many consumers.”

— Jim Marderosian, Bee Sweet Citrus

underway, as Mandarin and Mandarin hybrid acreage tripled over the past decade.

California growers are also moving toward production of a number of other specialty citrus varieties.

“Some of our specialty products like the Cara Caras, Blood oranges and Meyer lemons are proving to do well in the citrus market,” says Marderosian. “Meanwhile, Mandarins continue to be a fan favorite; their easy-to-peel feature and sweet taste make them a go-to snack for many consumers.”

There are even important new twists in lemons as more consumers become familiar with the remarkable Meyer variety.

“In addition to Limoneira’s Eureka and Lisbon lemons, we have seen increasing interest in our Pink lemons and Meyer lemons,” says John Chamberlain, director of marketing at Limoneira, Santa Paula, CA. “Meyer lemons are a cross between a lemon and a Mandarin. They have a yellowish-orange skin that is exceptionally smooth and tends to be almost round in shape with a thin skin. The pulp is usually dark yellow, contains less acid and has more juice than a lemon. They have a distinct honeysuckle aroma and a sweet lemony Mandarin flavor. Meyers are a favorite of chefs as they are naturally less tart. They are available year-round.”

Citrus, especially lemons, can even be used in nutritious diets as a healthy substitute for salt that adds interesting flavor.

“Lemons are definitely considered a Superfood,” says Chamberlain. “Just one lemon has more than 100 percent of an individual’s daily intake of vitamin C, which may help reduce cholesterol and strengthen bones. In addition to their medicinal properties lemons add abundant flavor to a variety of dishes.”

Other shippers also emphasize lemons’ potential to add zesty but healthy interest to familiar dishes.

“One Sunkist nutrition program for lemons that is of particular relevance today is our S’alternative initiative, which encourages consumers to reduce their sodium intake by using fresh lemons to flavor their food in place of salt,” says Wickham. “Recently, we released research in conjunction with chefs from Johnson & Wales University that concluded lemons can be used to reduce salt by as much as 75 percent without sacrificing flavor.”

### PRAY FOR RAIN

Despite the temporary disruption in production, the state’s citrus industry looks healthy, assuming the drought eventually ends, but the growers seem an optimistic lot.

“Mandarins continue to grow,” says Nelson. “The revenues are good, to offset the cost of water. You’re probably making \$1,000 an acre more net with Mandarins.”

Most of the orchards bulldozed and replaced by Mandarins last year were marginal but, unfortunately, this year some highly



# The *fastest-selling* mandarin in America. It's *only natural*.

America prefers the original. And for good reason:

- Cuties® sales per store per week are the highest in the nation, making Cuties the fastest-selling mandarin in America:
- Cuties is the #1 consumer-preferred brand of mandarins with the highest quality perception:
- Cuties was the first "whole fruit" healthy choice to be offered in over 14,000 McDonald's® restaurants during season 2014–15, and will be offered again this coming season.
- Sun Pacific and our grower and customer partners spend as much as anyone in the fresh produce industry on marketing support for Cuties.
- Sun Pacific will be bringing several million more cartons of Cuties to market in the 2015–16 season to meet the high consumer demand.

So stock your shelves with Cuties. Because from orchard to store shelf, the sweetness and quality of Cuties can't be beat.



PMA Booth #415 | [CutiesCitrus.com](http://CutiesCitrus.com) | 213-612-9957

\*Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts®. Total U.S. Mandarin Winter Season 2014-15. Cuties \$/store-d/week vs. competition.  
\*\*Strategic Consumer Research, Inc. '14-'15 Brand Equity Study.  
Cuties® is a registered trademark of Sun Pacific.



productive trees will be pulled.

"This year some good Navel acreage will be bulldozed," says Nelson. "A grower won't just turn off the water; he'll bulldoze the trees and replant because the new trees take less water."

Some growers are using the drought as an opportunity to invest in more efficient irrigation systems for the future.

"We're letting the ground lay for two years," says Roth. "These were older trees and one

**"Displays need to be bountiful and compelling, placed in a high traffic area of the department, utilizing color breaks, well-signed."**

— Bob DiPiazza, Sun Pacific Marketing

reason we took them out is the orchard is flood-irrigated, and it took too much water to keep them alive. We have to use our resources well. It takes two-and-a-half acre-feet of water to grow a crop of citrus."

When he does replant, Roth plans to invest heavily in a drip and fan jet irrigation system.

## ■ SMALLER FRUIT, HIGHER COST

They may be a little smaller this year, and perhaps a touch pricier, but there will be oranges from California again this year and some shippers even expect promotional volumes.

"All we have here are Navel and Valencia oranges, but we are set pretty good for water," says Tracy Jones, vice president of domestic sales at Booth Ranches in Orange Cove, CA. "Booth Ranches Navels will be available mid-October through June. There will be promotional volumes available late November through the end of the season. Peak times are February through April."

Even with the drought and the transition to Mandarins, California growers will still be shipping close to 150,000 acres worth of Navels and Valencias this year, which should be more than 80 million cartons.

But with the scarcity of high quality irrigation water to size the fruit, the oranges could be a bit smaller.

"We peaked on 72s and 88s last year," says Joel Nelson, general manager of Citrus Mutual in Sacramento, CA. "We don't really look at the crop until the end of August, but we expect less fruit in the 56 to 72 count that we like."

Not only will the oranges be a little smaller, they may also be more expensive because of the high costs for water.

"It adds up to higher production costs, be it having to dig wells deeper or pay

more per acre foot of water," says Bob DiPiazza, president of Sun Pacific Marketing in Pasadena, CA. "It could result in some acreage with severe shortages no longer being farmed."

But the major California grower-shippers still have supplies in place that allow them to offer at least some citrus varieties 12 months of the year.

"Sunkist offers Navel oranges in the winter and Valencia oranges in the summer, and lemons and grapefruit year-round due to the coordination of our members in various growing areas throughout the region," says Joan Wickham, manager for advertising and public relations at Sunkist Growers in Valencia, CA. "However, peak citrus season in California and Arizona is during the winter months, when supplies are strong and many specialty varieties are available."

And as the citrus industry waits for the end of the drought, there is some solace in knowing this winter fruit is even healthier than we knew.

"The [London-based research] firm Datamonitor has seen that two-thirds of consumers are trying to eat more healthfully but are moving beyond just avoidance behaviors (no salt, sugar or fat) toward positive nutrition, seeking nutrient-rich and functional foods and drink, and these are driving consumer interest," says John Chamberlain, director of marketing at Limoneira, Santa Paula, CA.

Citrus is well-positioned to benefit from this increased consumer interest in healthy eating.

"As an industry, we're constantly learning about the benefits to eating citrus," says Jim Marderosian, president of Bee Sweet Citrus in Fowler, CA. "On top of its delicious taste, citrus is high in vitamin C, which can significantly boost one's immune system. There is also a plethora of ways someone could use citrus products that aren't limited to just consumption."

Once the harvest starts in the fall, California citrus will bring a unique retail opportunity to the gloomier time of year.

"Displays need to be bountiful and compelling, placed in a high traffic area of the department, utilizing color breaks, well-signed," advises DiPiazza, "and at a price that is perceived as a value."

One way to make a bold statement is to include in the display stories of the farmers who grew the citrus.

"Another trend we encourage retailers to leverage is the growing interest in food with a story," says Wickham. "Sunkist is telling the stories of the multigenerational families that comprise the Sunkist cooperative with our Sunkist Family Stories campaign, which shares the rich heritage of our brand with consumers as well as the innovative farming techniques currently being employed to save energy, water and ensure our farmland continues to thrive for generations to come."

**pb**

“We’ll probably plant it back to citrus and use drip irrigation on it,” says Roth. “It’s about \$2,000 to \$2,500 an acre to put drip in, depending on the pump and filter system. After the third year we’ll put fan jets on them to get the trees to grow out.”

The new trees at the Cecelia Packing orchards will largely be Navels grown on more productive rootstocks.

“A lot of the varieties we had were old,” says Roth. “Now with the more vigorous root stocks, we’ll go with Navels on better root stocks. This year we already put in some Cara Caras and Bloods.”

Some growers also resort to the market for surface water, but those prices have gone through the roof.

“To help supplement using groundwater, we are all seeking surface water supplies,” says Tracy Jones, vice president of domestic sales at Booth Ranches in Orange Cove, CA. “The cost for an acre-foot of water can range from \$450 to \$1,500-plus if you find a source. The cost of water is significantly driving farming costs up. We need rain for the obvious reasons, however from a farming perspective rain is also needed to flush out the soil and clean up built up salts and contaminates from the root zone. For this coming season, we are looking at reduced volume in the industry due to the acreage that has been removed and lower yields.”

The water that can cost as much as \$1,500 an acre-foot was just available three years ago, according to Nelson, for as little as \$100 a foot.

Citrus is not unique, as every California crop grown in the Central Valley south of Sacramento is severely impacted by the water situation.

“The drought has impacted every crop grown in California,” says Jones. “Several thousand acres have been ripped up and now stand empty. With the lack of surface water we are depleting our ground water supplies, and the overall fruit quality has suffered and yields are down.”

Despite years of drought the San Joaquin Valley orchard land remains extremely valuable, and few farmers are letting go.

Growers are not walking away from their farms because even in the driest areas of the state farmers remain optimistic and land remains incredibly valuable: Kern County citrus ground in the Southern San Joaquin Valley goes for \$15,000 to 25,000 an acre and the price is trending up, according to the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers’ *2015 Trends in Agricultural Land and Lease Values*. **pb**

## SHOWCASE fall produce



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# SAN LUIS VALLEY

## Potatoes

Buyers can look forward to new  
crop of Colorado beauties.

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE



**S**urrounded by the backdrop of the majestic Rocky Mountains, potatoes grown in the San Luis Valley in southwestern Colorado are often compared to their adjacent beautiful scenery. It is here, at 7,600 feet above sea level (according to the Monte Vista-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee) — the highest and largest alpine valley in the world where commercial crops are grown — where potatoes thrive. The high-altitude growing climate contributes to the potatoes' high quality that are attractive to buyers.

As harvest and distribution gains momentum throughout the San Luis Valley potato region, growers and shippers are predicting demand will continue to

improve through the fall and winter months. At the same time, reduced acreage may create total volume shipped from the San Luis Valley to be lighter this season.

According to Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Monte Vista, CO-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC), 2015 planted potato acreage in the San Luis Valley was at 52,816, which is down from 54,098 in 2014. Ehrlich says weak markets last season, along with crop rotation and some farmers retiring, contributed to the reduction.

Colorado still ranks as the second largest fresh potato-producing state in the United States. Ehrlich also points out the state is the No. 2 in organic, fresh potato production.

Although more than 80 percent of the San Luis Valley spud volume is in Russets, demand increased the Valley's percentage planted in yellows. More than 15 percent of the San Luis Valley volume was in yellows in the 2014/2015 crop.

Ehrlich stresses, however, Colorado can grow any kind of potato buyers and consumers

desire. Purple potatoes, pink-skinned varieties, and unusually shaped potatoes are gaining the attention of a full range of consumers — from executive chefs to “foodies” to creative home cooks seeking new, imaginative ideas for their families or for entertaining guests. “And fingerlings are capturing more attention as well,” explains Ehrlich. “This creates a lot of

opportunities for shippers and more options for buyers.”

## NATURALLY ‘GREEN’

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

---

## ■ SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH AND SCHOOL-DIRECTED MARKETING DOMINATE CPAC PROMOTIONS

By Sandy Lindblad Lee

A revamped website and an increasing focus on social media avenues top the list of the marketing endeavors of the Monte Vista, CO-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC).

“One reason we are updating our website ([coloradopotato.org](http://coloradopotato.org)) is to help reach new consumer segments the U.S. Potato Board research identified,” explains Linda Weyers, CPAC assistant director. “One specific segment is the ‘food enthusiast’ who considers food an experience. They want to try different things while remaining cost and health-conscious.”

Updated pictures, along with increased content management, will be a part of the upgrades. “It will still be both a consumer site and an industry resource,” adds Racheal Werner, marketing administrative assistant.

The committee's additional social media links to Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn are all tools that Weyers says are being utilized. Werner “posts a new potato recipe nearly every day” for current and potential followers, notes Weyers.

United States Potato Board research shows Facebook remains the No. 1 online destination for consumers. Werner continually monitors and updates the committee's Facebook page and utilizes its Pinterest account for recipe distribution.

### Featured On Television

Additional publicity for Colorado potatoes during fall harvest will be through television commercials that were created in coordination with Colorado Department of Agriculture's “Colorado Proud” program. Colorado Proud promotes food and agricultural products grown, raised or processed in Colorado. The commercials aired on Denver's CBS, NBC, FOX, and WB network

affiliates began in late August and featured local growers and attractive potato fields in bloom.

Colorado potatoes will also be represented at the Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit in Atlanta. CAPC had a booth in the Agriculture Pavilion at the Colorado State Fair.

The spotlight on Colorado potatoes was especially bright at the CPAC's annual Potato Festival in Monte Vista in September. The two-day event included entertainment, dinner and one of the more popular activities — free baked potatoes grown in the San Luis Valley served all day. A free Potato Field Bus Tour offered festival-goers the opportunity to learn how potatoes were harvested, packed, and shipped. Several professional and student chefs from the American Culinary Federation's Colorado chapter cooked their tastiest potato dishes for the annual chefs' competition. Kids were the focus through activities such as the potato sack race, the potato-decorating contest, and the “shooting for accuracy” contest, which featured homemade potato cannons.

### Teaching Nutrition

In an effort to reach school-age consumers, CPAC is again coordinating the 2015/2016 potato essay/poster contest. Entry forms will be sent out prior to the Christmas holiday school break to middle and high schools across the state. Participants must describe in 250 words or less why they love Colorado potatoes and why the potato is a healthy fit into their lifestyles.

Entries can be submitted as individual students or as an entire class. Winners, selected in the spring, will get a \$300-value prize, coupons for activities and

merchandise, and will be featured on a four-color promotional poster to be distributed by CPAC. The winning teachers receive \$300 in cash.

To educate, the CPAC helped organize a teachers' tour with the Colorado Foundation for Agriculture. The five-day event involved 12 teachers from throughout Colorado and one from Kansas, who learned about the San Luis Valley's agricultural economy and history.

Offering two credits for participation from Colorado State University, the teachers were also provided curriculum for use in their classrooms. The event gave both hands-on experiences at area farms and ranches as well as classroom time, according to Jim Ehrlich, executive director of CPAC, who accompanied the group throughout the tour. Most importantly, “it gave the group a personal look at how food is grown, how water is measured, and how important agriculture is to the economy,” notes Ehrlich.

Yet another activity involving the educational system is CPAC's participation in the United States Potato Board “Salad Bar Challenge.” The committee is funding 10 salad bars in state schools and is aiming to increase that number to 100. The idea “is to get kids to eat healthy, and with ‘potato-friendly’ salad bars, we can encourage them to eat more potatoes as well,” said Weyers. As part of a pilot program, CPAC sponsored two in the Mapleton School District in Denver. One salad bar featured seasoned potato cubes, according to Ehrlich.

Working with the schools, CPAC is also able to track potato consumption. The USBP is challenging the potato industry to sponsor 3,000 salad bars over the next five years.

pb



(L-R) Rachel Werner, Linda Weyers and Jim Ehrlich of Colorado Potato Administrative Committee



Les Alderete is the general manager at Skyline Potato Co.

fit for the multitudes that are following the trend going “green.”

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 local skyrockets.

“We are more sustainable than any growing area,” stresses CPAC’s Ehrlich. “Buying Colo-

rado 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.” Cool weather also contributes to a smoother-skinned potato.

Jere Metz, sales manager at Monte Vista, CO-based Farm Fresh Direct of America

concur. “Colorado potatoes can be delivered to our customers in one or two days — which reduces shrink and makes them fresher.” He adds one-stop potato shopping through a single growing region can be another way to save on freight costs. Farm Fresh markets both conventional and organic potatoes year-round.

“Delivery can sometimes even be done overnight to Dallas, for example,” Metz

# Remaining Independent

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continues, describing the 800-mile trip from the San Luis Valley to some Dallas-Fort Worth delivery points.

### PRIVATE LABELING AND PACKAGING

An ever-increasing percentage of San Luis Valley potatoes being packed under private labeling reflects the trend of retail chains and strong independent stores choosing to market products with their own brand. Increased brand

recognition contributes to consumer loyalty, and packers are working to meet this increasing need of retailers. Most area shippers agree private labeling and specialty-size packaging are both seeing increased demand.

Les Alderete, general manager of Center, CO-based Skyline Potato Co. and Purely Organic, concurs. "We are definitely moving more of our product in private labeling," he notes, while adding, "We will work with our customers to help them any way we can. We are flexible and do whatever we can to meet

our customers' needs."

John Pope, vice president of sales and marketing for MountainKing Potatoes, based in Houston with offices in Monte Vista, CO, also notices more packaging size options. "The general trend is an increase in smaller package sizes, more shopping trips to the store, and buying new items for the experience of eating," says Pope.

### AN ECONOMIC FIT

Skyline Potato Co.'s Alderete says pota-



Lee Jackson is operations manager for Farm Fresh Direct LLC.



Potato fields in full bloom help provide beautiful scenery in the San Luis Valley during summer.

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Randy Bache • Les Alderete • Angela Diera  
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(L-R) Jake Burris stands with Rick Ellithorpe, both of Aspen Produce LLC.



Pictured in the newly-renovated offices of Aspen Produce LLC from left to right: Jon Gonzalez, Jed Ellithorpe, and Mike Bonemeyer.

atoes remain among the best fresh produce values for consumers. This even applies to organic potatoes — which some still perceive as higher priced. This price discrepancy lessened as planted organic volume increased, he notes. “We are a full-service potato company,

with a year-round supply of potatoes — both conventional and organic.”

Purely Organic is a separate packing facility dedicated strictly to organic volume. The company markets a portion of its organic volume through Robinson Fresh, Eden Prairie,

MN, using the Tomorrow’s Organic label. “At the same time, we sell our own Nature Fresh organic label, available in the 3-, 5-, and 50-pound containers, through Skyline,” says Alderete.

Roger Christensen, co-owner of Center,

## ■ WHAT’S NEW IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY?

By Sandy Lindblad Lee

**MAVERICK POTATO CO., CENTER, CO** — Building on the success of its second season in business, the company has become certified for organics and increased its organic production by 30 percent in its third year of operation, according to Roger Christensen, co-owner.

The company is handling organic Russets, yellows, and red potatoes in addition to its conventional volume. Organics are packed in 3- and 5-pound consumer bags as well as cartons. Maverick offers its own label and will also ship under private brands. Harvest and shipping were already in full swing by early fall.

Last season, the company made numerous upgrades in its packing facility for increased efficiencies and enhanced product quality for its customers. A revamped sorting area, an automatic baler, and an upgraded sizing machine are all part of the improvements, Christensen reports. “Everything we do to improve the packinghouse is with food safety in mind — that is our No. 1 concern,” he says.

Both the growing operations and the packing shed are USDA Harmonized GlobalGAP-certified.

Christensen, a longtime San Luis Valley

potato grower and salesman, started Maverick Potato in the fall of 2013 with Michael Kruse.

Among its customer base, Maverick works closely with a major retailer and packs export loads in addition to its domestic sales. Christensen worked to maintain existing accounts and forge new relationships in both the domestic and Mexican markets. About 15 to 20 percent of Maverick’s potatoes were shipped to Mexico last season.

Meanwhile, with both domestic and international customers, Christensen says he believes there is still clientele for a smaller growing, packing, and shipping organization such as Maverick Potato Co. “We are more personalized and pay attention to detail.”

**ASPEN PRODUCE LLC, CENTER, CO** — An entirely new atmosphere now encompasses the Aspen Produce offices, which were completely renovated. This past spring, the entire building was gutted, and the main entrance was moved to the north side. New offices were created, and the overall design and look of the headquarters have been upgraded. According

to co-owner Rick Ellithorpe, the building is more energy-efficient as well, with all LED lighting. The more open floor plan has already led to better communication among the staff.

In addition, new equipment in the shed gives the company more sizing flexibility.

Staff changes have also been a part of Aspen Produce’s transition. Mike Bonemeyer, who worked in Aspen’s warehouse for several years, returned and is now behind the sales desk. Bonemeyer works both in sales and assists with phytosanitary protocol. Bonemeyer left Aspen to pursue a career in law enforcement in 2011 and was with the sheriff’s department until deciding to return to the potato industry.

Now sitting next to Bonemeyer is Jon Gonzalez, who works in quality control and assists in some human resources work. Gonzalez also has law enforcement experience, and he was a U.S. Department of Agriculture inspector for a number of years before joining Aspen Produce.

Ellithorpe asserts, “we are one of the few remaining independent shippers in the area that are not affiliated with a larger cooperative or corporate sales orga-





Four of the Farm Fresh Direct salesmen: (L-R) Cliff Edwards, Jere Metz, Todd Mortensen, and Byron David.

CO-based Maverick Potato Co., reports he increased his organic potato production by 30 percent this season, and his packing facility has its organic certification. Organics are packed in 3- and 5-pound consumer bags as well as cartons and are shipped under the Maverick

brand and in private labels.

Whether conventional or organic, “potatoes are a good food value — even during market years when prices are a little higher,” touts Farm Fresh’s Metz. “And when food prices are high — and they are predicted to continue to

increase — potatoes are perceived as an even better value.”

Rick Ellithorpe, co-owner of Center, CO-based Aspen Produce LLC, agrees. “Consumers need to be reminded that potatoes are still one of the greatest values in the

nization, which guarantees more personal attention to its customers. We are different from other entities. We are quicker to react,” he says. “Most of our sales staff has seen, touched, and maybe tasted what they are selling.”

**SKYLINE POTATO CO., CENTER, CO** — Les Alderete, general manager of all operations, says the company plans to upgrade its wash system this winter and spring in readiness for the 2016/2017 season.

“We’re looking at our options of adding new equipment and more ways to automate,” reports Alderete. “Labor continues to be a big issue, with wages going up and labor shortages.”

Skyline Potato Co. offers conventional and organic product lines and operates three packing sheds in the Center, CO area. Potatoes are primarily marketed under the “Skyline” and “Green Giant” labels, but the company also does private labeling. “We cater to our customers and pack to their individual specifications,” says Alderete, “and our growers are some of the best in the Valley.”

**FARM FRESH DIRECT OF AMERICA, MONTE VISTA, CO** — The grower-owned

sales and marketing organization is entering its second year of its partnership with Albert Bartlett, one of the largest fresh potato shippers in the United Kingdom. The company began its second harvest this fall of the famed Albert Bartlett Rooster variety, according to Lee Jackson, operations manager.

The Rooster variety expands consumer choices beyond what are the perceived conventional varieties. “It’s not a red. It’s not a Russet. It’s a Rooster, and we have it as conventional and organic,” notes Dave Yeager, vice president of business development for Farm Fresh. The Rooster has pink skin and cream-colored flesh “with a nutty, buttery taste.”

In addition to the Rooster, Farm Fresh is featuring the “Natural Blush,” a golden Russet, one of several other potato varieties Farm Fresh growers plant, which are now grown commercially in the San Luis Valley and may help revolutionize what consumers perceive about the traditional, table-stock fresh potato.

The “Natural Blush” has white fresh, pink-hued eyes, a cream-colored skin, and it is packed in 5-pound poly bags for retail.

Packing an average of 5 million cwt. per season, Farm Fresh Direct is reportedly the

largest grower-owned potato cooperative in the U.S., according to Colorado Department of Agriculture.

**WADA FARMS MARKETING GROUP, MONTE VISTA, CO** — Michele Peterson was added to the Idaho Falls, ID-based Wada Farms Marketing Group sales team this spring. Based in the San Luis Valley, Peterson had most recently worked in sales at Center, CO-based Aspen Produce LLC. She also worked at Monte Vista, CO-based Harvest Select. While at Harvest Select, Peterson gained experience in warehouse management and accounting before joining the sales staff.

**TATER TRADERS, GOLDEN, CO** — Long-time potato industry veteran Tonya McCormick started her own brokerage, Tater Traders LLC. The new company is handling potatoes as its primary commodity but also buys and distributes onions. McCormick says she plans to handle more items in the future. Also working at Tater Traders is transportation coordinator Kari Cook.

McCormick’s previous experience includes 14 years with H.R. Bushman and 15 years with the Colorado Potato Growers Exchange. **pb**



Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee.



Roger Christensen, owner of Maverick Potato Co.

**“People want to support locally grown to help cut fuel usage and costs. That’s good for all of us.”**

— Les Alderete, Skyline Potato Co.

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 costs,” notes Skyline’s Alderete. “That’s good for all of us.”

According to Ray Keegan of American Produce Co. LLC, a Denver-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.”

pb



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# COUNTER-SEASONAL BERRY OPPORTUNITIES

It was not long ago berries were considered a seasonal fruit difficult to obtain during the off season or winter months.

Ever since fresh fruit imports to the United States ramped up in the 1980s and '90s, year-round availability of blueberries, strawberries, blackberries and boysenberries increased significantly in this country. That is good news for supermarket produce departments, as these items are typically top sellers 12 months a year.

The produce section in today's grocery store has evolved as global trading has expanded. There are now dozens, if not hundreds, of different fresh fruits on display year-round, which come from all corners of the globe as well as from this country's growing regions. This exceptional ability to fully stock supermarket produce departments no matter what the season is due to improved logistics, technology and transportation.

"Fresh produce from the Southern Hemisphere began entering this country in the mid-to late-80s and we've seen dramatic growth since then," says Tom Richardson, vice president of global development for The Giumarra

**Imports provide the means for produce departments to keep availability steady and revenue rolling.**

BY LISA WHITE



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATURIFE

Co., based in Los Angeles. "Imports are essential to keeping a year-round berry supply from September through March."

The U.S. is a net importer of fresh blueberries, bringing in close to \$420 million worth in 2012, a 12 percent increase from the year prior, according to the USDA. More than half of fresh blueberries originate from Chile

during mid-November through January, with Canada providing 25 percent of blueberries during this period.

The U.S. is the fourth largest strawberry importer, with imports increasing a record 351 million pounds in 2012, up 31 percent from the year prior, according to the USDA. Fresh strawberry imports from Mexico reached 231 million pounds in 2011, accounting for 95 percent of the total volume imported. With expanded production in this country, this number is expected to continue to rise. The recent challenge has been Florida's production, which is now overlapping with that of Mexico. This has had a negative impact on both the margin and market share of domestic strawberries.

## IMPORT REGIONS & TRENDS

The biggest downside to healthy berry imports is the effect on domestic growers. For example, the rise in strawberry imports is due to acreage declines in both Florida and Southern California.

"This [factor] opened up opportunities for Mexico in the last three years," says Jim



Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe, located in Estero, FL.

Mexico is nearly the only supplier of fresh-market strawberries to the United States, according to the California Strawberry Commission. Mexico's proximity to the U.S. market makes it hard for other countries to compete. Not only can it be challenging to keep fresh-picked strawberries in good shape, but these berries cannot be picked until fully ripe, and the fruit easily deteriorates once picked.

Other berry types are more hardy, so are logistically easier to source. Blueberry imports from Chile continue to grow, and this looks to remain the case for at least the next couple of years.

"Chile had one challenging year with pests, but its blueberry imports grew in the 10 to 20 percent range in the past five years," says Roberts.

While Argentina's blueberry imports to the U.S. have been flat, more of this fruit is beginning to come out of Peru, which rapidly expanded production during the past year.

"Last year, we saw a 100 percent increase in fruit imports from Peru to the U.S., and we will see that again this year," says Roberts. "This country has only been in the blueberry game for about three or four years, but it really became a bigger player in 2014."

Mexico also has been increasing its blueberry production in late winter and early spring, while Argentina mainly exports in the fall.

"Mexico picks up the slack in late winter or early spring until the domestic season starts back up in the states," says Roberts.

Raspberry imports, primarily from Mexico, are growing rapidly as well at between 25 and 35 percent. Blackberry imports from Mexico slowed in the past two years, with growth in the 10 to 12 percent range. Similar growth is expected next year.

"Mexico is a viable source that can bridge the gap for good quality fruit from October through February," says Craig Casca, owner, chief executive of Red Blossom Sales, Inc., located in Oxnard, CA.

"Strawberry shipments for the past year

## "Chile, Argentina and Mexico constitute the largest in volume countries, with Chile and Argentina expected to supply a comparable amount of product this year as in 2014."

— CarrieAnn Arias, Dole Fresh Vegetable and Berries

[from Mexico] were close to 18 million, while blackberries were close to 24 million," says Casca. "We see strawberry and blackberry consumption maintaining or increasing for all of the months we are in production."

Although blueberries are leading the pack, as more blackberries and raspberries become available, these berry varieties sourced from outside the U.S. are growing the category.

"As with any agricultural item, we will always see peaks and valleys in volumes each year," says Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co., located in Brooks, OR. "I'd say the focus is on growth in blueberries, blackberries and raspberries. As consumption and demand grows, so will plantings in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Peru and Mexico."

Suppliers agree, blueberries from all Latin America producers are still growing. Blackberries from Mexico are on a similar, yet less strong, growth path.

A select few countries are currently capitalizing on the year-round sales potential of this fruit category, but that may be about to change.

"Supply from Argentina and Chile is pretty stable," says Luciano Fiszman, procurement manager at Gourmet Trading Co., headquartered in Redondo Beach, CA. "We will see an increase of blueberries coming from Mexico and Peru during the next few years. I wouldn't be surprised to see new countries and areas producing berries in the future."

This is due to increased global consumption of berries, which may result in labor issues during harvests.

Chilean blueberry exports to North America increased from 35,067 tons in 2008/09 to 61,346 tons in 2014/15, according to the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), based in Santiago, Chile. Total export volumes grew from 41,532 tons in 2008/09 to 92,089 tons in 2014/15.

"North America is, by far, the largest market for Chilean blueberries, taking roughly 67 percent of all export volume in 2014-15," says Karen Brux, managing director North America for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association.

Because today's consumers expect to be able to get fresh produce anytime, regardless of season, Dole relies heavily on its international

berry farmers to ensure a year-round berry supply for retailers and consumers.

The company mainly sources its berries from Chile, Argentina and Mexico, with a small quantity originating from Peru.

"Chile, Argentina and Mexico constitute the largest in volume countries, with Chile and Argentina expected to supply a comparable amount of product this year as in 2014," says CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing at Dole Fresh Vegetables and Berries, located in Monterey, CA.

The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC) estimated per capita consumption of blueberries in the nation will increase from 34.9 ounces in 2010 to 50 ounces in 2015, which is an increase of 43 percent. The USHBC also reported in 2013, 69 percent of U.S. households purchased blueberries within the past month, versus 38 percent in 2008. Analysts expect global blueberry production to be in excess of 1.45 billion pounds by 2017.

"Imported berries are essential to keeping year-round berry displays full," says Brux. "Without supply from Chile, retailers would not have blueberries during the winter months. We bridge the gap between the end of one domestic season and the start of the next."

### BERRIES AT THE FOREFRONT

For supermarket produce departments to capitalize on the imported berry segment, it's crucial to keep products stocked and visible.

Knowing where and when to source berries throughout the year is critical.

Gourmet Trading's imported blueberry program runs from September through April. The fall months are key, because of the big domestic push for Thanksgiving, with product



from Michigan, Oregon and British Columbia.

“While consumption of fresh fruit decreases in winter, it doesn’t seem to affect berries as much as it does with many other commodities,” says Fiszman. “A decade ago, it was very hard to find fresh blueberries in November for the holiday, [and that is no longer the case].”

Suppliers say there is still room to grow the business, as not every supermarket has a full selection of berries available year-round.

It’s also important to note that winter can be a prime time for these products, with global consumption rising due to Christmas, Valentine’s Day and the Chinese New Year. For this reason, it is critical to have a stable supply of quality fruit.

“Good genetics and good logistics are 80 percent of a good box in the supermarket,” says Fiszman. “South American growers are doing a fantastic job delivering great product.”

With the entire berry category experiencing growth, it is a good idea for produce departments to diversify. By doing this, stores become

QUANTITY (TONS) FOREIGN BLUEBERRY PRODUCTION AREAS SHIPPING INTO THE UNITED STATES				
	2011	2012	2013	3-YEAR AVERAGE
<b>CHILE</b>	<b>76,889</b>	<b>69,754</b>	<b>84,673</b>	<b>77,105</b>
<b>CANADA</b>	<b>30,374</b>	<b>70,767</b>	<b>48,149</b>	<b>49,763</b>
<b>ARGENTINA</b>	<b>9,001</b>	<b>14,830</b>	<b>13,813</b>	<b>12,548</b>

**Quantity of Blueberries from  
Foreign Production Areas 2011 - 2013**

Source: U.S. Customs

Charts: [ers.usda.gov/media](http://ers.usda.gov/media)

a destination for these products.

Staying on top of berry trends and proper merchandising can help move more products.

“Blackberry demand was very strong for us this past year and is an area we are focused on,” says Curry. “Retailers are under pressure

to always increase sales, and with berries being one of the top dollars per-square-foot item in the produce department, they want to see the category grow as much as possible.”

With its vibrant color and appealing look, the berry is taking center stage in produce

## ■ FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INCREASED SALES

Unique flavors, convenience and nutrition make berries a popular healthy snack, plus these fruits, with continued quality improvements, are easy to snack and pack and are versatile. With the prevalence of smoothies, salads and other healthy items, this fruit segment moved more to the forefront in recent years.

Dole raspberries are the fastest-growing of the company’s international berries, followed by blueberries and then blackberries. After years of growth, strawberry consumption is beginning to slow.

“Increasing public education of the antioxidant, and other health and wellness benefits of berries, has the most to do with the upward public appreciation and sales trends,” says CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing at Dole Fresh Vegetables and Berries, located in Monterey, CA. “Our customers also like the convenience benefit of berries.”

The media has been touting the health benefits of this fruit, which contributed to a rise in sales. According to data from The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, the most popular reason for liking blueberries is connected to nutrition. Fifty-seven percent of Americans have seen news stories about the health benefits of blueberries, and 84 percent of consumers like blueberries, because they have health benefits.

“The berry category is a key category

for retailers nationwide, and imports are critical to the success of virtually all produce departments,” says Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co., located in Brooks, OR.

Today, consumers expect to find berries in the produce department year-round, and they understand these items are imported during the domestic off-season, he says. It’s the versatility and healthful qualities of these fruits that have created a solid niche in supermarket produce departments, adds Curry.

“All of the berries we work with are seeing strong sales right now,” says Curry. “We feel consumption will continue to rise in North America during the next several years. Retailers want berries in the produce department, because they are a great impulse purchase and they return a high dollar per-square-foot compared to other produce items.”

It’s not just consumption of berries year-round that is helping to drive sales trends, but also the higher quality product that is obtained each year due to innovative technology.

“Cold chains are constantly improving, so the better the imported fruit is handled from picking to packing, the better the quality we are seeing on imports, which helps drive sales,” says Curry.

As volumes increased, so have the packaging sizes. This helped expand the

demographic to those seeking more bang for the buck.

“There was a time when virtually all import blueberries were simply sold in a 4-ounce clamshell, but now we will offer everything from a 4-ounce to a 2-pound clamshell, allowing for value buys during the peak of the season,” says Curry.

In the past, berry pack sizes tended to decrease during the winter months to as little as 4.4 ounces due to more limited availability. The opposite is true today.

“Now we’re seeing berries in pint packages, which are a greater value for consumers,” says Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe, located in Estero, FL.

“Also, retailers are more comfortable carrying 18-ounce clamshells, which they were reluctant to do in the past.”

It’s the larger pack sizes that are helping drive demand, as consumers can easily feed a family with these products.

Fortunately, overall quality of these products continues to improve, as the competition heats up and consumption continues to climb.

“Blackberries are definitely growing in consumption, as are strawberries, and the product from Mexico is excellent,” says Craig Casca, owner, chief executive of Red Blossom Sales, Inc., located in Oxnard, CA.

“There are more people juicing on a daily basis, which increases sales.” **pb**

departments. Proper placement and creative displays can boost berry sales during the off-season.

“Most retailers want these products at a visible location in stores, typically in the first or second table as consumer walk into the produce department,” says Roberts. “This is the largest category in the department, so it should be at the forefront all year.”

Multi-deck cases in the winter months can also help increase visibility.

#### BERRY PROMOTIONS

With berry volume being good and steady from Mexico, there are many opportunities for ads.

As one of the largest categories in the produce department, berries have become increasingly important in the past three to four years for driving fruit sales.

Consequently, supermarket produce departments are more apt to highlight this fruit in promotions and put it more at the forefront.

“Ask any retailer, and they will say it’s important to have berries available at all times, because these fruits are destinations for consumers,” says Naturipe’s Roberts. “Although strawberries represent about half of total dollars in the category, most retailers are looking to include one of the berry types in the weekly circular to leverage these products.”

With an abundance of variety, this fruit category provides the means to rotate promotions based on availability.

For example, if strawberries from Mexico are in good supply, these will be highlighted until blueberries are in, so there will be a constant rotation of berry types throughout the year.

“Retailers are happy to have a good quality berry they can run in ads with confidence in the winter time,” says Red Blossom Sales’ Casca. “There are rain issues occasionally, but for the most part the blackberries are a good item from October through May.”

It’s the same situation with strawberries during November through February, when retailers can count on good quality and volume coming from Mexico during this time period.

With increased berry availability from Chile, Argentina and Peru, the peak period for these products is beginning to shift, and pricing is becoming more aggressive during the winter months.

“The berry category, in general, is growing and has been for the past 15 years,” says The Giumarra Co’s Richardson. “In the years ahead, the significant growth will be in blueberries and blackberries.”

pb



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# Apples For All Seasons



FIRST FRUITS MARKETING OF WASHINGTON

**Creative merchandising and careful promotion drive apple sales throughout the year.**

BY MARK HAMSTRA

**R**etailers have year-round opportunities to drive apple sales, whether promoting local varieties in season or tying in with holidays for creative merchandising solutions.

“In my opinion, I feel the best retailers really celebrate each season,” says Don Roper, vice president of marketing at Honeybear Brands in Eden Prairie, MN. “When you think of apples and talk about seasons, to me it is really about the new fresh crops that are coming to harvest. For instance, late summer/early fall really begs for driving excitement around locally and regionally grown. There is a huge marketplace affinity to our local/regional varieties, and they should really take center stage on the retail deck. It is what the consumer is looking for.”

By late fall and early winter, the strength of the category shifts to apples from Washington state. “At this point, we really celebrate all that

Washington has to offer,” he says.

Steve Lutz, vice president of marketing at Columbia Marketing International in Wenatchee, WA, says the foremost factor in driving apple sales is recognizing how the competitive set impacts overall category performance at different times throughout the year.

“Obviously, the harvest in the fourth quarter drives the highest dollar performance, simply because the availability of apples is so huge at that time,” he says. “The first quarter tends to be when supplies of local apples disappear, only to be replaced by citrus. The second quarter brings the arrival of imported fruits and grapes, and the third quarter is dominated by soft fruits.”

Lutz cautions retailers “not be sucked into value pricing the entire apple category” in the fall.

“It’s tempting for retailers to run hot harvest specials with low pricing for an extended period of time,” he says. “The problem with this approach is it generates relatively modest increases in volume, but it can have a significant negative impact on dollars. More apples are sold, but since each apple sells for less, the total category suffers.”

Promoting too aggressively “effectively trades consumers down from more expensive, full-margin apples to whatever apple is cheap that week,” says Lutz. “Retailers can literally

wreck the profitability of the apple category if they aren’t prudent.”

He also cautions retailers not to drop lesser-known apples such as Ambrosia that have a loyal consumer following.

In the second and third quarters, retailers must continue to carefully promote and merchandise apples, says Lutz, maintaining their up-front positioning in the department. Some of the emerging, unique apple varieties also begin appearing in the summer.

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Sage Fruit Co. in Yakima, WA, agrees retailers need to be cautious about how their apple promotions impact the rest of the category.

“When planning a promotion, we recommend trying to either promote something that will drive incremental sales and not cannibalize the rest of the category; or during certain times of the year, promote a variety or varieties to drive traffic and volume,” he says.

Retailers can also take advantage of the time when apples are at peak of flavor, adds Sinks. “Retailers may consider creating a harvest/farmers market-type theme in the fall, then transition to holiday promotions,” he says.

After the New Year, retailers can shift focus to promotions based on diets and healthy eating. He also notes that Sage offers a variety



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of tools such as tote bags, secondary displays and high-graphic packaging to help retailers meet their merchandising goals.

Kelly Ciceran, general manager at Ontario Apple Growers (OAG) in St. Catharines, Ontario, says apples are always a focus for retailers in September for back-to-school and the October “fall harvest” season.

Flier ads, in-store displays and sampling programs always help sell more apples, she says. “Apple displays and sampling programs in the winter months help to educate consumers that Ontario apples are available due to advanced storage techniques,” says Ciceran. “It is the only Ontario-grown fruit available at this time of year.”

Molly Zingler, director of marketing at the New York Apple Association (NYAA), suggests using different promotional tools to drive off-season sales, such as digital coupons, display contests, demos and others.

Lee J. Peters, vice president of sales and marketing at Fowler Farms in Wolcott, NY, says retailers need to get into the seasonal spirit to merchandise apples.

“Driving sales through all seasons just takes a little imagination,” he says. “Back-to-school, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New

Year, etc., all provide merchandising opportunities, and artwork can easily convey the desired message that will drive sales.”

Gretchen Mensing, communications and marketing manager at the Michigan Apple Committee (MAC), says the MAC can work with retailers to implement programs tailored to each stores’ marketing needs.

“In addition, we have consumer education programs in place for the 2015 crop to complement the in-store activities with the goal of driving customers to the stores for Michigan apples,” she says.

#### PROMOTING MULTIPLE ITEMS

Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt Growers in Wenatchee, WA, says retailers need to promote multiple varieties of apples at the same time.

“An ideal apple ad will contain four to five varieties of bulk apples, and perhaps two in bags,” he says, noting that the bags can be listed as a sub-feature. “This allows apple consumers to buy the apple varieties they prefer and perhaps try a new variety through the promotional pricing.”

It also helps the produce manager keep the apple section fresh and turning, says Pepperl.

**“Apple displays and sampling programs in the winter months help to educate consumers that Ontario apples are available due to advanced storage techniques.”**

— Kelly Ciceran, Ontario Apple Growers

“When only one or two varieties are featured, the others often slow down in movement and age the non-featured apples during the promotion,” he says. “This is hard for produce managers to maintain and keep fresh.”

The sub-featured bags will appeal to consumers seeking value and smaller sizes, says Pepperl. He cites Stemilt’s award-winning pouch program, Lil Snappers, which is focused on premium, kid-sized apples and pears.

“Lil Snappers is all about marketing to parents who are looking for grab-and-go solutions to feed their families,” he says. “Lil

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Snappers not only brings in great retail dollars and profits, but the product can also create better segmentation of the category — large bulk for the everyday consumer, and kid-sized for the lighter appetite.”

Stemilt also has a new program called Fresh Blenders, which is a 5-pound value bag geared for making smoothies and juices. The bags are blender-shaped, with a recipe on the back. This also presents opportunities for cross-merchandising other produce ingredients, says Pepperl.

“This program helps turn the juicing market into a destination sales opportunity,” he says. “Too many consumers are just blending what they have in the refrigerator rather than purchasing a deliberate list of fresh items.”

**CREATING DISPLAYS**

Mac Riggan, director of marketing at Chelan Fresh Marketing in Chelan, WA, says retailers need to think about capturing consumers’ attention with apple displays and providing information to help consumers make decisions about which variety to buy.

“You don’t want to have too many apples in the front end of the display — you want to grab consumers’ attention with maybe a Honeycrisp, and then something that’s really



pretty, like a Red Delicious from Washington,” he says. “But it’s important to do a good job of calling out the name of the apple, and telling consumers about some of its unique characteristics. We assume that a lot of people know what the characteristics of these apples are, but they don’t.”

Chelan’s apple packaging, in addition to clearly displaying weight as either 3 pounds or 5 pounds, for example, also calls out uses for the apples based on qualities, he says.

“We like to let customers know what they can expect from this apple,” says Riggan. “Is it tart? Is it sweet? And we like to let customers

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know some of the uses for each apple: Is it good for baking? Is it good for salads?”

Riggan also says that while it would be ideal for retailers to put out small displays of apples to keep product as fresh as possible, that's often impractical because of the labor challenges.

“What makes a good apple display and what's possible are two different things,” he says. “It's easy for me to sit here and say, ‘Only put out so much product, and then have your people go out and service those displays four or five times a day.’ In this day of labor challenges,

I am sure a lot of displays get built big, so they don't have to service them as often.”

Riggan also notes that one of the best ways to display apples is on cold racks, but those racks are generally not in the front of the department, where suppliers would want the displays to be located.

#### TELLING THE STORY

Pepperl of Stemilt suggests retailers display bulk apples in a large, prominent display with color breaks between varieties.

**“Variety signage with a flavor description that is thoughtful and encouraging is a must. Make sure your descriptions tell more than the old, ‘sweet and juicy’ message that tells the consumer nothing.”**

— Roger Pepperl, Stemilt Growers

“Variety signage with a flavor description that is thoughtful and encouraging is a must,” he says. “Make sure your descriptions tell more than the old, ‘sweet and juicy’ message that tells the consumer nothing.”

In addition, providing information about the grower/shipper can help build excitement, says Pepperl.

“The Millennial crowd really is looking for the story. Don't miss this opportunity,” he says, noting that Stemilt offers digital photography and other collateral to help promote its own “family-grown story that focuses on location, heritage and fun.”

Lutz of CMI says in addition to providing information on differences among varieties, the keys to a good retail display include being fully stocked, with up-front positioning and an assortment of the best-selling varieties. Niche varieties/brands should also be included to get consumers to trade up.

Displays should also include a mix of premium, packaged apples in pouch bags instead of lower-value poly or mesh bags, and a solid assortment of organic varieties in both loose and packaged options, he says.

Lutz says retailers would be well-served by partnering with just one or two top shippers. “Top-performing retailers align themselves with one or two shippers, versus simply buying around the market from whatever grower happens to be cheapest on any particular day,” he says. “This has a huge impact on the consistency and appearance of displays in-store. Since nearly every grower puts up a box that is unique to them, working consistently with a key grower partner reduces checker-boarding on the shelf and improves the overall appearance of displays.”

Consistency in display appearance cuts down on consumers' sorting through bulk



The advertisement features two apples, one red and one yellow, with a pink 'X' mark over them. Below the apples is the text: "Once bitten, forever smitten." followed by "Now available from Washington" in pink. Below that is the company name "HONEY BEAR TREE FRUIT CO." and address "Wenatchee, WA 98801" and phone number "(509) 663-2625 • www.smittenapple.com". At the bottom is the "smiXten" logo with a pink 'X' over the 'i'.



displays, which can cause bruising, adds Lutz. Retailers also have to be cautious not to allow displays to sell down too far, he says.

“Out-of-stocks can be one of the biggest unseen performance killers in the apple category for retailers,” says Lutz. “This problem seems to get worse as retailers add new varieties, because they have limited historical data on sales performance. As a result, stores cut back displays to minimize shrink, and the result is an empty shelf.”

Jim Mertz, vice chairman and a partner at Symms Fruit Ranch in Caldwell, ID, says retailers often know best when it comes to merchandising.

“Our company has been around for 101 years, and one thing we learned in the process is to be customer friendly, and give the customers what they want,” he says. “Some want the apples packed one way, others want them packed another way. Every market is a niche market. That’s the way we look at it.”

Mertz says he’s in favor of any merchandising strategies that drive increased consumption of fresh apples. “It’s hovered between 14 and 17 pounds per person per year for too long, but think of what it would be like if that increased to 20 or 25 pounds?” he says. “That’s why we support anything retailers want to do to try to sell more apples.”

### MERCHANDISING NEW VARIETIES

Retailers have to be especially diligent about educating consumers when introducing new varieties, says Lutz of CMI. “Retailers are constantly bringing in new apple brands and varieties for consumers to try. Amazingly, they often tell the consumer nothing about the new apple other than the name and price,” he says.

“That’s death to new products, especially when we are asking consumers to pay a significant price premium for these new apples over the apple that they know. Consumers want to try new items, but they need the back story and information on why they should spend more.”

Freestanding secondary displays can also be a huge boost to sales, especially for newer brands, says Lutz, noting that CMI offers them at no charge. Retailers also need to make sure they are giving new apple varieties enough time before removing them from the stores, he says.

“Many retailers like to use an ‘apple of the month’ approach with some of the newer branded apples,” says Lutz. “It’s great to get the product in stores. Unfortunately, this approach often dooms new products to failure.”

He notes that loyalty-card data shows that the purchase cycle on apples is about three weeks.

“So, if a shopper buys a new apple from a retailer using the ‘apple of the month’ merchandising strategy, chances are high that when the consumer returns to the store for a follow-up

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repeat purchase, the product is no longer carried by the retailer,” says Lutz.

This means that all of the effort, merchandising, signage and demos used to launch the product are essentially wasted, he says.

“New products really need time to build awareness with consumers,” says Lutz.

Sinks of Sage Fruit notes that with the increasing number of apple varieties now available, it’s important to ensure the consumer does not get confused.

“If a retailer is carrying a new variety, call

attention to it through signage or secondary displays to give consumers an opportunity to recognize it is something different from the normal offering,” he says.

In general, Sinks says apple displays need to be well-organized, with varieties and prices clearly labeled.

“Many times from a distance a Gala apple may look like a Fuji or Braeburn, so having good color breaks in the displays can eliminate confusion and create an attractive display,” he says.

Providing tote bags can also be a great way to sell more apples, he says.

Peters of Fowler Farms says a good apple display has cross-merchandising components.

“Pie shells and other baking aids can drive the sales of baking apples,” he says. “Slicers/corers can be used to promote healthy slicing for lunches.”

He agrees that offering a combination of bag-size fruit and larger, bulk apples will help increase sales by appealing to a broader swath of customers.

Roper of Honeybear Brands says retailers need to “consistently celebrate fresh” when merchandising apples. “This is what we sell in our industry,” he says.

He agrees that having informative signage is important, and notes that it is also important for signage to be accurate.

“Nothing turns Mom off more than incorrect signage and incorrect pricing,” says Roper. “It begs the question, ‘If you can’t get this right, what else is wrong with the product?’”

He also highlights the key role of store-level produce-department employees. “These great produce associates are the ones who keep the bad product off the deck, rotate the fresh products, use color breaks, put up sizable displays — not just a lane or two — and cross-merchandise the apples with other opportunities,” says Roper. “They know what is in season from a variety standpoint, they know flavor profiles, they communicate to customers, and they actively sample products for customers.”

#### SETTING THE TONE

Roper says retailers can use apple displays to set the tone for the whole produce department, and in turn, the entire store.

“Apples are a great, showy item,” he says, noting that apple displays are fairly easy to keep clean. “Celebrate them, and make the deck look great every day. Apples also occupy a huge run of space in the department, so keeping this area clean and sharp helps set the tone for the entire department and the store.”

Roper cautions that retailers “sometimes get stuck on staying in a specific growing region, because that is what the supplier tells them to do.”

“When the fruit is tired, the fruit is tired,” he says. “Move on to fresh crop, be it from imports from Chile, New Zealand or South Africa. Move to fresh regional local crop as soon as you can, or move to Washington when that crop is ready. Don’t let the fruit overstay its prime. It’s better to turn off a variety than push old inventory on your customer. They will



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remember that experience.”

Roper also warns of the dangers of trying to be first to market.

“Oftentimes the first fruit is the worst fruit,” he says. “Why give that poor experience to your customers just to say you are first? They don’t forget it.”

“Great retailers make sure to have the right fruit first and over-deliver on commitment to the customers,” says Roper.

Ciceran of the OAG suggests that large, colorful displays, which can include cross-promotional ingredients and items, “are great to catch consumers’ eyes in stores.

“It would help if varieties with similar visual appearance were separated on the store shelf, so the consumer is not confused,” she adds. “Also, if the apples could be placed on the refrigerated shelf space in the stores, then that would be nice, and would really help with the quality of the apples.”

Ciceran also cites Foodland Ontario’s “Buy Local” program for its efforts to promote Ontario-grown food products, with an annual retailer display contest. The OAG is a partner in the contest for apples this fall.

“Foodland also has wonderful point-of-sale materials and a team of people to place



the materials in store for Ontario produce,” she says.

Mensing of the MAC agrees that signage is key to merchandising apples.

“Identifying signage, several varieties, and usage information will help consumers select

the apple that will best serve their uses and their taste buds,” she says. “Our biggest challenge is ensuring Michigan-grown apples are identifiable in the marketplace. Many consumers want to buy local, and many think they are buying local when, in fact, they are not. Making sure



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## SNACKING ON SLICED APPLES

Value-added apples are primed for growth, says Krista Jones, director of brand marketing and product innovation at Crunch Pak, the Cashmere, WA-based provider of fresh sliced apples.

"Based on consumer trends, we believe the fresh-cut category will continue to grow during the next few years," she says. "Because consumers perceive more value with fresh-cut, there is more growth opportunity for this category, particularly in the snack segment."

Crunch Pak has a line of single-serve produce snack items called Dipperz, which are available in apple varieties as either sweet or tart apples with caramel dip or sweet apples with chocolate dip. Each Dipperz snack item is 80 calories or less.

Another single-size product from Crunch Pak called Snackers offers combinations of fruits and other sides, such as dips and cheese, in a hard-form mini-tray designed to protect food during transportation in a lunch box.

Crunch Pak offers a wide variety of package sizes for its sliced apple products, from snack-sized (2-ounce) bags to family-sized (14-ounce) bags.

"The genesis for our snack size was shopper feedback. Shoppers were telling us they were purchasing our family-sized bags and then dividing up the apple slices into Baggies for their kids' lunches," says Jones.

"Shoppers are apple savvy," she says. "They know what they like, and they look for their favorite varieties in store."

Crunch Pak offers variety-specific peel and reseal bags featuring limited quantities of fresh-sliced Honeycrisp, Gala and Piñata apples.

"We created the peel and reseal bag based on shopper feedback," says Jones. "Consumers tell us they want to use one bag multiple times."

Mac Riggan, director of marketing at

Chelan Fresh Fruit in Chelan, WA, says he has noticed package labeling for fresh-sliced has been getting more specific. "I am noticing a real move toward variety-specific labeling on sliced fruit, whether they are Pink Lady, Gala, and so on," he says.

Kelly Ciceran of the Ontario Apple Committee in St. Catharines, Ontario, says Empire is the preferred variety in Eastern Canada for fresh-cut, while Gala reigns in the West. "But Granny Smith, Goldens and Pink Lady are used as well to provide a variety," she says.

Don Roper, vice president of marketing at Honeybear Brands of Eden Prairie, MN, says value-added items "have been a godsend to our industry."

"I don't see this slowing down at all," he says. "With the pressure on healthy eating and knowing we have to change the obesity curve in the U.S., I see our industry finding even more and more avenues to put ready-to-eat apples into so many different venues. It is a must, and our industry is strongly positioned to meet this need."

As far as varieties used in fresh-cut, the important thing is that they have a 21-day-plus shelf life, says Roper.

"The red standbys have been Empires, Galas and Pinks, and of course the green are Granny Smith," he says. "As Honeycrisp production has significantly ramped up, we are also seeing specific chop programs putting Honeycrisp sliced offerings out there."

Lee J. Peters, vice president of sales and marketing at Fowler Farms in Wolcott, NY, says fresh-cut apples offer time-challenged homemakers a convenient way to pack a healthy lunch for school or work.

He says his company's customers generally ask for Gala and Empire when it comes to fresh-cut. "They are both preferred by the volume users because of their consistent size and quality," he says. **pb**

the product is appropriately marked and signed helps shoppers find the local fruit they seek."

Zingler of the NYAA says that in addition to good signage, variety is also crucial to a good display. "Offering consumers choice and educating them on apple usage will help drive sales," she says. Zingler also suggests cross-merchandising apples with cider, hard cider and baking ingredients.

Perhaps most importantly, how the apples are handled in the store is important. "Like any food product, apples, both bagged and loose, need to be properly handled," says Zingler. "Growers harvest their apples as if they were handling eggs. Any slight bruise will only lead to more damage. Merchandisers should be adhering to the same careful handling so the consumer has the best quality apple. **pb**

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# ‘Filling In The Organic-Buying Map’



## Organic produce sales grow throughout the US.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Consumer spending on organic foods continues to grow in double digits, driving producers to expand product output and prompting retailers to rethink product assortments and space allocation.

Organic fruits and vegetables remained the biggest-selling organic category in 2014 with \$13 billion in sales, an increase of 12 percent over 2013 volume, according to a survey by the Organic Trade Association (OTA), membership-based business association headquartered in Washington, D.C. for organic agriculture and products in North America.

Organic produce now accounts for more than 36 percent of all organic food sales, the OTA reported.

In addition, of all the produce now sold in the U.S., 12 percent is organic. That share of the overall market has more than doubled in the past 10 years, when organic produce sales accounted for only 5 percent of total fruit and

vegetable volumes.

Of the \$13 billion worth of organic fruits and vegetables sold in the U.S. in 2014, \$11.85 billion was fresh produce (which is up 12.4 percent from the previous year), and \$496 million was frozen fruits and veggies (up 9.7 percent). Another \$449 million was canned fruits/veggies (up 10.8 percent), and \$265 million was dried beans, fruits and vegetables (an increase of 15.1 percent).

“From the Atlantic Seaboard to the Pacific Coast, from Detroit to Houston, households of all sizes and income levels, and individuals

of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and political leanings are buying organic,” said Laura Batcha, chief executive and executive director of the OTA, in a statement.

David Weinstein, sales manager at Commerce, CA-based organic-produce wholesaler Heath & Lejeune, says consumer interest in organic produce has been spreading to more areas in the Central and Southeastern regions.

“The traditional market for organic fresh fruits and vegetables had been retail grocery stores on the East Coast and the West Coast, and everything other than that has been un-



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explored territory,” he says. “Ever since the implementation of the national organic law in 1990, the market has grown and demand has grown — so now, in effect, we are filling in the map moving eastward from the West Coast and westward from the East Coast. We have some amount of retail support now in every region of the country.”

Although many smaller communities have not yet embraced organics, “you are seeing more of it in the bigger towns and university towns,” says Weinstein. “It’s filling in a lot of areas we would not have expected,” he says. “It is moving toward market maturation, but we are still trying to reach those last customers.”

He notes that web-based food retailers — one of the hottest segments of the grocery industry — embraced organics. “The online companies are all jumping in with both feet in terms of supporting organic produce,” he says. “You can buy [organic product] from Amazon, and most of the home delivery companies.”

### MAINSTREAM GROWTH

Jeff Huckaby, executive vice president of Bakersfield, CA-based Grimmway Enterprises (parent company of Lamont, CA-based Cal-Organic Farms) agrees the organic market is continuing to expand both in the U.S. and Canada.

“Consumers today are looking for transparency with the origin of their food, and that is found in organic produce,” he says. “Ten years ago, the organic growth movement was primarily sold through natural and specialty stores with a strong presence in the West and Northeast regions. Today, the demand for organics went mainstream.”

The Midwest, Southwest, and Southeast regions are experiencing the greatest demand as organics are becoming more readily available, he says.

Data provided by the OTA, gathered by Schaumburg, IL-based research firm SPINS, appears to support the widespread expansion of consumer interest in organic products.

Among the markets where spending on organic foods increased by 16 percent or more in the 52 weeks ending Feb. 22, 2015, were several in the South and Midwest. These markets included: Richmond/Norfolk, VA, with sales up 18 percent; Wichita, KS, up 17 percent; and Orlando, FL, Houston, TX, and Columbus, OH, each up 16 percent.

Perhaps even more telling about the future potential for organic sales is that sales increased just as much or more in well-established markets, such as Sacramento, CA; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Los Angeles, CA; San Diego,



PHOTO COURTESY OF EARTHBOUND FARMS

**“The online companies are all jumping in with both feet in terms of supporting organic produce. You can buy [organic product] from Amazon, and most of the home delivery companies.”**

— David Weinstein, Health & Lejeune

CA; Portland, OR; and Denver, CO.

Weinstein says it’s no longer justified to portray the typical organic consumer as an affluent yuppie.

“While there might have been some truth to that 20 years ago, there is no truth to that [stereotype] now,” he says. “I think there has been interest in organic produce from a broad range of consumers ever since there has been organic produce. What’s changing is marketers are beginning to recognize that there is a demand for organic produce — not just in the affluent areas of town — in every area of town.

“We see that here in Southern California, where there is as much interest [in organics] on the east side of town as there is on the west side of town. Whether the customer is African-American, or Hispanic, or Asian, it really doesn’t matter, because the demand for organic produce is uniform across every community.”

Retailers need to be cognizant of that broad interest, says Weinstein. “If you are operating a grocery store and serve a largely Hispanic community, a largely Asian community, or

a largely African-American community, you might not think those people want organic produce, but they do.”

### RETHINKING RETAIL SPACE

As demand for organic produce continues to grow, retailers are advised to make room on shelves. “Space within the walls of the produce department is always the greatest challenge,” says Huckaby. “As the organic segment continues to grow, retailers continue to make tough decisions on where to merchandise the product. Depending on the demographics of the store, conventional displays are shrinking to make room for more organic offerings. Retailers are also replacing the more specialty conventional produce items with the organic version of that item to handle the space constraints.”

Weinstein describes the grocery produce department as a “battleground” for precious real estate. “The turnips fight the rutabagas for space, and the rutabagas fight the oranges for space, and every commodity fights every other commodity for space,” he says. “Organic items, little by little, are winning that war.”

Retailers are seeing success with a range of strategies, says Weinstein. “There are a lot of enormously talented retail produce merchandisers out there,” he says. “Some of them are successful by creating organic departments where they have all the organic produce together, some are successful by having the organic produce next to conventional items and integrating them; some are successful by doing both, having some things integrated and some things segregated.”

One trend he is seeing in space allocation is that as packaged salads take away volume from the wet racks in the produce departments, retailers are looking to the wet rack areas as potential space for organic products.

“Retailers are looking at the wet rack and seeing that it is not the profit center that it



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once was, and they want their profit dollars back," he says. "There's a lot of investment in equipment and technology there.

"We are seeing retailers pull out their conventional chard, kale, broccoli and celery, and putting in organic, because that's what drives traffic in that area," says Weinstein. "I think that's the most interesting development in how the retail produce department is changing. I think in the next few years, we will see in more stores that the organic shippers will come to own the wet rack."

Samantha Cabaluna, vice president of marketing and communications at Earthbound Farm, a packaged-salad division of The White Wave Foods Co. in San Juan Bautista, CA, says she thinks organics will continue to gain space in the produce department.

"As consumers' interest in fresh foods produced with an absence of things they don't want grows, organic options are going to be a consideration."

Cabaluna notes that organic product accounts for about 23 percent of packaged salads/greens sales. "That organic share of the category is higher than other categories, because the price premium at retail for organic is generally so small in this category — just around 20 percent," she says.

Huckaby says the costs of growing organic fruits and vegetables justify the company's higher retail prices.

"Although there are more organic producers each year, the cost to produce organically will remain higher than conventional produce," he says. "Organic weed control and fertilization are expensive in comparison to conventional means. There is also a huge learning curve in organic production, so just because a grower decides he will switch does not mean he can do so immediately or in an efficient manner."

### PACKAGING TRENDS

As the conventional grocery stores start to carry more organic produce, packaging of organic is becoming more important, says Huckaby.

"The retailer pays a premium for the organic product, and it must get the premium ring at the register," he says. "This forces the supplier to use packaging that clearly identifies the product as organic, and it also acts a barrier between the conventional products and the organic products."

In packaged salads, packaging continues to be focused on clamshells, says Cabaluna. "They provide great visibility to the product and protect the delicate leaves from mechanical damage that can occur with handling." **pb**

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# New Salad Trends



## Salad kits and single-serve salads overshadow traditional bagged.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD

More than 20 years ago, leaders in the value-added salad category, such as Fresh Express, Dole and Ready Pac Foods, revolutionized the produce department with the introduction of bagged salads. Fast forward to today, when packaged salads make up about half of dollar sales for value-added produce, according to Dr. Roberta Cook, cooperative extension specialist in the Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics at the University of California, Davis. About 83 percent of households purchase packaged salads — ranked second only to potatoes — while consumption of Romaine and leaf lettuce has been slowly declining since peaking in 2010.

ACNielsen “Target Track” Hispanic service provides a measurement of retail sales for a proprietary client database. The recent data for the 52-week period ending July 11,

2015, shows pre-cut salad mix has the fourth largest dollar sales of all vegetables, at \$1.5 billion. According to Nielsen, salad kit sales were up 38 percent and single-serve salads were up 22 percent for the 52-week period ending July 12, 2014. A 2014 Packaged Facts published report, *Branded Packaged Produce and Salads: U.S. Market Trends*, predicts sales of packaged salads will grow nearly 5 percent per year through 2018.

## HEALTH MATTERS TOO

The highest percentage of packaged salad sales are generated by families where the head-of-household is more than 40 years of age, by couples more than 35 years of age without kids at home, and by shoppers with higher income, according to Dr. Cook.

Consumers are striving to maintain or adopt healthful eating habits, and consuming more fruits, vegetables, and salads is a means



**“Consumers are increasingly incorporating healthier choices into their diets and are looking for options that are convenient, flavorful and satisfying.”**

— Tristan Simpson, Ready Pac Foods, Inc.

toward that end, as noted in the Packaged Facts report. The report notes consumers indexing highest for bagged/package salads are most likely to be the ones to try a new diet or health food, think about calories, consider their diet to be healthy, and want to know as much as possible about ingredients.

“As part of the trend toward healthier eating and plant-based diets, more of our customers are buying products across our entire line, including both traditional salad blends and the newer salad kits that come with dressing, toppings, and other ingredients,” says CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing for Dole Fresh Vegetables and Berries in Monterey, CA.

Anne Byerly, vice president of marketing, Apio Inc. and the Eat Smart brand, Guadalupe, CA, cites a trend toward what she calls additive nutrition, the practice of powering up meals with more nutritious choices. Several Eat Smart salad kits offer up to seven nutrient-dense Superfoods, along with toppings and dressings. Fresh Express introduced three functional health kits in March 2015 — anti-

oxidant, digestive health, and heart – to focus on specific health needs and conveniently deliver benefits against those needs.

Ready Pac likewise sees the impact of health on the sales of its packaged salads and salad kits. “Consumers are increasingly incorporating healthier choices into their diets and are looking for options that are convenient, flavorful and satisfying,” says Tristan Simpson, chief marketing officer for Ready Pac Foods, Inc. in Irwindale, CA. “Providing consumers with salad options that are healthy and fresh gives

people the freedom to eat healthy anytime.”

#### TAKING AWAY THE GUESSWORK

A quick look at the offerings of the major brands in the packaged salad category shows the dominance of multi-serving salad kits and similar kits in single-serve portions. “Salad kits are the perfect option for people who don’t want to sacrifice nutrition when they opt for quick meal solutions,” says Byerly. “Single-serve salad kits are portioned for one quick meal and are a great way for consumers to eat salads





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## fresh-cut marketing ▶ salad trends

when they are on the go.” They also reduce waste, another consumer hot button.

Salad kits allow consumers to try new or less familiar ingredients. The Packaged Facts report names less familiar trending ingredients and flavors like wasabi, chipotle peppers, soba noodles, quinoa, chia seeds, and hemp; shoppers might not buy these individually but can try them virtually risk-free in a salad kit. “We continue to see new, innovative salad blends that give consumers a “new experience” in flavor or texture, with a convenience factor too,” says Samantha Cabaluna, vice president of marketing and communications for Earthbound Farm in San Juan Bautista, CA. Earthbound Farm’s new salad line also offers the bold global flavors sought out by many of today’s salad eaters.

Consumers increasingly want to replicate the restaurant experience and flavors but at a lower price point at home or on the go. Hence, the introductions by Dole of two kale chopped salad kits, by Eat Smart of a salad kit with flavors of the Southwest, and by Ready Pac of its Bistro Chopped salad line. Fresh Express recently announced two new chopped kits and two new kits in its Gourmet Café line.

### KALE IS KING

“Spinach is our biggest seller, but all things kale continue to grow in popularity,” notes Cabaluna. “We recently added a new blend with half baby spinach and half arugula to build on the popularity of our spring mix and baby spinach blend.” Indeed, data from the 2015 USDA/ERS, *Vegetables and Pulses Yearbook* tables (which contain a time series of annual per capita supply and use data for fresh and processed vegetables and for dry pulse crops), show spinach use slowing climbing after peaks in 2005 and 2009 that were followed by drops.

Kale still reigns as king of the salad bowl. “Consumers crave the flavor, texture and health benefits that come along with this mighty leaf,” says Cabaluna.

Eat Smart’s Sweet Kale salad kit was among the first sweet kale salads on the market and continues to be among the best-selling kale salad kits from any brand.

Kale appears to have stimulated consumer taste buds for other bold greens too. “Two of our other gourmet vegetable salad kits with deep greens continue to gain in popularity – the Eat Smart Wild Greens & Quinoa salad kit and the Eat Smart Beets & Greens salad kit,” says Byerly.

Garrett Nishimori, marketing manager and corporate chef for San Miguel Produce in Oxnard, CA, says his company’s Cut ‘N Clean SuperKALE salad kit line pairs kale



**Salad kits allow consumers to try new or less familiar ingredients. The Packaged Facts report names less familiar trending ingredients and flavors like wasabi, chipotle peppers, soba noodles, quinoa, chia seeds, and hemp; shoppers might not buy these individually but can try them virtually risk-free in a salad kit.**

with bold-flavored vinaigrettes to complement kale’s hearty flavor.

### HAIL CAESAR

Caesar sales dwarf the sales of other salad kits, with half of dollar sales for both regular and light versions, followed by chopped salad (21 percent), according to Nielsen data presented by Dr. Cook.

“Certainly it is impossible to have a conversation about the most popular Dole salad kits without talking about Caesar offerings,” says Dole’s Arias. “We introduced our base Caesar kit line in the early 1990s and today offer more Caesar kit choices than any other brand.

### POWER TO PROTEIN

The 2014 Packaged Facts report on packaged produce highlights the increased presence of protein-rich components — primarily poultry, smoked meats, cheese, beans, and nuts and seeds — in salad kits and salad bowls in response to high consumer interest in protein. Consumers are seeking foods with protein, eating more protein than in the past, and also looking for plant-based sources.

“We are launching a new line in the fall of 2015, Dole Take Aways, with whole grains, nuts, beans, fruit, herbs and cheeses added to our most popular salad greens to create nutritious protein-based meal options,” says Arias. Dole is ramping up the convenience factor even more with a to-go container doubling as a bowl, packaged dressing, a finishing drizzle, and a towelette as well as disposable fork.

“Apio’s Eat Smart Plant Powered Protein salad kits are among the first to offer a range of



vegetable blends with plant protein toppings,” says Byerly. “Our new kale salad provides 11 grams of plant-based protein from vegetables and seeds, including flax and hemp.”

Ready Pac introduced hemp seeds, along with other seeds and plant sources of protein, into its product line. “Hemp seeds pack as much power as other proteins,” says Tristan Simpson. “Adding hemp has more than doubled the popularity of those salads, underscoring the desire of consumers to seek alternatives to typical nutrition offerings.” Ready Pac also incorporates alternative grains such as quinoa and wheat berries.

### LINES BLUR

Organic salad sales represent about one quarter of total salad sales, according to the Nielsen Perishables Group, and are growing at a rapid rate. The Packaged Facts report notes organic produce consumers tend to be younger, well educated, and with higher incomes. They are also more likely than average to be Asian and married with kids.

In addition to all-organic companies (such as Earthbound Farm), several traditional companies, (including Ready Pac and Fresh Express), have introduced organic products. The 2015 Food Marketing Institute’s *The Power of Produce* (which explores changes in shoppers’ produce purchasing trends and behaviors at retail) reports kale, spinach, greens and lettuce are among the top seven vegetables with a critical mass in organic sales.

### PRIVATE LABEL CONTINUES TO GROW

Multiple sources confirm private label pack-



**Eat Smart salad kits offer up to seven nutrient-dense Superfoods, along with toppings and dressings.**

aged salads are nibbling away at national brand market share. Citing Nielsen data, Dr. Cook notes private label salads have a 30 percent share, compared to a 2 percent share 20 years ago. The Packaged Facts report, citing IRI-tracked sales, notes private label/store brands account for nearly 38 percent of total sales.

### FRESHNESS SELLS

Freshness is a most desired feature in packaged salads, as noted in the Packaged Facts report. "At Dole, we take salad freshness seriously," says Arias. "Our salads should be stored at 36-38 degrees Fahrenheit and used by the date indicated on the package." Several companies mention their packaging is designed to

maintain freshness. Packaged salads generally retail for up to \$3.99 while full meal salad kits can be priced up to \$5.99.

### STAYING IN TOUCH WITH THE CONSUMER

"While our salad kits are the fastest-growing segment of our business, we continually offer marketing and sales programs that support a wide variety of consumer, retailer and shopper needs," says Arias. "These can include recipes, targeted offers, and in-store marketing

and merchandising."

Eat Smart utilizes technology to bring its product to consumers wherever they are, offering nutrition information, recipes, and other tools for helping consumers incorporate a variety of fresh-cut vegetables into their daily meals.

Are some brands and products hard to find? Earthbound Farm makes available a Dear Retailer letter on its website for consumers to fill out and bring to their produce manager to request products not in stock at the market. **pb**



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# Holiday Time Is Pecan Time



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GEORGIA PECAN COMMISSION

## Gatherings and celebrations drive end-of-year sales.

BY KRISTEN POPE

**T**he holidays are a time when families and friends gather together and share special seasonal foods, with pecans being a key player.

Whether raw, candied, or as an ingredient in a decadent pecan pie, these nuts are closely associated with the season. The timing of the end-of-year holidays also dovetails nicely with the pecan harvest season. “Because the holidays are during pecan harvest, you’ll see more in-shell pecans at that time,” says Margaret Lisi, program manager for the Georgia Pecan Commission’s Center for Pecan Innovation, headquartered in Atlanta.

“People naturally associate pecans with holiday dishes like pumpkin or pecan pie and sweet potato casserole. That said shelled pecans also are abundant the rest of the year. There’s so much more you can do with pecans — inside dishes, marinades, dressings, casseroles, and

more — so we’re working to get people to use more pecans year-round. There is always a ready supply of this delicious, filling, versatile nut,” says Lisi.

The well-selling nut sees even more of a boost during the end of the year. “Pecan sales are good year-round, but they increase dramatically during the holidays for a couple reasons,” says Chad Hartman, director of marketing for Tropical Foods, headquartered in Charlotte, NC. “First, pecans are a very popular baking

nut commonly used in many holiday dishes and desserts. Second, stores know how popular they are and push them by stocking larger displays and, in many cases, stand-alone destination displays.”

Baking and gift giving are key elements that help boost holiday pecan sales. “Pecan sales peak at the holiday season,” says Tammy Merritt, secretary and treasurer of Merritt Pecan Company, headquartered in Weston, GA. “More people are baking and giving gifts



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GEORGIA PECAN COMMISSION



Some retailers and marketers prefer using clear acetate containers to showcase product in stackable displays; the containers also make the item presentable for gift giving.

during this time, and pecans are always perfect for special occasions.”

The holidays are also a great time to create promotions to help boost sales. “We’ve seen steady increases in consumer purchasing with peak volumes for the holidays,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets, headquartered in Lakeland, FL.

“This is also the time of year when we provide our customers with promotional value. In addition, during the holidays, our stores offer secondary displays for the variety of nuts we offer — including pecans.”

One way to get customers to purchase more during the holidays is to let them know in advance that pecans are readily available. Linda Johnson, vice president of produce sales for International Foodsource, headquartered in Dover, NJ (and parent company for the Valued Naturals’ brand of dried fruits and nuts), aims to get customers thinking about holiday baking after Halloween.

“We like to get produce buyers and department managers planning for the fourth quarter baking needs early,” says Johnson. “We secure orders in early July through August with shipments to stores as early as first of October.”

### STABILITY HELPS SALES

Pecan sales are growing, and this may be due to the fluctuating prices of other kinds of nuts. “We saw a double-digit increase during the past couple of years,” says Hartman. “Pecan prices have been fairly firm, while other nuts (both snack and baking) have been on the rise.”

The low-shrink factor helps keep shelves

stocked with pecans. “We are seeing an increase in sales,” says Sean Hays, vice president of sales and marketing for The Green Valley Pecan Company, headquartered in Sahuarita, AZ. Hays believes produce buyers prefer pecans because they are not as perishable as other items in produce. “If you keep them cooled, they should last at least a year.”

In addition to whole pecans, value-added halves, pieces, and flavored nuts are gaining momentum. However, sometimes consumers benefit from learning more about just how versatile this nut is. “Pecan halves are usually the first association that customers have with shelled product, so this has taken some time to educate the consumer,” says Merritt Pecan Company’s Merritt.

### A LITTLE NUTTY

Halves and pieces help time-strapped bakers create their favorite treats without spending time chopping nuts into their preferred sizes.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TROPICAL FOODS

**“We saw a double-digit increase during the past couple of years. Pecan prices have been fairly firm, while other nuts (both snack and baking) have been on the rise.”**

— Chad Hartman, Tropical Foods

“A lot of consumers will pick up nuts and spend time cutting them, but we can offer them in pre-cut smaller formats,” says Hays.

The ease of value-added pecans is a reason consumers select them over more time-intensive varieties. “In general, they are gaining momentum as consumers look to convenience and easy meals,” says Tropical Foods’ Hartman.

Flavored pecans are another way to entice the consumer to sample a new product. “Value-added pieces with Cajun flavoring or wasabi flavoring or spiciness get people to try, and purchase, pecans for something other than just as a baking nut,” says Johnson.

### NOT JUST FOR BAKING

As a healthful addition to a daily diet, pecans belong in produce. “By displaying pecans in the produce department instead of the baking department, people should begin to make the association that pecans are a good choice for a healthy diet,” says Merritt, who believes this perception helped increase sales both in the U.S. and overseas.

Leading health groups confirm that pecans are a good source of nutrients and minerals. “Pecans are certified by the American Heart Association as a ‘heart-healthy food’ because regular consumption of pecans has been proven to significantly reduce cholesterol,” says Lisi of Georgia Pecan Commission’s Center for Pecan Innovation.

“They also are recognized as the nut with the most antioxidants, zero sodium, and ‘good’ carbs to keep your energy high and appetite sated,” she says. “Almonds still have a huge share of the market, but innovators are excited about working with pecans, so we expect to see more pecans in a wide variety of new product launches in the coming year.”

Pecans are also a healthy addition to a salad. “Another thing we’ve been seeing again with people wanting to eat healthier is adding pecans to a salad can give it a little bit of a boost in terms of adding protein. The pecans add an

## dried fruits & nuts ▶ pecans

almost meaty-type presence, so a salad can be more filling and remain healthy and vegetarian or vegan for those that fall into that category,” says The Green Valley Pecan Company’s Hays.

### ON FULL DISPLAY

Letting customers see the pecans is a great way to entice sales. Hartman recommends packing them in clear packaging. “Let the consumers see the quality of the nut,” says Hartman.

Grab-and-go pecans are convenient for consumers. “Grocers tend to display in-shell pecans as they are, in bags by the pound, so they’re easy to grab and go,” says Lisi.

But many consumers also appreciate a bulk option, such as a barrel with a clear top and scoop to let consumers select their quantity. “We find people scoop out quite a bit of pecans in that [display] format,” says Hays.

Using colorful displays is another way to entice consumers to purchase pecans. “I love a big vibrant fruit and veggie display with in-shell pecans, often sold in red or green net bags, piled in the center,” says Lisi. “It’s visually beautiful, and pecans beautifully accent the flavors of vegetable and fruit dishes — so it

**“I love a big vibrant fruit and veggie display with in-shell pecans, often sold in red or green net bags, piled in the center. It’s visually beautiful, and pecans beautifully accent the flavors of vegetable and fruit dishes — so it makes a great display.”**

— Margaret Lisi, Georgia Pecan Commission

makes a great display.”

But some companies skip the bags in favor of stackable containers. “We prefer to use clear acetate containers that are airtight, waterproof, and tamper-evident,” says Richard Merritt, president of Merritt Pecan Company. “We found these to be ideal for stacking in displays. They also make the item much more presentable for gift giving.”

To preserve the nuts longer, light-safe packaging is key. “When we speak to growers and sellers, we’ve been promoting the idea of packaging pecans in light-safe packaging to keep them fresher longer,” says Lisi. “Pecans are a premium nut, and light-safe packaging keeps their flavor quality high.”

### PRICING YOUR PECANS

When the holidays come around, retailers have a few different options for pricing their pecans. Hays notes some stores opt to keep prices steady, while others prefer to reduce the price in order to bring consumers in. “Why not use that to be the tool to bring the customer into the store during that time of year when people are spending a lot on groceries,” says Hays, who recommends making sure pecan specials are prominently featured in printed material and advertising.

However pecans are priced, packaged and merchandised, they are no doubt a winning holiday staple for consumers interested in entertaining, indulging and gift giving. **pb**

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# Floral Quest Continues



With this 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary article, **FLORAL BUSINESS** editor Shaunn Alderman takes a peek into the past.

BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN

**T**he mission to “Initiate Industry Improvement” is the same in floral as it is in produce. Floral has been a part of the conversation from the very beginning of **PRODUCE BUSINESS**, because the information was needed and valued by supermarket retailers who were seeking in-house improvements as the floral marketplace evolved.

## THE BEGINNING

Providing floral and foliage articles inside of **PRODUCE BUSINESS** was the beginning, and with great support from loyal advertisers, the next step was to publish **FLORAL BUSINESS** as a supplement publication mailed in the same clear polybag as **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. During the midst of industry consolidation, Floral & Foliage Marketing was moved back onto the



inside pages of **PRODUCE BUSINESS** in the early 1990s.

The section contained articles selected to provide the information necessary to effectively market, merchandise, procure and manage the dynamics of the floral arena. Articles still relevant today were published in the early years including coverage on such topics as Transportation, Care and Handling, Labor Solutions, Merchandising Tips, Signage, Sustainability, Branded and Licensed Items and Cold Chain Management.

When asked why he and co-founder and publisher, Ken Whitacre, decided to include floral department information when they started **PRODUCE BUSINESS** in 1985, editor-in-

chief Jim Prevor says, “Produce is a funny area since product is based on how retailers organize staff and the department. So refrigerated salad dressings are part of produce whereas non-refrigerated dressings are grocery. Most retailers were structured, so the floral director reported to the produce director or vice president of produce. As such, the top produce executives were interested in floral, so including floral in our bailiwick made perfect sense.”

Prevor shares this about how well **PRODUCE BUSINESS** readers accepted information about operating a floral department: “When we started, floral in mass market outlets was still relatively new, and many of the senior retail executives did not have much or any floral

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**FLORAL MARKETING**

**Profit From Festive Displays**

*As a part of the southwestern craze sweeping the nation, savvy consumers are celebrating Mexican-style holidays and decorating their homes and desktops with festive looking, low maintenance cactus plants.*

By JOAN BORAM

Cacti might be called the character children of ornamental floral displays. They're not glamorous stars, but their "health" variety of shapes and textures for minimum maintenance make them a favorite with consumers and floral department managers.

Interestingly, cacti are becoming mainstays gift items, passed on and loved with traditional holidays as Secretary of State and Father's Day. But also toward Mother's Day and Father's Day. Cacti are also featured at such "Specialty" occasions as Mother's or Southwestern Days. And, of course, one can collect them who are over the border for low taxation.

**Holidays Are Where You Find Them**

"The tradition of international occasions" says Margaret Clark, of H & P Sales, growers in Tulsa, Ok. "We introduced the word, 'Fiesta Cactus' a Mexican-themed party and gift item. It's a great idea and a great opportunity for growers in the United States and Canada. Depending on how many of our 200 cactus varieties they offer, we supply varieties with waxes, succulents, bright colored paper flowers, and a plants.

"The one variety I like with attached roots," adds Clark. "And my wife is on the topic explaining how to care for cacti." Fiesta cacti are most popular in celebrating Cinco de Mayo, the date of the Battle of Puebla, May 5, 1862, when Mexican forces, outnumbered three to one, defeated the invading French forces of Napoleon III. Mexicans everywhere celebrate the occasion with parties and bonfires, but the holiday's popularity is especially growing in the U.S.

"But," says Clark, "Other popular celebrations of Mexican Fiesta Days are September 12, 'Revolution Day' and 'Unite the Two' that honors the Mexican Revolution, in January, when everybody is kind of come and witness they were on the Mexican border.

"Traditional customs in the Chinese New Year in January. We supply hand-painted parrots and ferns, including a heart lot for the luck of the cactus display. The more variety, Chinese New Year. A sign of Chinese money."

**Cacti Are Profitable Souvenirs**

Members of a team in the middle of a desert wouldn't seem to combine a likely market for cacti, but winter visitors, looking for a souvenir of area and used to their back home, can be a very profitable market.

"Cacti are the special appeal here for any of the holidays," says Richard Marquez, floral buyer and manufacturer for Florida's Super Value stores in Phoenix, AZ. "But about four times a year in the fall and winter, we advertise a special price to appeal to northwestern shoppers who are here. We also have one special in the summer for local people."

The most popular items are the 4- and 6-inch plants. They are made up by a local supplier, with a mixture of cactus and succulents. They are sold in a variety of sizes and colors. Bright cacti are popular over the border, says Marquez. "I've seen a decorative succulent pot which costs more than the plastic pot we use here. But the plastic pot is still a good thing to have something with a Succulentian look."

"Another popular cactus item is a cactus-shaped vase," adds Marquez. "It comes in a pot, and a cactus with its roots wrapped in plastic. It's a great gift for anyone. You can use it to bundle back home, or even to themselves if they don't want to take it, and plant it when they get home. Cacti are very hardy — they'll be practically immune to the drought here."

At Shoppers of the Desert, cactus growers in Tucson, Ariz., value strategies for better sales. "We provide promotional labels for the Zoo Market, a group of 12 Ariz. cactus nurseries and nurseries, such as their cactus-shaped cut, fern and cholla, and so on. They're inexpensive, and they have a great appeal for children."

"Some retailers do a Secretary's Day promotion featuring a Fiesta cactus wrapped in gift with a sign. The bonus of the cactus are better."

**PRODUCE BUSINESS** 14

Merchandising articles always rank highly popular with readers.

**“When we started, floral in mass market outlets was still relatively new and many of the senior retail executives did not have much or any floral experience.”**

— Jim Prevora

experience. So retailers valued our analysis of topics, such as closed cases versus open displays. And producers who were used to dealing with either large wholesalers or small shops valued a chance to understand how supermarket executives thought about the issues of the day.”

In 2012 when tablets were becoming popular and information was so commonly obtained from hand-held devices, the digest-size FLORAL BUSINESS was launched as a quarterly tool kit for floral retailers. Distributed in the March, June, September and December issues of PRODUCE BUSINESS, FLORAL BUSINESS is a removable supplement featuring articles about marketing, merchandising, management and procurement. To provide more than the printed version and support a greater range of access to the information in the floral “tool kit,” the publishers post each quarterly issue on FloralBusiness.com.

**MAX BRUNK**

When asked if there are any especially memorable topics approached in the floral

**“Driver recruitment is a constant challenge and as the economy improves, the driver shortage will most likely not improve. This is a serious concern for our industry.”**

— Stephen Armellini, September 2014

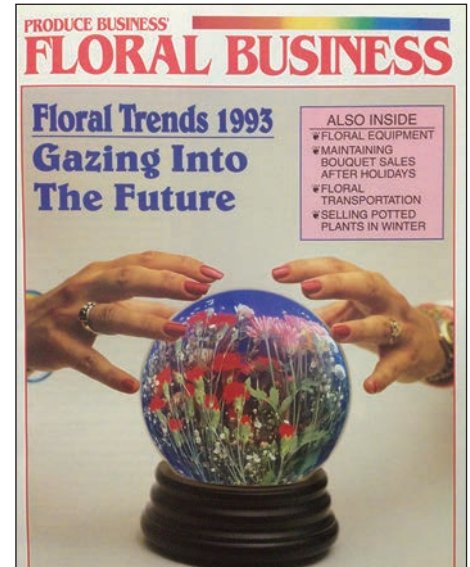
pages of the past that still ring true today, Prevor mentions contributions from Dr. Max Brunk, a revered professor of ag economics at Cornell University and a founding columnist of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*.

“Although much of the value came from day-to-day assessment of marketing, merchandising, management and procurement issues of the trade, I recall a few big issues,” says Prevor, “generic promotion of floral, the role of shrink in selling floral, and the need to avoid parochial



Trending floral topics in August and October of 1992 included impulse sales and transportation.

thinking. Max Brunk wrote often about studies he had done for Roses, Inc. [an organization of Canadian and American rose growers]. The studies showed that promoting multiple flowers increased sales over just promoting roses — the idea of using good research to drive campaigns — even when the results



were not ‘politically correct’ — helped move the industry in a more sophisticated direction.”

### SUSTAINABILITY

When asked about the current trend for organic and certified sustainably grown flowers in a 2008 Floral Industry Perspective column,

## ON THE TOPIC OF SHRINK — WHAT WAS TRUE IN 1991 IS TRUE TODAY.

Since Shrink remains relevant today, we are sharing a few stimulating comments extracted from an October 1991 article written by Jim Prevor:

“The more retail operations I study, the more convinced I become that campaigns to reduce shrink almost always wind up costing operators both sales and profits.

To one degree or another, all these shrink campaigns lead floral managers to get closer to this “closed store” ideal. The first thing managers do if told that they are being evaluated based on their ability to reduce shrink is cut back on orders. They reduce both the variety and the quantity of floral products in the stores. This leads to an immediate decline in sales and profits.

Of course the damage to our floral sales due to efforts to control shrink doesn’t start with a sudden campaign. The damage actually starts much earlier with the very design of the store and the choices of cases. A lot of stores believe that the best way to merchandise flowers is in closed cases stuck in the back corner of the store.

These cases scream out to consumers, “don’t touch,” and work against the main goal of mass-market floral depart-

ments: catching the impulse sale. It is obvious that open-air cases are far more accessible and make pleasant what closed-cases make difficult — picking up that “just because” bouquet.

The problem exists because too many mass-market floral retailers are still using as a paradigm the set-up of small independent freestanding floral shops.

This is an enormous mistake. A flower shop is a floral destination; people go to them with something specific in mind, such as a funeral wreath, or flowers for a wedding, or some other special floral event. In any case, nobody just passes through a flower shop. By the time they get there, the customers already decided they want flowers.

Floral shops almost inevitably will place a premium on reducing shrink. First of all, most of a floral shop’s customers never enter the store, they call and order, or the order comes over the wire service. As such, the profit lies in reducing spoilage rather than showing flowers to consumers not there to see them. In addition, floral shop variety usually skews to a more expensive flower, which also

increases the premium for reducing waste.

A mass-market outlet is different. What makes it distinctive is that thousands of people pass by every week, the vast majority of which have no thought of buying flowers. So the key is in-store merchandising, which includes attractive, bountiful, accessible displays that persuade passersby to buy.

This perspective makes clear what we should be doing — increasing variety, quantity, and display accessibility.

Sure this will mean more shrink. So what? The key is to keep our attention on what is really important. Gross margin isn’t important in and of itself. The bottomline is what is important, and in most cases, profits are increased in mass market floral outlets when shrink is increased due to larger, more variety-filled, more accessible displays.

So am I saying shrink doesn’t matter? Of course not, but a concentration on shrink is almost certainly going to be counter-productive. The key to keeping shrink in line is forgetting about reducing shrink and concentrating on good solid operational procedures.” **pb**

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**FAMILY BUSINESS CELEBRATED IN THE JUNE 2010 PRODUCE BUSINESS BLAST FROM THE PAST** "It's time to celebrate not only the end of 100 years, but also the beginning of a second century filled with hope and a bright future," said Harrison Higaki, president of Bay City Flower Company, Half Moon Bay, CA, when referencing the 100th anniversary of the family business in 2010. Above Photo: Bay City's first delivery truck in 1916. Left Photo: Harrison Higaki at the 2015 Northern California Fresh Produce & Floral Expo in Pleasanton, CA.



Gerald Prolman (the former president and co-founder of Made In Nature, which was the first company to successfully introduce a line of branded organic produce to supermarkets in the United States) had this to say as then-president of Organic Bouquet: "Organic flowers are following the same trend as did organic produce in the early 1990s. We are accelerating toward an inevitable tipping point. We will soon see a complete transformation of our industry where buyers will only source flowers from farms using sustainable practices."

Related to attitudes, actions and the future for growers Prolman states: "Organic production means new growth for the floral industry — especially as consumer awareness of social and environmental issues relating to floral production continues to rise. More growers will respond once they see a green light from visionary retail buyers who are environmentally committed. The inherent demand in step with increasing supplies will drive a complete shift in how flowers are bought and sold."

**TRANSPORTATION**

In a September 2014 Voice of the Industry column, Stephen Armellini wrote: "Driver recruitment is a constant challenge. As the economy improves, the driver shortage will most likely not improve. This is a serious concern for our industry."

**RELATIONSHIPS**

Similar to the produce pages, floral is full

of relationships. A lot of nurturing is necessary in floral where the product provides visual nutrition instead of consumable satisfaction. Dedication on all sides will forever be needed to continue the encouragement of floral department sales.

When asked about continuing efforts to provide our readers with floral information, Prevora says, "With our quarterly FLORAL BUSINESS digest and Floral & Foliage coverage, we think we hit the sweet spot in this market."

The quest to assist retailers in enlightening and educating consumers about the health benefits of enjoying flowers and plants is a responsibility we gladly will continue. This effort is not merely a 30-year showing. The business articles and guest columns offered a broad range of essential issues that affect the bottomline. Along with responsibility for the opportunity to make a difference in your businesses, there is gratitude for the opportunity and for the support.

Thank you, readers, for your feedback and participation. Whether you share your comments on current industry challenges or share photos of outstanding floral displays, our editorial efforts are to enhance your efforts. And for the advertisers reaching floral executives making buying decisions for supermarket, mass market and club store floral department, we genuinely appreciate your support and your pursuit toward industry improvement. **pb**

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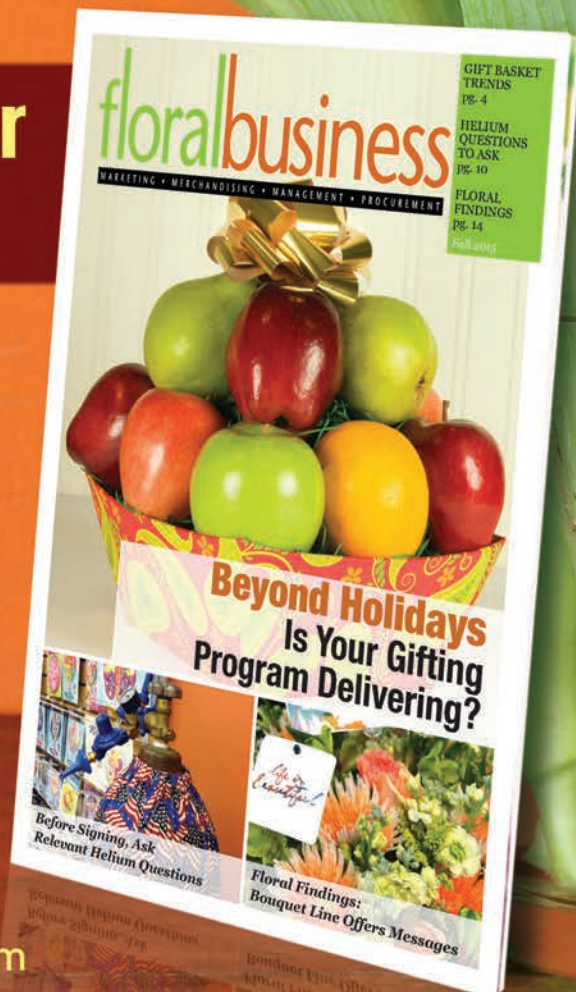
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# Through The 30-Year Looking Glass, Darkly

BY DON HARRIS

**F**or my column in the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, I thought I would reflect on the past 30 years and the eternal fight between produce and retail management. This conflict has been going on for as long as there have been stores carrying produce. However, the past 30 years played out a remarkable series of events that changed how this relationship will be viewed for the next 30 years.

Three decades ago was a very different time for the produce business. The industry was just awakening to the fact that it held opportunity for retailers to move operations to the next level and attract more customers. There was considerable excitement and “buzz” around produce and what it could do for the appeal of stores. Eyes widened at the potential of sales that could be driven utilizing fresh produce as a key portion of a store. Every retailer was obsessed with adding produce to the product mix and cashing in on the wave of consumer excitement over quality, fresh produce.

One had to experience this era to appreciate just how electric the atmosphere was surrounding fruits and vegetables. The supplier community was increasing production to meet the burgeoning demand. Retailers were redesigning stores and distribution processes to handle the increasing volume of produce sold in stores. Transportation companies were building refrigeration capacity to transport the product across the country to various markets.

It seemed like everyone had a stake in this produce “gold rush” to meet consumer demand as well as capitalize on the newfound popularity of fruits and vegetables. Each retailer expanded its produce department to get ahead of the competition in the race to capture customers with the “best” offerings. In these days, retail produce personnel were constantly being challenged by retail management, which was dominated by grocery personnel with no knowledge of produce’s special needs. In other words, even 30 years ago, “they just didn’t get it”! But even those roadblocks couldn’t stop the industry.

With all of the challenges posed and misunderstandings generated by management dominated by grocery-based thinking, produce continued to prosper. Fortunately for all retail produce personnel, there was an abundance of leadership icons in the industry initiating the charge. I won’t attempt to list all of them — as I am afraid of leaving someone out — but we all know who they were. These men and women of vision were committed to the growth of produce as a whole. They realized that by elevating the industry, they would also

elevate their own companies.

During the 80s and into the 90s, these individuals drove the development of everything that helped produce grow. These efforts included: expanded variety, improved quality, import availability, supplier relationships, merchandising concepts, improved distribution, and a myriad of other contributions. Simply put, the produce industry that we all know today would never have been possible without the efforts of these pioneers. Their drive, personality, and foresight

enabled the rapid expansion of the industry and its acceptance by consumers. It was because of their work that consumers were conditioned to wait for what was going to be the next new item in produce. Shoppers anticipated their visits to stores to see what new items might be available.

One by one, these icons began to drop out of sight and out of mind. While their influence waned, advancement in the industry continued. Now, a period of new leadership is approaching with a group of leaders who were protégés of these innovators.

Today, the industry is motivated and driven by a quest for technology, profit matrixes, and other grocery and consumer product units of measurement. Gone is the “buzz” that used to dominate and drive produce desirability and innovation in the mind of the industry as well as the customer.

Instead of being the area that drove consumer interest in the store, produce became a “profit center.”

I am not condemning the industry as it presently exists; I simply offer a reflection upon the past and what transpired to lift produce into a higher position within the minds of customers. I suggest that we should return to the commitment and sacrifice by industry leaders to push agendas that grow the total industry and not just promoting self-serving interests.

The saying, “everything old is new again” applies very well to our present situation. It is up to the present leaders of the industry to rejuvenate that sense of a united purpose and vision for growth that was so dominant 30 years ago to ensure the continued growth and prosperity, and the “buzz” to our beloved industry. **pb**

**I am not condemning the industry as it presently exists; I simply offer a reflection upon the past and what transpired to lift produce into a higher position within the minds of customers.**

*Don Harris is a 40-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting and is director of produce for the Chicago-based food charity organization, Feeding America. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.*



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# A Tale Of Two Terminals

BY ALAN SIGER

In 1985, Terminal Markets across the country were already losing business due to the long distance shipping transition from railroad to trucking. Buyers no longer needed access to a rail siding, or had the buying power to purchase a full railcar to buy directly from a supplier. Brokers were more than happy to put together mixed trucks with multiple stops to satisfy the smaller customers' needs. Auctions (once a huge attraction to customers on many Terminal Markets) were gradually dying off.

At the time, many predicted the demise of the Terminal Markets. In some cases, those predictions were true. However, Terminal Markets in mega metropolitan areas, such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Baltimore-Washington (Jessup, MD), Boston, and Philadelphia, continued to prosper. Markets, such as St. Louis and Cleveland, operated with one or two dominant companies controlling a large segment of the market. Cities like Pittsburgh and Buffalo have one or two strong produce distributors, but the Terminal Markets there are gone or exist in name only.

Detroit's Terminal Market, though a smaller regional market, prospered while others struggled to survive. Thirty years ago, Pittsburgh and Detroit had bustling markets. Today, the Detroit Terminal Market still thrives, while the Pittsburgh terminal building is being converted to offices and retail shops; only two wholesalers with Terminal Market roots are still operating.

Detroit and Pittsburgh are similar in many ways: Both are Rust Belt cities hit hard by the loss of their primary industries. Pittsburgh lost much of its steel industry to foreign competition in the 1980s and 1990s; Detroit lost much of its automobile industry a few years later. The Detroit metropolitan area is slightly larger than Pittsburgh's, but nowhere near the size of a New York or Chicago. So why does the Terminal Market in Detroit continue to flourish while Pittsburgh's disappeared?

Let's start with ownership of the physical property. Both the Pittsburgh and Detroit Terminal Markets were built by the railroads in the late 1920s in an effort to provide customers with a more efficient way to handle rail shipments. By the late 1970s, trucks began to replace the rail as the preferred transportation mode for produce. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, eastern railroads such as the Penn Central were experiencing financial difficulties and decided to divest much of the non-performing assets, which included many of the Terminal Market buildings.

In the early 1980s, the Pittsburgh terminal building was purchased by the City's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), which acted as landlord to the tenants. The URA made some improvements over the early years of ownership, and in effort to preserve jobs in the mid-1990s, the URA helped to finance my company's new building across from the terminal building.

My company achieved its job growth goal, but by the early 2000s, the City of Pittsburgh began to struggle financially. The City's Ad-

ministration was no longer willing to commit resources to insure the terminal building's viability as a food distribution center. As a result, one major distributor moved to a suburban Pittsburgh location in 2011, and most others closed the doors in the years to follow.

In Detroit around 1983, my late friend and mentor, Herb Abrash of Andrews Brothers, along with fellow entrepreneur Chris Billmeyer of Ben B. Schwartz and Sons, bought the terminal building to insure the future of their companies. In 1990, the Detroit Terminal became a cooperative sharing ownership among all the firms on the market. Property ownership encouraged capital investment in their businesses without having to worry about leasing or whether the building might be sold to a developer.

While control of the property was a significant difference between Pittsburgh's and Detroit's Terminal Markets, the differences in each city's customer base is an even larger reason for Detroit's long term success. Detroit's retail market has very few chain stores, and most fruits and vegetables are purchased by consumers at independent mega-markets. Pittsburgh's retail market has always been dominated by chain stores with no large independent retailers.

Detroit's mega-independent markets grew from fruit-market roots. Pioneering entrepreneurs like the late Nino Salvaggio, who grew a small market into a local powerhouse, saw an opportunity and paved the way for others to follow. The buyers for the independent markets shop every day, which provides a large customer base for the merchants on the Detroit Terminal.

Pittsburgh's retail landscape is completely different. In the 1970s, Kroger, Loblaw, and A&P were among the national chain stores in the Pittsburgh retail market. They, along with local chains Giant Eagle and Thorofare, and small neighborhood markets, were where Pittsburghers did most of their grocery shopping.

Today, while some names of the chain stores changed, they still control the market. Local wholesalers that were willing to invest in facilities in order to do business with the chain stores and foodservice distributors continued to prosper, while smaller traditional terminal market wholesalers who were reliant on walk-in trade are gone.

The Pittsburgh of today is different from that of the 1980s — The Steel City is now recognized more for its great universities and healthcare systems than its industrial past. The universities motivated companies like Uber, Google, and Apple to set up facilities in the city, which resulted in an influx of highly educated consumers from all over the world. The new Pittsburgh is ready for some upscale independent retail markets. The opportunity is there — anyone interested? **pb**

*Alan Siger is chairman of Siger Group LLC, offering consulting services in business strategy, logistics, and operations to the produce industry. Prior to selling Consumers Produce in 2014, Siger spent more than four decades growing Consumers into a major regional distributor. Active in issues affecting the produce industry throughout his career, Siger is a former president of the United Fresh Produce Association.*





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# How The Changing UK Retail Market Impacts US Fruit Exporters

BY JOHN GILES, DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR, PROMAR INTERNATIONAL

**B**adly impacted by the economic downturn of the late 2000s, the U.K. economy is finally returning to positive growth in the past two to three years with GDP (gross domestic product) increasing at up to 1 percent in 2015. In this period, the structure of the U.K. fruit supply chain was altered significantly with increasing consolidation taking place.

The sale of fruit in the U.K. is still dominated by the major retailers, but widespread change is taking place, with the growth of the discount chains, online shopping, and developments in the foodservice sector are all putting pressure on the position of the “Big Four” leading supermarkets — Tesco, ASDA (part of Wal-Mart), Sainsbury’s and Morrisons.

A relatively small number of influential importers and distributors (known as category managers in the U.K.) are now responsible for supplying the leading retailers and are often specialists on certain products and geographical sourcing areas. They normally supply two to three key retail customers.

U.K. retailers are renowned for having some of the highest quality standards and technical specifications in the world, but residual impact of the economic downturn and the growth of the discount sector means that these stores are more cost-conscious than in the past. Major U.K. retailers are now investing more in direct supply relationships to ensure the integrity of the supply chain.

The U.K. is still heavily reliant on fruit imports, and these items are in the region of 3.7 million tonnes per annum. The country has a long tradition of importing fruit from a wide range of sources — including the U.S., Central and Latin America, Africa, Asia and from within Europe itself. The traditional role of the importer underwent a fundamental change in the past five to 10 years. The days of importers supplying all fruits to all retailers, as was often the case in the past, are well and truly over.

These importing category managers also have the responsibility for organising all the packing, storage, transport and distribution, promotion and marketing of fruit. In some cases, these category management companies might also carry out other functions such as market research and developing consumer insights on behalf of its retail customers.

The category managers are also expected in this role to have: strong pre- and post-harvest skills, support teams, highly developed knowledge of key current and potential emerging suppliers, new varietal developments, new packaging formats, technologies, etc. This is seen as fundamental part of the role beyond just supplying fruit of high and consistent quality.

As such, the category manager role transformed very much away from the straight import and distribution of fruit into a much wider role of service provider. U.S. growers and exporters will need to develop very close relationships with these key category managers if they are to develop business with the U.K. supermarkets.

The U.K. also has a number of wholesale fruit and vegetable markets in major towns and cities. During the past 20 years, the role of the traditional wholesale markets diminished as the leading retail chains looked to bypass them and source direct from growers and importers. The value of trade is still large, though — New Covent Garden Market in London is an example; it has a combined turnover from approximately 200 wholesale businesses of some £650 million per annum.

The role of most wholesale businesses located at these markets changed throughout the years to now focus on supply to the independent retail and foodservice/catering sectors. This has been a trend, which rejuvenated the wholesale sector for those companies that survived the past 20 years. Previously, wholesale markets were sometimes used as a route to dispose of produce that does not meet the strict requirements of the main supermarkets and a way in which to sell Class II produce.

This reality now changed. Most wholesalers will only accept high-quality fruits and also require suppliers to have traceability systems in place. Wholesale markets are, therefore, still an important part of the U.K. fresh produce sector,

and while not accounting for huge volumes in comparison with the leading supermarkets, the markets represent a secondary selling route for the U.S. produce sector.

What does this all mean to U.S. exporters? The U.K. market changed considerably in the past few years. U.S. exporters need to recognise the changes taking place — in particular, how the growth of the discounters (such as Aldi and Lidl) altered the nature of consumer behaviour and how the market is now driven.

Taking this all into account is important if U.S. companies (or indeed any other international suppliers) are to be successful in the U.K. The region is still a big import market, but the battle to supply it will only intensify in the future. Only those who really understand it and commit to meeting its technical and commercial requirements will survive, let alone prosper.

**pb**

*John Giles is a divisional director with Promar International, a leading value-chain consulting firm in the agricultural and horticultural sector and a subsidiary of Genus plc.*

**U.S. growers and exporters will need to develop very close relationships with these key category managers if they are to develop business with the U.K. supermarkets.**



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Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	800-333-5454	www.dole.com/saladkits	Spice World, Inc.	17	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
dProduce Man Software	62	888-PRODMAN	www.dproduceman.com	Sun Pacific	115	213-612-9957	www.cutiescitrus.com
Duda Family Farms	79	561-804-1477	www.dudafresh.com	Sunshine Bouquet Co.	146	305-599-9600	www.sunshinebouquet.com
Dulcinea Farms	37	949-429-1200	www.dulcinea.com	Symms Fruit Ranch, Inc.	124	208-459-8064	www.symmsfruit.com
Eclipse Berry Farms, LLC	107	310-207-7879	www.eclipseberryfarms.com	Tambo Sur Thermal Technologies, Incorporated	137	954-943-1572	www.tambosur.com
Edinburg Citrus Association	107	956-383-6619	www.txcitrus.com	To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms, Inc.	119	610-268-8082	www.to-jo.com
Eureka Specialties, Inc.	131	213-488-6470	www.eurekaspecialties.com	Triple J Produce, Inc.	46	252-205-2936	www.triplejproduce.com
Fierman Produce Exchange	59	718-893-1640		Uesugi Farms, Inc.	48	408-842-1294	www.uesugifarms.com
Floral Business	26, 149	561-994-1118	www.floralbusiness.com	United Fresh Produce Association	76	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
The Florida Tomato Committee	81	407-894-3071	www.floridatomatoes.org	United Fresh Produce Association	90	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
Fowler Farms	127	800-836-9537	www.fowlerfarms.com	The USA Bouquet Co.	148	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Fox Packaging	68	956-682-6176	www.foxbag.com	Vick Family Farms	114	252-291-8880	www.vickfamilyfarms.com
Fresh Origins, LLC	131	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com	Village Farms	43	888-377-3213	www.villagefarms.com
Fresh Produce Association of The Americas	141	520-287-2707	www.freshfrommexico.com	West Pak Avocado, Inc.	47	951-296-5757	www.avocadomore.com
Garber Farms	114	337-824-6328	www.garberfarms.com	West Pak Avocado, Inc.	49	951-296-5757	www.avocadomore.com
The Garlic Company	83	661-393-4212	www.thegarliccompany.com	Western Fresh Marketing	107	559-662-0301	www.westernfreshmarketing.com
Genpro Transportation Services, Inc.	60	800-243-6770	www.genproinc.com	Wholesum Family Farms	135	520-281-9233	www.wholesumharvest.com
Giorgio Fresh Co.	39	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofresh.com	Wonderful Company	13	661-720-2500	www.halosun.com
Giorgio Fresh Co.	119	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofresh.com	Wonderful Company	15	661-720-2500	www.wonderfulcitrus.com
Global Bloom	31	347-926-5500	www.globalbloom.com	Wonderful Company	5	661-720-2500	www.sweetscarlets.com
Gourmet Specialty Imports LLC	83	610-345-1113		Wonderful Company	6-7		www.helosfun.com
Gourmet Trading Company	136	310-216-7575	www.gourmettrading.net	Wonderful Company	21		www.helosfun.com
Grower Alliance, LLC	74-75	520-761-1921	www.groweralliance.com	J. Roland Wood Produce	114	919-894-2318	www.jrwoodfarms.com
A. Gurda Produce Farms	62	845-258-4422	www.agurdaproduce.com	Yakima Fresh LLC	121	800-541-0394	www.yakimafresh.com
J. G. Hall's	89	701-894-6112					
Harris Consulting Solutions	89	269-903-7481					
Herbs Unlimited/Coosemans Retail Group	131	305-545-5516					
Highline Mushrooms	119	519-326-8643	www.highlinemushrooms.com				
HLB Specialties	50	954-475-8808	www.hlbspecialties.com				



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RECEIVED AT MAIN OFFICE FRUIT EXCHANGE BUILDING NO. 1 WEST 7th AVE YAKIMA, WASH. TELEPHONE 335-331 <small>This is a fast Telegram unless otherwise indicated by signal after the number of words—“Blue” (Day Letter) “N.L.” (Night Letter) or “Nite” (Night Telegram)</small>	<b>TELEGRAMS</b> TO ALL AMERICA		<b>CABLEGRAMS</b> TO ALL THE WORLD
87Z C 68 BLUE		DELIVERY NO. _____	
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C M HOLTZINGER FRUIT CO			
YAKIMA			
CAN SELL DESEL BOETTCHER CO FIVE CARS EXTRA FANCY WINESAPS HUNDRED SIXTY THREES LARGER SEASON SHIPMENT DOLLAR QUARTER FOB TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS CAR DEPOSIT WITH OPTION OF STORING TWENTY CENTS PER BOX IF STORED EXTRA TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS JANUARY FIRST BALANCE WHEN TAKEN OUT TRY CONFIRM BUT IF UNABLE ADVISE BEST CAN DO STOP QUOTE BEST PRICE JONATHANS FOR DESEL SHIPMENT THIS MONTH ALSO BETWEEN FIRST AND TENTH			
907 - No. San Jacinto St.		CHRISTMAN BROK CO 1202PM	

## TWITTER VIA TELEGRAM

On April 11, 1926 at 12:02 p.m., a telegram went across the wires from Christman Brokerage Co., located in Houston, to C.M. Holtzinger Fruit, Co., located in Yakima, WA.

The message negotiated five railcars of “extra fancy” Winesap apples to be shipped out of Yakima, 163 apples in a box at \$1.25 FOB at the time. “According to today’s standards, you could get about 100 apples in those shipping crates, so those apples were much smaller — possibly a little larger than a golf ball,” estimates Andy Black, salesman at Holtzinger Fruit Company.

A \$200 railcar deposit for the shipment was required. If Holtzinger wanted to store the apples — possibly at the Desel-Boettcher Warehouse for the Southern Pacific Railroad — then it would cost 20 cents per box for storage with an additional \$200. The balance would be paid when the last car was pulled. If that scenario wasn’t possible, then Christman Brokerage Co. wanted to know the best price quote for Jonathan apples.

“Winesaps and Jonathans are obsolete varieties of apples,” says Black. You may run into them at a fruit stand or small farmers market, but the industry doesn’t market them anymore.” He says Winesaps were comparable to a Red Delicious. “Top grade had full color and lower grade had less color, but they weren’t elongated like the Red Delicious; they were more round like a baseball and were a tart-flavored apple.”

Black is a 47-year veteran of the produce industry, and is now retired. He was recently offered a three-month stint at Holtzinger while a member of the sales team went on maternity leave, and

he welcomed the opportunity.

“In 1964, I started working at a local buying office for A&P as an office clerk. From there, I gravitated to field inspector where I would inspect fruit brought in from different shippers to check quality,” recalls Black. “I was then transferred to another field office in Fresno, CA. I inspected tree fruit, melons, grapes — all the produce grown in the San Joaquin Valley. Everything was loaded by railcar in those days [mid-1960s]. Out of that A&P-Fresno buying office, we would load 100 railcars per day during the summer.”

After his experience with A&P, Black returned to Yakima and worked for Topco Associates as a branch manager. “We were a produce buying organization for 36 major grocery chains in the U.S.” In the 1980s, he converted to sales and continued working in that division of produce until retirement.

Black was given the telegram along with a collection of late-1920s invoices, purchase orders, and other telegrams from the original C.M. Holtzinger Fruit, Co. (named after its owner, C.M. Holtzinger, who was a fruit broker) after the company’s building went up in a massive blaze in May of 1988. He doesn’t remember who gifted the documents, but he kept them as a keepsake.

The Blacks were no strangers to produce. Andy’s father, Andrew Sr., worked for three different fruit companies in Yakima. He retired from Zillah, WA-based Stadelman Fruit Co. Andy’s mother packed apples beginning from the September harvest and would finish by the end of February. Today Andy’s son, Steve, continues the family tradition as Holtzinger’s director of sales.

pb

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