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MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



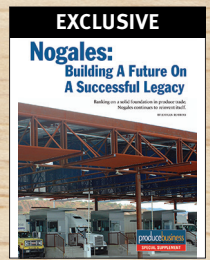
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Time to Make a Difference

While an effective CSR program requires expenditures, “such a program can create: efficiencies, improve labor relations, motivate employees, strengthen a brand and its reputation, as well as create new commercial opportunities.”



FLORAL BUSINESS



NOGALES



PHILADELPHIA



STEVE WILLIAMS



RETROSPECTIVE



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PUNDIT EXAMINES CECIL THE LION, DONALD TRUMP AND CAPITALISM
FALL AVOCADOS • MARKETING TO KIDS • DeCA-COMMISSARIES
PERUVIAN ONIONS • NEW YORK APPLES • JICAMA STICKS
TRANSPORTATION • MICHIGAN APPLES • PEARS • POTATOES
SWEET POTATOES • LETTUCE ON THE MENU • PISTACHIOS
REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE: INDIANAPOLIS • IDAHO POTATO CONTEST



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Visit Dole.com/GetUpAndGrow for more information. #GetUpAndGrow



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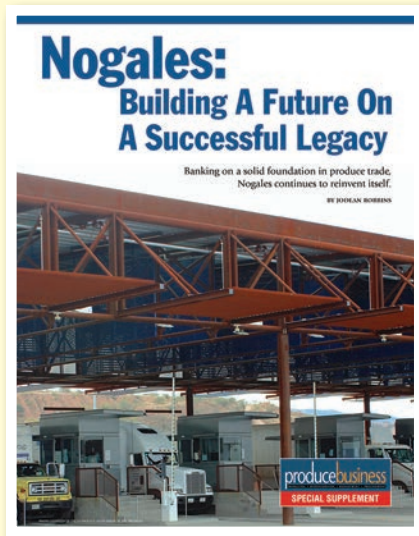
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FLORAL BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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produce quiz

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



DOUG DEYOUNG
 Director of Fresh Sales
 Harding's Market
 Plainwell, MI

Doug DeYoung has an impressive 50 years in the produce industry — specifically within retail for the Plainwell, MI-based Harding's Friendly Markets.

He began his adventure as a bagger and eventually became produce manager for a Town and Country supermarket, which was bought out by Harding's around 1981. By 1985, DeYoung joined Byron Center, MI-based SpartanNash. "I was on the road as a produce merchandiser for five years, and then returned to Harding's when a produce supervisor position became available," he recalls. "I like the retail side [of the produce

business] over the wholesale side. I like the hands-on, everyday responsibilities, and working with store staff."

Today, DeYoung coordinates with the seven independent Harding's banners included in the company's 27 retail outlets. He helps advise produce staff about buying, sizing and merchandising. "We're into our local deal now," he says. Each store has long-term relationships with farmers located throughout southwest Michigan and northern Indiana. "We buy as much local as we can, but 90 percent of what we buy is through SpartanNash."

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

WIN A PICKLEBALL KIT

This pickleball kit sets up in minutes for impromptu fun for two players. Its 12-foot wide by 26-inch high net can be used on any hard surface (e.g. driveway, tennis, or badminton courts). Sized between a table tennis paddle and a tennis racquet, the wooden paddles make for easy handling. The set also includes two balls. Pickleball is easy to learn and fun to play for anyone over the age of 8. The kit fits inside a carrying case for convenience.



QUESTIONS FOR THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

- 1) What fruit is considered the "scent of the tropics" in the J&C Tropical ad? _____
- 2) What is the website address for the Hass Avocado Board's Love One Today initiative? _____
- 3) How many ounces is the single-serve container for POM Wonderful's Fresh Pomegranate Arils? _____
- 4) What is the phone number for Target Interstate Systems' customer line? _____
- 5) What are the names of the three contacts listed on the ad for Interrupcion's Taste Me, Do Good? _____
- 6) What apple variety is showcased in the ad for the New York Apple Association? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
 Company _____
 Address _____
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 Phone _____ Fax _____

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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SEPTEMBER 2015 • VOL. 31 • NO. 09 • \$9.90

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 Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425
 PH: 561.994.1118 FAX: 561.994.1610
 Produce Business is published by Phoenix Media
 Network, Inc. James E. Prevor, Chairman of the Board
 P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425.
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*Nielsen Perishables Group Freshfacts, November 2014–April 2015



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Possible Signs of Bipartisanship, Progress Ahead On Key Legislation



BY JULIE MAINES,
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Seeing light at the end of the tunnel is a rare occurrence in Washington, D.C., these days as consumers are typically confronted with bitter partisanship attacks and negative soundbites. But, there are signs that Congress may actually be making progress in moving major legislation that will affect how we grow and transport produce in the United States.

The historic drought effecting California and much of the western U.S. is creating a devastating toll on America's fresh fruit and vegetable supply across the country. To date, the drought resulted in more than \$2 billion in lost income; 17,000 lost jobs; 500,000 acres now idle; and 300 billion gallons of diverted water away from California's Central Valley — the nation's leading provider of fruits and vegetables.

This summer, both the House and Senate introduced legislation that would provide relief to farmers, growers and other business owners negatively impacted by the relentless drought conditions. In June, the House passed the Western Water and American Food Security Act, which requires federal and state agencies to utilize better science as regulatory decisions based on new science to provide more water to parched communities. The bill also enacts permitting reforms aimed at building infrastructure to capture water — enabling the movement and storage of water throughout California to better prepare for future droughts. Introduced by Representative David Valadao (R-California), who will speak to attendees at the United Fresh 2015 Washington Conference, the House bill passed by a vote of 245-176.

In July, Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer (both D-California), intro-

We must build on the work that is being done in other key issues such as agriculture labor challenges and delays in the H2A guest-worker program and maintaining the current school nutrition standard of half-cup of a fruit and vegetable.

duced the California Drought Emergency Relief Act, which would assist rural and disadvantaged drought-stricken communities with a new USDA program; seek federal support for desalination projects; promote the building of new reservoirs; support water recycling projects; and increase agriculture water conservation mandates, among others initiatives. The Senate legislation is currently being considered by the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

While the years-long drought is nothing new to western parts of the U.S., the fact that lawmakers are tackling this disaster with legislation containing substantive and impactful measures that truly give it the potential to move forward, is new. Historically, politics got in the way of finding a truly effective solution — one that would balance current laws and regulations governing water availability for rural and urban communities with environmental needs. Even though the House and Senate both passed drought-assistance legislation last year, neither chamber was able to reach a compromise before adjourning at the end of last year.

Another piece of legislation that has a strong possibility of making its way through Congress in the coming weeks is the Federal Highway Bill. Set to expire earlier this summer, the House passed an extension in

July that will fund federal highway programs through the end of October. Looking beyond the extension, House Transportation Committee Chairman Bill Shuster maintains his goal is the completion of a long-term bill and is confident there is a strong will in Congress to put forth a long-term approach. In a rare spirit of cooperation, the Senate passed on a bipartisan vote a \$350 billion long-term, six-year deal.

While signs of real progress are being made in these two important areas, which are critical to the success of the produce industry, we must maintain the pressure on Congress to complete action on these bills and send them to the President for his signature.

Furthermore, we must build on the work that is being done in other key issues such as agriculture labor challenges and delays in the H2A guest-worker program and maintaining the current school nutrition standard of half-cup of a fruit and vegetable. With much-needed policy changes closer to being reality than they have been in a long time, it's essential that members of our industry attend the Washington Conference (September 28 - 30) where we'll dive deeper into these and other challenges, voice our concerns directly to members of Congress, and come together to shape a better business environment for the produce industry.

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TRANSITION



**J&J FAMILY OF FARMS
LOXAHATCHEE, FL**

As part of ongoing efforts to expand the leadership team and keep pace with organizational growth, J&J Family of Farms appoints **Tom Travers** as chief operating officer. Travers

is responsible for overseeing operations, sourcing, sales and transportation and has full P&L responsibility.



**MONTEREY MUSHROOMS
WATSONVILLE, CA**

Lindsey Roberts is joining Monterey Mushrooms Inc. as marketing coordinator. She will report to Mike O'Brien, vice president of sales and marketing. Roberts comes to Monterey Mushrooms from Lakeside Organic Gardens, LLC where she was responsible for marketing communications. Between 2010 to 2013, she worked for Monterey Mushrooms in quality assurance and food safety and as a grower.

TRANSITION



**READY PAC
IRWINDALE, CA**

Ready Pac Foods, Inc. announces **Dan Redfern** joins the company as chief financial officer. Redfern will be based in the Irwindale, CA-based headquarters and

will report to chief executive, Tony Sarsam. In his new role, Redfern will be responsible for overseeing and directing Ready Pac's financial goals and objectives, driving the company's financial planning including managing risk, record-keeping and company reporting. Redfern will serve on Ready Pac's First Team and assist on management of all strategic and tactical matters as they relate to budget management, cost benefit analysis, forecasting needs and securing new funding.

TRANSITION

ANNOUNCEMENT



**CALIFORNIA GIANT
CELEBRATES BACK TO SCHOOL**

California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, launched an exciting twist to the back-to-school season. The "Fresh Start" promotion supports the company's commitment to the Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools program. Running through September, the company is encouraging consumer followers to vote on which school should receive a new salad bar from California Giant based on those schools currently on the waiting list. As millions of students return to campus, California Giant is focused on helping provide fresh options in the school cafeteria and says the meals consumed can greatly add to the success kids experience in the classroom.

ANNOUNCEMENT



**GRAPES FROM MEXICO ANNOUNCES
DISPLAY CONTEST WINNERS**

Grapes from Mexico and Asociación Agricola Local de Productores Uva de Mesa (AALPUM), the local association of table grape growers in Sonora, Mexico, announced the winners of its "Snack On!" Retail Display contest in the Northeast region. Winners include Donelan's Supermarkets in Pepperell, MA and Highland Park Markets in Farmington, CT. Participating retailers competed for prizes such as an iPad Air and Bluetooth speakers. Displays were judged on overall creativity, size and use of branded POS materials.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**JOSIE'S ORGANICS VERIFIED
BY NON-GMO PROJECT**

Braga Fresh Family Farms, Soledad, CA, announces 25 Josie's Organics products are verified by the Non-GMO Project, including products in every category in the full line of USDA-certified: organic beets, radishes, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, herbs, kales, chards, lettuce and greens. The Non-GMO Project is North America's only independent verification for products made according to best practices for GMO avoidance.



ANNOUNCEMENT



RPE INTRODUCES ODDBALL ORGANICS

RPE Inc., Bancroft, WI, adds to its family of brands with Oddball Organics. These potatoes have the same flavor consumers recognize, the difference between these and traditional organic potatoes are the odd shapes or minor skin blemishes. Potatoes that are misshapen or contain minor blemishes are often discarded and considered non-market-grade potatoes. With Oddball Organics, RPE embraces these imperfections and reduces waste in the process.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**PEAR BUREAU NORTHWEST LAUNCHES
REDESIGNED CONSUMER SITE**

Pear Bureau Northwest, Milwaukie, OR, launches a bright, bold new look at www.usapears.org to optimize the website for use while in the kitchen or on-the-go. The new site brings 10 Northwest pear varieties to life through rich recipe and lifestyle images, instructional videos, and pages highlighting nutrition, snacking, and pear ripening. Recipes on usapears.org are organized in Pinterest-style layout and can be shared via social media with the click of a button. Website visitors can browse more than 250 recipes, filtering searches by pear variety, keyword, or recipe category. The recipe section also has a review feature, where users can rate recipes and leave comments and suggestions.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**GIUMARRA INCREASES
STONE FRUIT AND CITRUS
VOLUME WITH JOINT VENTURE**

Giumarra, Los Angeles, announces a new sales and marketing agreement representing Kingsburg, CA-based Wildwood Packing and Cooling and its growers. Giumarra will market Wildwood's volume of California stone fruit and citrus. The exclusive agreement will commence in fall of 2015, beginning with Wildwood's citrus offering. Following in spring 2016, Wildwood's volume of California stone fruit will round out the program. The partnership with Wildwood supports Giumarra's Nature's Partner DulceVida proprietary line of stone fruit. The DulceVida program made its first commercial launch in spring 2015.





INNOVATION HAS TURNED OVER A NEW LEAF.



ANNOUNCEMENT

NATUREFRESH FARMS MOBILE GREENHOUSE TOUR EDUCATES CONSUMERS

NatureFresh Farms' (Leamington, Ontario) #GreenInTheCity Tour is making an impact with its mobile greenhouse on both sides of the border. After touring through New York, Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, the tour visited the company's home region of Windsor-Tecumseh at Zehrs, Kingsville Zehrs, and Sarnia Real Canadian Superstore. In addition to learning about how greenhouse produce is grown, customers get to sample fresh tomatoes as part of each event. Served raw and in prepared recipes, the NatureFresh Demo Station in the store is staffed by the company's corporate chef, Henry Furtado. He helps pair the right accents to create flavorful recipes at home using fresh tomatoes, bell peppers, and cucumbers.



ANNOUNCEMENT

AMERICAN PISTACHIO GROWERS ENLIST TEAM OF LIFESTYLE ALL STARS FOR GIFTING INITIATIVE

American Pistachio Growers, Fresno, CA, wants to encourage gifting of pistachios this holiday season. To do so, the company enlisted a team of renowned, coast-to-coast tastemakers to demonstrate how. The grower organization is also holding a contest

for the general public for the most creative gift ideas. Ten winners will receive a year's supply of pistachios.

Representing the gamut of lifestyle categories (home design, food, the arts, event planning, and pop culture) are: Emmy-winning designers, Twinart; Cheryl Forberg of NBC's "The Biggest Loser"; and Bravo star, Jes Gordon, just to name a few.



SUN WORLD LICENSES 4 SOUTH AMERICAN GRAPE MARKETERS

Sun World International, Bakersfield, CA, appoints four leading grape producer-exporters to grow and market its proprietary seedless grapes from vineyards throughout South America. The appointments include Exser in Chile, Agrivale in Brazil, and Ecosac and Agricola Chapi in Peru. The four companies join 12 existing Sun World grape marketer licensees in Chile, Peru and Brazil. In addition to growing many of Sun World's new seedless grape varieties, the four new licensees are able to distribute fruit from the new labels as well as distribute Sun World's existing brands, which include Midnight Beauty, Scarlotta, Seedless, Autumncrisp, Adora Seedless and Sable Seedless in the marketplace.



ANNOUNCEMENT



DOMEX SUPERFRESH GROWERS KICKS OFF APPLE SEASON WITH RETAIL SUPPORT

Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, WA, provides retailers with new tools to connect with consumers by relaunching its social media promotion, "Your Awesome Apple Recipe Sweepstakes," and a new offering of apple-related social media content. Traditional in-store promotional materials and new social media content is designed to help drive excitement for the category and help retailers communicate to their customers about the apple varieties they source from Domex. The apple content kit is all original and easy for retailers to download. It will contain a variety of educational information, ready-to-post photography and graphics, pre-written Tweets, recipes and inspirational usage ideas.

ANNOUNCEMENT

NEW YORK APPLE GROWERS UNVEILS NEW ORGANIZATION NAME

New York Apple Growers (NYAG), Wolcott, NY, changed its name to Crunch Time Apple Growers after the launch of the SnapDragon and RubyFrost apple varieties. The organization is comprised of 145 grower members who are united with the mission of introducing exclusive, flavorful apple varieties to the marketplace.



ANNOUNCEMENT

TIP MURPHY LEGACY GOLF TOURNAMENT

The United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C., held the 2015 Tip Murphy Legacy Golf Tournament. Participants of this fundraising event supported the foundation's programs to increase children's access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Attendees enjoyed networking and participated in raffles, all to support a cause benefiting the next generation of produce consumers.



ANNOUNCEMENT

WISH FARMS EXPANDS ARGENTINA BLUEBERRY PROGRAM

Wish Farms, Plant City, FL, announces its upcoming Argentina blueberry program. The Argentina blueberry season will span from the beginning of October to the end of November and will segue into the Chilean season. Although there will be a light trickle of fruit beginning in early September, the first significant volume out of Argentina will be around the first week of October.



ANNOUNCEMENT

NATURAL DELIGHTS EARNS NON-GMO PROJECT VERIFICATION




Natural Delights, Bard Valley, CA, announces it is Non-GMO Project Verified, furthering commitment to providing quality, fresh fruit for consumers. The Non-GMO Project is North America's only third-party verification and labeling organization for non-GMO food and products. Natural Delights will proudly display the Non-GMO Project Verification mark on its packaging, beginning this fall, coinciding with the 2015 crop harvest.

ANNOUNCEMENT

STEMILT'S LIL SNAPPERS BRAND OFFERS KID-SIZED APPLES AND PEARS

Stemilt's (Wenatchee, WA) Lil Snappers are heading back-to-school with kids this fall thanks to an early start on both apple and pear harvest in Washington state. Gala apples and Bartlett and Starkrimson pears are among the first varieties harvested. The grab-and-go Lil Snappers 3-pound pouch bag was launched in 2011 and popular with parents. The Lil Snappers pouch bag also helps retailers by boosting categories through a higher retail price and purchase size. Stemilt recommends promoting Lil Snappers pears regularly alongside bulk promotions.





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Turbulent Times For Retail

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

All across the country we see evidence that food retailing is fundamentally changing. In the New York metro area, the once mighty Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P) disintegrates before our very eyes. In all one does in business, one should remember this: There was a time when A&P bestrode the land no less mightily than Wal-Mart does today. It was the world's largest retailer. Yet, what value is left is in its real estate. Nothing is forever. From ashes to ashes, from dust to dust.

Consolidation abounds — Safeway and Albertsons, now Ahold and Delhaize — yet these mergers, though they may provide sustenance for Wall Street dealmakers, seem unlikely to provide much value to consumers.

Although lawsuits are flying in all directions, the fundamental fact remains that, for whatever reason, Haggen's attempt to grow from 18 stores to 164 locations in one day, while bringing an unknown brand and different concept into the California market, is failing and demonstrating both the difficulties inherent in the supermarket business today and that much depends on one's ability to execute.

There is interest by almost every chain in opening smaller scale urban formats, lately best signified by Ahold's recent fresh launch in Allston, MA. The concepts may be winners: In the UK, the "express" and "local" versions of the big chains have come to dominate the market for small convenience-oriented stores, displacing lots of independent and ethnic retailers.

Though driven by many factors — growing urban hipster populations, the difficulty in securing prime suburban sites, etc. — it is also true that a symbiotic relationship is coming into being between online shopping services and these small fresh formats. Urban dwellers can buy their big volume weekly shop on line and then fill in with a run across the street to one of these small store urban concepts. This fill-in requirement means the stores have to orient heavily toward fresh items and foodservice options.

The discounters are rolling out fast across the country, with Aldi being the most aggressive, but with Lidl soon to appear and Supervalu spinning off Save-a-Lot so it can raise capital, focus management and grow faster. Yet the funny thing is that the discounters are not just about being cheap anymore. The extraordinary transition that Aldi pioneered, and what distinguishes today's deep discount category from, say, dollar stores, is that today's discounters have moved from stores designed to serve the poor to stores designed to serve "smart shoppers" who want to spend their money wisely. This means that Aldi and the discounters have had to change assortment to be more "on trend" with organic, gluten-free and other specialty offerings.

The founders of Whole Foods brilliantly understood the power of

the idea of a retail concept carrying items good for the world and good for the consumer. As with many niche ideas, though, this concept has become so successful it is becoming mainstream. If the practical manifestation of the ethos is organic or local, and those products are available elsewhere for less, it will become difficult to see Whole Foods delivering the kind of growth in the future that it has in the past.

Whole Foods' recent efforts to focus on the story behind the food, through its "Responsibly Grown" initiative, have suffered as producers protest its grading system, but the big unknown is to what degree consumers are willing to change their purchasing habits based on these criteria. There is some evidence that retailers caught procuring product from companies mistreating workers or misusing natural resources can be hurt, but there is less evidence that doing things right increases consumer preference.

Online is booming, with Amazon seemingly having decided that nearly 10 years of development in Seattle was sufficient and now it is ready to roll out across the country. There is a lot of evidence that many consumers prefer click-and-collect to delivery, and that positions brick-and-mortar retailers to have an important role in the online space, but most of the conventional chains have invested only sparingly in online and may not seize the opportunity.

The big success stories are national (and international) chains with very specific market positions: Costco, Aldi, Trader Joe's — they are proving themselves exceptionally successful competitors with clear market positions.

In contrast, conventional grocery struggles. They are not as inexpensive as Aldi, as epicurean as Trader Joe's, as convenient as Amazon Fresh or Fresh Direct, or as high quality as Costco. Conventional supermarkets seem unable to respond. Trader Joe's was bought in 1979 by the family that owns Aldi. Aldi itself opened in the United States in 1976; Costco opened in 1976, and Amazon spent 8 years developing its Amazon Fresh concept. Yet just as they allowed Wal-Mart to roll across their territory without fielding a competitive supercenter of their own, most conventional supermarkets seem fully prepared to allow their territories to be infiltrated by these up-and-coming concepts without any direct response.

And Wal-Mart? It is stuck in a hard place — not as inexpensive as Aldi, yet with a brand that means not just low cost, but downscale. It has massive square footage, but as business shifts to online, it is not clear the world needs that much square footage. More than a decade ago, Bruce Peterson suggested Wal-Mart should sell the stores while someone still wanted to buy them. Time may prove him prescient. **pb**

Conventional grocery struggles. They are not as inexpensive as Aldi, as epicurean as Trader Joe's, as convenient as Amazon Fresh or Fresh Direct, or as high quality as Costco.



NEW FROM MANN'S!



WOMEN OWNED BUSINESS



FreshFacts® on Retail Report Rundown

Produce is a rapidly changing space. During the past 15 years, there's been a revolution in the availability and applicability of performance and consumer data for fresh produce. With that in mind, Washington, D.C.-based United Fresh Produce Association, in partnership with the Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group, enhanced the *FreshFacts*® at Retail quarterly and Year in Review reports, sponsored by Miami, FL-based Del Monte Fresh Produce, to be more impactful and in line with the perspective and insights needed to help drive our industry forward.

Taking a look back at 2014 trends, U.S. households are spending more money on fresh foods than they did in 2013. The fresh produce department increased both average weekly dollar and volume sales in 2014 and growth outpaced the meat, bakery and seafood departments. Performance data remains a key element of measuring this growth with a spotlight on seasonal categories as a feature of each quarterly report. In Q1 2015, seven of the Top 10 fruit categories (berries, citrus, avocados, specialty fruits, melons, stone fruits and cherries) increased volume sales compared to Q1 2014, but only four of the Top 10 vegetable categories increased dollar and volume sales.

Generational data continues to be a strong factor in measuring merchandising behavior as the industry realizes there are more generational differences in buying behavior now than ever before. Boomers represent nearly 80 million people and account for nearly 39 percent of all produce sales with their significant spending power. They are more likely than the average shopper to purchase convenient items such as value-added fruit. Conversely, Millennials (born between 1980-1995) drive about a quarter of produce sales and buy apples more often, and packaged salad less often, than the average shopper.

"*FreshFacts*® on Retail provides our member companies with data they can use to understand consumer trends and develop their retail produce strategy," says Jeff Oberman, vice president, trade relations and Retail-Foodservice Board staff liaison for

The fresh produce department increased both average weekly dollar and volume sales in 2014 and growth outpaced the meat, bakery and seafood departments.

United Fresh. "Increased category spotlights, deep dives into generational data, as well as insights on produce's impact across channels and the total store will help our members drive their businesses forward."

When taking specific commodities into account, the quarterly reports measure retail price and sales trends for the Top 10 fruit and vegetable commodities, as well as value-added, organic and other produce categories. The Q1 2015 report also features insights on organics and value-added produce, as well as category deep dives on popular summer items, including stone fruit, cherries and sweet corn.

Stone fruit sales struggled during the 2014 peak season (July-Sept.) but still generated nearly 60 percent of annual sales during this period. A national recall caused a supply shortage resulting in significant price increases and corresponding sluggish volume. Barring sudden crop issues, a return to normal prices should generate sales growth this year. Stone fruits also have an opportunity to expand into the pre-cut area, which has continued its rapid growth.

Cherry sales soared during the 2014 peak season as a strong crop resulted in much lower prices than the prior year. With more than half of all cherry sales occurring on promotion, it's important to advertise it's cherry season. Cherries also have an opportunity to gain new households purchasing and increase trip frequency, given that both are low compared to other seasonal fruits.

Due to its price point, corn has wide appeal across income groups, yet it only reaches four in 10 U.S. households. Linking corn with other items purchased during grilling season could help increase corn sales. It's important to remind consumers of fresh corn value versus year-round frozen and canned substitutes.

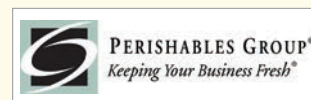
Produce item sales for salad bars, potato salad, cole slaw and other lettuce salads in the deli are at \$405 million, which is up 9.8 percent. The report explores how produce in the deli provides solutions for shoppers seeking healthy and convenient meal solutions. It also analyzes a deeper dive into how the Boomer generation's spending power impacts the fresh produce industry and a look at perceptions of how different income groups purchase fresh produce.

Value-added fruits and vegetable sales data from Q1 2015 shows they surpassed the \$3.6 billion mark annually with 11.5 percent growth over the past full year. This is supported by the Boomer data stated above where value-added fruits and vegetables are most often purchased by this demographic. Although the most affluent households spend a larger share of their perishable spending on produce than the least affluent, produce is still frequently purchased across all income levels.



About United Fresh Produce Association

Founded in 1904, the United Fresh Produce Association brings together companies across every segment of the fresh produce supply chain, including growers, shippers, fresh-cut processors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, foodservice operators, industry suppliers and allied associations. We empower industry leaders to shape sound government policy. We deliver the resources and expertise companies need to succeed in managing complex business and technical issues. We provide the training and development individuals need to advance their careers in produce. Through these endeavors, we unite our industry with a common purpose — to build long-term value for our members and grow produce consumption.



About Nielsen Perishables Group

Nielsen Perishables Group is the industry expert in fresh food consulting, offering a full spectrum of solutions for the complete fresh food marketplace as well as consumer and category understanding.

Data And A Dose Of Experience Create Best Path To Decision-Making

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

There is no question that the explosion in data available about fresh produce sales at retail creates an enormous opportunity for both retailers and vendors to use this data to find more effective ways to boost produce sales. Data, however, is not insight. Recognizing and appreciating the valuable contribution that United Fresh, the Perishables Group and Del Monte Fresh made in supporting such research, it still is easy to struggle to understand the meaning and significance of the reams of data now available.

Take a look at generational data; it is interesting to pinpoint behavioral differences between Baby Boomers, Millennials, Gen X, Generation Z, and other generational cohorts. But do the differences signify divergent attitudes of distinct generational cohorts, or do the differences represent the transition of attitudes as people age? What one would really like are studies of Baby Boomers when they were 14 years old so we can compare with Generation Z — but we don't have such long-term data.

Increases and decreases in sales of individual items change dramatically based on crop quality, quantity and timing. Even the location of production can have a dramatic impact on sales channels and price. Let Washington have a bumper crop of apples, and the large grower/shipper/packers in that state will carefully manage sales using substantial cold storage facilities and other resources. The exact same volume in states with smaller shippers is likely to find apples being dumped in terminal markets all over the country with prices collapsing.

Sometimes getting a deeper understanding of the data requires bringing in outside data. For example, if produce is picking up market share against meat, we want to know how prices of meat and poultry in that period stack up against price levels on produce.

Data doesn't eliminate the need for experience. Data provides a new forum for experience to add value.

Data also can't be viewed in isolation. Did spinach sales plummet? One can't just read the POS data; one needs to know that the FDA declared nobody should eat it that week.

And knowing the current news is not enough either. Food safety events, as an example, could have sales implications for years to come. And winnowing out the actual cause of data shifts is an exercise worthy of Sherlock Holmes.

Take the Alar crisis of 1988 — *60 Minutes* ran a story that scared people away from apples, and apple sales declined. It seemed simple, and many surmised that consumers alone reacted to the *60 Minutes* exposé and shied away from apples. But later, more in-depth studies said the situation was more complicated than that. Because of the news report, retailers shied away from promoting apples so they were removed from best food day ads and other promotions. A big chunk of the decline in apple sales seemed to have been due to retailers and their decisions to react to the Alar report as they did.

There are some things data can't tell. We can't sell more of a product than is produced. So if sales hold steady, that may be a sign of steady demand, or it may mean there is great untapped demand, because production is not rising.

The produce department also evolves, and only careful attention to the data can winnow out the details. Winter produce sales exploded as production centers in Latin America became prominent during the past 30 years. So evaluating one year's data against a different year requires assessment

of product availability in each year.

Merchandising can also distort the numbers. If retailers decide to carry only one organic SKU on low volume items, organic sales may rise — but that might not signal any particular increase in consumer demand for organic produce.

The weak-willed may desire to run away from this data, yet that path guarantees the industry will not advance. The goal, instead, is to deeply engage with data, and then interpret the data *shrewdly*. The subtext behind the word *shrewdly* is utilizing the experience of multiple analysts, gathered through working in produce and with consumers over the course of a lifetime.

In other words, the popular perception that data is best used as a replacement for decisions previously made based on gut instinct, or mentoring delivered by old-timers, is not quite right. Yes, of course, decisions made based on good data are likely to be closer to optimal than decisions blindly followed because one's first boss said it was so. But data, in and of itself, never tells us what to do.

There is no decision that automatically flows from streams of sales statistics. So those who will use data best are those who leverage the experience of people long active in the trade, with new insights from collected data, to identify paths to optimal decision-making. Data doesn't eliminate the need for experience. Data provides a new forum for experience to add value.

So get this most interesting report, and make it useful by adding a good dose of produce expertise.

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Email: postharvest@ucdavis.edu

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Website: newenglandproduceCouncil.com

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Conference Venue: The Breakers, Palm Beach, FL

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Email: martha.tucker@ffva.com

Website: ffva.com

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Cecil The Lion, Donald Trump And Two Cheers For Capitalism

The story of the killing of Cecil the lion tells us a lot about our country and the West, but not necessarily what we would like to know.

If you were living under a rock for the past month, Cecil was a majestic lion that was killed in Zimbabwe under disputed circumstances by an American dentist from Minnesota. Cecil lived in an animal preserve but was allegedly wooed off the preserve and then killed.

It is said that Cecil was well known and deeply beloved. He apparently had a tracking device from Oxford University, and that made him a tourist attraction. Though these claims should be viewed with some skepticism as people in Africa find the prospect of lions entering their villages highly disruptive and very dangerous. They are lions, not kittens.

Today he is certainly beloved in memory. Jimmy Kimmel tears up when talking about him. He has millions of followers and friends on social media. Mia Farrow thought it a good idea to tweet out the address of the Minnesota hunter's dental practice — the better to dispense with the legal niceties and just send the vigilantes to get him.

It is possible the dentist broke a law in Zimbabwe. He claims he paid more than \$50,000 to bag a lion and relied on the local guides to set it up as a legal hunt. It is also true that laws are broken all the time in Zimbabwe — not least by Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, whose most recent birthday party included him eating the meat of a baby elephant.

There are several laws that may have been broken related both to enticing an animal to leave a preserve and permit

allocations to shoot lions on private land — beyond this, it is unclear what a foreign tourist is expected to know about Zimbabwe law.

The whole outcry reminds one of nothing as much as the emotional outpouring in England over the death of Princess Diana and, especially, the contrast between the public reaction around her funeral and that of a world historical figure such as Winston Churchill. The contrast did not persuade us that society had advanced during the 32 years between the two events.

There is a kind of silly sentimentality that overcomes our civilization in which the public discourse gets diverted from substantive matters to the passion of the moment.

First, the enormous attention paid to the death of Cecil tells us that our citizenry is now focused on what can only be seen as aesthetic revulsion. There are loads of lions being killed every year in places such as the Sudan, but barely a word is heard, because we would actually have to do something to solve that problem — such as invade the Sudan. With Cecil, people can just be passionate and emotional, but not have to do anything or sacrifice anything. As long as the problem is not thrown in their face, people turn the other way.

Second, many are not inclined to actually solve any problems but just want to feel morally superior. So they enjoy noting that the dentist/hunter is



James F. Prevor

JIM PREVOR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

a horrible person and should be severely punished, even killed, but few are inclined to actually propose policies that would deal with the issue at hand. In fact, it is impossible to find a coherent point in all the lamentations. Are they urging that the killing of animals be banned — so no more meat or leather? Or is it just killing for sport that is the problem, so killing lions is OK if one butchers them into steaks and makes sure those are eaten?

Every year, we have to stop printing our magazines because hunting season opens and all the guys on the press take off for a week. There is just zero indication that the media types who feed this moral outrage know or care that lots of people go hunting right here in America.

Third, it is well known in the conservation community that encouraging activities such as hunting by rich Westerners actually encourages conservation. Setting aside land for conservation, having rangers patrolling the land, etc., all costs a lot of money — both in direct outlays and in opportunity costs. The only way poor communities support such efforts is if they can profit from doing all this. Eco-tourism, photo-safaris and, yes, wild game hunting are the mechanisms

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that make local communities willing and able to sustain conservation efforts.

The dentist/hunter has been chastised for spending more than \$50,000 on this hunt; the implication is that he was doing something seedy, yet, in fact, it is the willingness of people to spend money like this that sustains conservation efforts. The indication on social media and in the press that these are complicated issues and that legal changes may have unintended consequences has been almost non-existent. If the prosecution of this dentist scares away 1,000 other hunts, that is \$50 million to very poor countries. That is a life-changing amount of money.

Fourth, it is quite interesting that all this is transpiring at a time when Donald Trump has been leading the polls for the Republican Presidential nomination. Mr. Trump's sons, Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr., are famously hunters of wild game and, even more interesting, famously non-apologetic for doing so. Mark Cuban said Donald Trump's appeal has little to do with his policy positions but, rather, with a sense that he speaks his mind and is not desperately calculating his responses to avoid giving insult or to coordinate with received opinion of the day. This seems to imply there is some portion of the population that has come to believe this propensity for political correctness — this enormous hesitation to offend — is no longer serving the country by promoting community but is, instead, making it difficult for the country to address real problems.

Fifth, most of the outrage seems to focus on supposed ethical lapses by the dentist. Others mentioned the weak enforcement of laws in Zimbabwe. The role that capitalism could play in protecting wildlife and in determining the appropriate amounts to spend on protecting wildlife is completely ignored. After all, there is an oddity at the heart of the story we have been told of Cecil the lion. On the one hand, we are told that this particular lion was uniquely valuable and beloved. On the other hand, we are told he lived in an unfenced game preserve. The dentist is blamed for wooing Cecil outside the preserve with meat, but Cecil could have just as well walked out of the preserve or been

This scenario is not about Cecil the lion, but about people wanting to feel good about themselves, so they can experience this situation as an expression of their moral superiority over the Minneapolis dentist. This has become an all too common trend in society.

enticed by food that got there naturally whether it was game running by or humans having a barbecue.

In addition, as a lion in the preserve, Cecil was not protected from other lions, crocodiles, injury, etc. Let us suppose that the story had the same ending — a dead Cecil — but he died because another lion challenged him for leadership of the pride and won. Injured in that fight, Cecil is banished from the pride as often happens. Then, as a lone, injured lion, he is killed by a pack of hyenas.

The logical ways to protect something of value is to make sure someone owns it. If ownership is clearly established, then those who own things generally protect them. This might be an individual lion or it might be the whole game preserve. It is when things are owned by everybody that nobody spends the money to protect them.

Yet, in the end, we doubt Cecil the lion was actually the point. If the issue is really that the death of Cecil is such a loss, then the loss would be just as great whether we lose Cecil due to hyenas or to a hunter. Yet it is almost certainly true that had Cecil died via hyena, very few people would have heard about it or cared about Cecil's demise.

This scenario is not about Cecil the lion, but about people wanting to feel good about themselves, so they can experience this situation as an expression of their moral superiority over the Minneapolis dentist. This has become an all too common trend in society.

We wrote back in November of 2009 about how retailers ran away from a

blueberry operation in Michigan that was alleged to have used child labor. The retailers were reflecting their customers' aesthetic revulsion to the plight of poor parents working in the field who might bring their children with them. Yet abandoning this grower didn't help the poor parents or their children. The retailers didn't offer to put the poor kids in summer camp. The retailers didn't offer to pay the parents more so the pickers could hire babysitters.

They were not actually solving the problem; they were just catering to the aesthetic sense of consumers that they didn't want to be associated with ugly things. We see the same going on regarding consumer attitudes toward migrant farm workers here or in Mexico. There is a lot of outrage, but very little in the way of solutions. And even when companies announce they are part of the solution — as Ahold did recently with its announcement that it would join the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' "Fair Food" program, there is little notion of addressing whether such efforts actually help at all — much less whether the intended population winds up a net beneficiary. After all, when the price of labor rises in one place, it disadvantages that production source thus leading business to migrate elsewhere.

But that is not the point. And that is the problem. Instead of addressing real problems in serious ways, we are neglecting real problems to be emotional extroverts about fallen princesses and dead lions. It may make us feel better, but we won't be better.

pb

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Green Valley Marketplace



Rick Rodgers, chief operating officer of B. Green & Co. — the parent company for the independent banner, Green Valley Marketplace — tells the story of how one wholesaler grew to a fully integrated produce business with a distribution platform, retail outlets and procurement strategies.

BY OSCAR KATOV

“It’s really a family story starting in 1910 with arrival of Benjamin Green in Baltimore, MD, from Lithuania,” says Rodgers.

Green started a food distribution business using a horse-drawn cart to serve small independent grocers.

“The continued success of the company after 100 years is an exciting story,” says Rodgers. “Particularly when it [the company] remains family-owned and -operated. That tells us something very important — that succeeding generations are firmly dedicated to the growth of the business. It means that in an evolving economy, and in evolving times, the family’s next generation will continue to respond to changing circumstances.”

Today, that’s the plan of the third generation management team: Benjamin Green, chief executive; Ben Sigman, chairman emeritus; and Bernice Sigman, owner/board member.

What followed through the years of succeeding generations was two Cash & Carry stores (wholesaler that is strictly business-to-business), two Food Depots (supermarket formats), one distribution warehouse and one Green Valley Marketplace — a 40,000-square-foot independent retailer with an emphasis on perishables, organics, and natural foods.

Through a surge in family participation, a successful working relationship developed with Eden Prairie, MN-based Supervalu.

“We do a lot of local purchasing when it

is in season, and we deal with many local farmers on a regular basis,” says Rodgers. “We are purchasing anywhere from five to 10 local farmers. From a standpoint of apple varieties: we try to keep a minimum of 10 apple varieties at all times. Pepper varieties: we try to keep somewhere between 15 to 20 varieties. The greens we stock are kale, chards and leafy greens.

Rodgers says that even though the store is smaller compared to the company’s other formats, “we do have an on-site holistic dietician,” who is dedicated to produce and creates recipes and meal solutions for shoppers to include more fresh vegetables and fruits in their diets.

The store also boasts health-conscious point-of-sale materials under its “Eat Right, Live Well” program, which highlights gluten-free items, GMO-free, and organic produce. The store integrates these healthy packaged items with its conventionals and has a specific refrigerated organics section for produce, so customers can shop with ease.

To continue the company’s legacy, a new Green Valley Marketplace store will open in Arnold, MD, near Annapolis and the U.S.



Navy Academy in October. “My objective as COO is to ensure the viability of our business models,” says Rodgers. “We want to differentiate with purpose. We want to create initiatives customers want, and offer them consistency to create excitement and loyalty. We try to deliver 100 percent on everything we say that we are.”

As the company moves forward into its second set of 100 years, Rodgers offers insight into Green Valley Marketplace’s objectives and operations.

"We continue to stay involved in the community, to offer a point of difference, and to be relevant to maintain the trust of our customers."

– Rick Rodgers

PRODUCE BUSINESS: How do you differentiate yourself with produce competitors?

Rick Rodgers: We are very heavy with organics in the Green Valley store, and they represent 8 to 10 percent of produce sales in that store. In the markets we service, we want to have the best variety and quality. We pride ourselves on having the latest and best items.

Because our two Food Depot stores and Cash and Carry outlets are so different from the Green Valley store, the respective produce managers have the authority to work with local farmers directly. We're on a seven-day replenishment schedule to maintain our fresh commitment and our appeal to customers. Our primary sources for fresh produce replenishment are Supervalu and Baltimore, MD-based Lancaster Foods. To be sure that we're hitting on all of our needs and conditions, such as weather, we have 20 to 25 suppliers always ready to call.

PB: Please give us an idea of Green Valley's prepared foods program.

RR: First, we do not open cans or jars, or tubs of salads. I would say 85 percent of salads are store-made. We do our own smoked ribs and smoked turkey parts. We do all the dishes that go with it, such as the macaroni and cheese and the almond green beans. We do fresh sushi, which is prepared in store. We make meals to-go, such as pot roasts, meat loaf, turkey breasts. We do sea foods: filets, stuffed shrimp and crab cakes. We also do a cut fruit and veggie program. In our meat department, we do combinations with produce and ready-to-eat. Baltimore is a big seafood town, so our seafood departments are huge [in both Food Depot and Green Valley locations]. Our stores are a great attraction for seafood. We sell live and steamed crab just like the crab houses.

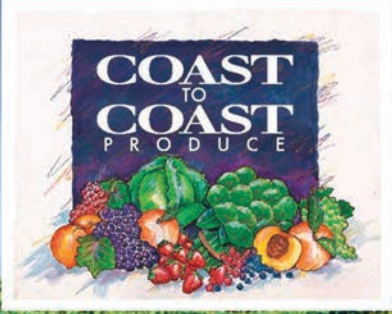
PB: How do you create a competitive edge for your business?

RR: The way is to create a point of difference. When you walk into our seafood departments, we have actual fish mongers who can prepare fish any way you want. In our meat departments, we have professionals who can custom-cut what you specifically

want. In our deli departments, we ran a contest asking customers to bring in recipes to let our customers taste. Now we name certain recipes after the customer that created it.

We continue to stay involved in the community, to offer a point of difference, and to be relevant to maintain the trust of our customers. **pb**

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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

INDUSTRY PLAYERS DISCUSS THE PHILOSOPHY AND ITS ROLE IN THE PRODUCE JOURNEY FROM FIELD TO FORK.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



Consumers desire produce that is flavorful, priced right and offers convenience, but that's not all. Today's shoppers also want to know how people and the planet were affected along the produce journey from field to fork.

"We see an uptick in the number of consumers interested in attributes that fall into the realm of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)," says David Fikes, vice president of consumer/community affairs and communications for the Arlington, VA-headquartered Food Marketing Institute (FMI). "Many of these [attributes], which fall into personal benefit, social, economic and environmental zones, were once single-digit concerns that are now well into double digits."

Personal benefits, such as good value and convenience, are the two most important traits ranked by consumers when choosing a grocery store to shop, according to FMI's *U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2015*, prepared by the Hartman Group, based in Bellevue, WA. These qualities increased 16 and 17 percent, respectively, in shopper priorities during the past two

years. However, the biggest gains came in the three other zones, specifically consumer concern for animal welfare (23 percent), air and water pollution (20 percent) and employment practices (19 percent).

CSR and sustainability are indeed becoming more important based on feedback by consumers, operators and suppliers alike, according to the 2014 *Healthy Eating Consumer Trend Report*, published by Chicago-based Technomic, Inc. At the same time, this report reveals CSR and sustainability are two ill-defined, misunderstood, and seemingly interchangeable terms and require clarity in definition to achieve clarity in direction.

"The definition of CSR in general, as well as for the produce industry, is an obligation for companies to use resources well — ensuring future generations can operate in this space — and to have a positive impact on society," explains Kathy Means, vice president of industry relations for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), headquartered in Newark, DE. "These components are usually described as a triad: social/environmental/economic or people/planet/profit or something similar. In produce, health

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With consistent year-round sales of fresh watermelon through its “MelonUp! Pink Ribbon Watermelon” program, Robinson Fresh collaborated with more than 25 retailers, raising more than \$1 million for breast cancer research organizations throughout North America.

is another piece of CSR. Having products that enhance the health of those who consume them is considered by some to be a strong piece of CSR.”

CSR consciousness is not a new phenomenon in the produce industry. Farmers through the years maintained an allegiance to the environmentally beneficial belief of “take care of the land and the land will take care of you.” The humanity aspect has long been key too. For example, back in 1924, Westlake Village, CA-based Dole Fresh Fruit built the Vicente d’Antoni Hospital in one of its prime banana farming lands on the Atlantic Coast of Honduras. This institution continues to provide the community with a variety of medical services. Categorizing these initiatives under the banner of CSR generates greater consumer demand, and more companies throughout the produce supply chain are either enhancing or creating a wide variety of CSR-oriented plans.

SUPPLY CHAIN RESPONSIBILITY

“The food industry is responsible to everyone in its distribution channel,” says John Stanton, Ph.D., professor of food marketing at St. Joseph’s University, in Philadelphia. “That said, the genesis of CSR throughout the supply chain isn’t so much altruism as it is to give customers what they want. If a customer wants something, everyone, from grower/shippers to retailers and restaurateurs, is going to figure out a way to supply it.”

Grower/Shippers: “Everyone is important in realizing a responsible supply chain,” says Gavin Bailey, director of responsible sourcing for Wal-Mart, the multinational retailer headquartered in

Bentonville, AR, which operates more than 11,000 stores. “Retailers can help convene conversations, set expectations, raise awareness, create alignment and work with stakeholders to help foster responsible supply chains. The role of suppliers is to understand the risks and compliance gaps and work proactively with their supply chains to reduce risk and improve compliance.”

Large U.S.-based international grower/shippers are already on this page. For example, Chiquita Brands International, headquartered in Charlotte, NC, attained Rainforest Alliance certification on all the banana farms it owns in 2000. Del Monte Fresh, based in Coral Gables, FL, implemented an environmental policy in its worldwide operations. Programs that fall under this policy are regularly audited internally and externally.

On the social side, Dole Fresh Fruit started farming foundations in its growing areas that lack health infrastructure. In one example, the Dale Foundation in Ecuador — funded by per-box contributions from Dole and its banana growers — recently surpassed 1 million health-related actions, such as lab tests and vaccinations during its decade-long history.

However, size doesn’t matter when it comes to a company’s ability to put

CSR practices in place. Gary Wishnatzki, chief executive of Wish Farms, a 2,500-acre strawberry operation in Plant City, FL, which employs 75 full-time and 700 to 800 part-time workers, was tackling the food safety issue when he created and patented the company’s pioneering traceability tool, ‘How’s My Picking?’. A unique 16-digit code affixed to each clamshell pack of berries via a yellow sticker gives consumers the opportunity to provide comments.

“This feedback is shared with our growers and pickers to hold them accountable and to ensure we offer the highest-quality fruit. This tool also allowed us to identify and reward those pickers who are doing a great job with bonus plans,” says Wishnatzki.

Wholesalers, Logistic Providers & Fresh Marketers: Philanthropy is a long-standing part of the company culture at Philadelphia-based Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., one of the largest wholesale produce distributors in North America. For example, the company, which sources and grows tomatoes (as well as other produce in Mexico and Florida), is completely upgrading its housing and accompanying facilities for its Ag-Mart employees in Mexico with all new construction.

The construction also benefits the National Migrant Seasonal Head Start Summer Internship Program, which is a unique summer program located in Washington, D.C. that is available to former migrant workers and seasonal Head Start students who are currently in college. Regarding the company’s environmentally conscious division, projects range from reducing energy, food waste and fertilizers. To eliminate the use of Styrofoam beverage cups in the company’s business offices, all employees were provided with their own mugs.

Market-driven is how Nelson Longenecker, vice president of business innovation at the Ephrata, PA-based Four Seasons Produce family of companies,

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— John Stanton, Ph.D., St. Joseph’s University



PHOTO COURTESY OF WISH FARMS

Gary Wishnatzki, created and patented the company's pioneering traceability tool, 'How's My Picking?'. A unique 16-digit code affixed to each clamshell pack of berries via a yellow sticker gives consumers the opportunity to provide feedback to the company.

explains the company's business dynamic when it comes to CSR. "One of our core values is to create exceptional and long-lasting partnerships with our growers as well as our wholesale and retail customers," says Longenecker.

In 2013, Four Seasons underwent a Green Plus Diagnostic Survey to assess its business' CSR efforts across three categories: People, Planet, and Perfor-

mance. A score of 80 percent nets a Green Plus Certification from Green Plus, a Morrisville, NC-based organization that fosters business improvement by focusing on environmental, social and business practices.

Four Seasons scored 92 percent for its efforts, which range from sustainability management to energy savings and community engagement. Four Seasons, along with several suppliers, supports four food banks in the mid-east region of the U.S. through Feeding America, a Chicago-headquartered network of member food banks across the nation. In July, Four Seasons Produce, Earth Source Trading and Sunrise Logistics alone donated a total of \$52,000.

C.H. Robinson, one of the world's largest third-party logistics providers, assists its retail customers in CSR efforts through its fresh produce sourcing business brand (Robinson Fresh) via cause marketing campaigns. In 2007, the Eden Prairie, MN-headquartered company, launched its "MelonUp! Pink Ribbon Watermelon" program. Through consistent year-round sales of fresh watermelon, Robinson Fresh collaborated with

more than 25 retailers, raising more than \$1 million for breast cancer research organizations throughout North America.

"The opportunity to showcase watermelons, while at the same time continuing our support for Robinson Fresh's campaign to raise awareness and support research of breast cancer is a win-win for us," says Luke Friedrich, spokesman for Cub Foods, a 77-store chain based in Stillwater, MN.

Retailers: "We view sustainability/CSR holistically and the supply chain is part of our approach," says Chris Ratto, director of sustainability for nearly 2,400 Albertsons and Safeway stores. "One tool that we put in place to identify guidelines and expectations for our private label line is the *Supplier Sustainability Guidelines and Expectations* document."

This 55-page document, released in August and targeted for quarterly update, covers perishables and non-perishables. The document is provided to the suppliers of Safeway-Albertsons by sourcing personnel as well as posted on the company's website. Under the header, "Detailed Expectations by Category for Perishables/Non-Perishables,"

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the commodity-specified section of the document is an encouragement for suppliers to use locally/regionally sourced materials whenever feasible.

Buying locally and supporting the local community is important at Weis Markets, says Mickey Stringham, director of produce and floral for the chain headquartered in Sunbury, PA. "We're also looking at store design and facilities for composting bins at each of our stores."

Sprouts Farmers Market gives back

to the communities it serves as part of its CSR program. The 200-plus chain based in Phoenix donates all unsold and edible — but not marketable — groceries (including produce) to local area hunger relief agencies and charities as part of its local Food Rescue Program.

"Some produce is also set aside for relief agencies directly from our distribution centers," explains Diego Romero, corporate communications manager.

"We donated more than 8.5 million

"The Food Rescue Program is one way for Sprouts to tackle these larger societal issues of food waste and hunger in our communities."

— Diego Romero, Sprouts Farmers Market



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pounds of food in 2014, equating to more than 7 million meals. The Food Rescue Program is one way for Sprouts to tackle these larger societal issues of food waste and hunger in our communities."

Suppliers' compliance with principles of CSR, such as responsible sourcing, have long been important to Wal-Mart and its customers, which reflects the retailer's core business beliefs, says Bailey. "Currently, we are working with our produce suppliers and growers in the U.S. and Mexico to test a new approach to responsible sourcing. While this is something that we initiated, we are keen to collaborate and share to develop mechanisms that improve social compliance in our produce supply chains and improve business and conditions for workers in the global supply chain."

Wal-Mart is also a member of The Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Fair Food Program, a coalition of farmers, farmworkers and retail food companies that aims to improve wages and working conditions for the workers who pick fruits and vegetables on participating farms.

Restaurants: Foodservice operators such as Chipotle Mexican Grill, Subway, Burger King, McDonald's and Yum! Brands (owner of Taco Bell, Pizza Hut and KFC), and the CIW, which represents tomato workers in Florida, were among the driving forces behind the creation of the Fair Food Program. More recently, retailers such as Ahold USA, Fresh Market and Whole Foods Market also jumped onboard.

"The Fair Food Program requires its customers or receivers to participate in the platform, which has standards for conditions and fair compensation of those who work to harvest fruits and vegetables including Florida tomatoes," explains Reggie Brown, executive vice president of the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange,

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in Maitland, FL. "Because of this participation, which is like a certification, purchasers can have great confidence that Florida tomatoes are harvested in a socially responsible way."

Some 20,000 to 30,000 part-time and full-time workers harvest Florida's tomato crop annually.

Tomatoes and lettuce grown in California are the two vegetables purchased in the greatest tonnage by Burgerville, a 40-unit quick-service restaurant chain owned by The Holland, Inc. in Vancouver, WA. However, chief cultural officer, Jack Graves, says 70 to 75 percent of the chain's menu ingredients are locally sourced — most notably its beef, as well as produce such as seasonal asparagus, Walla Walla onions (served as a limited-time, onion-ring special), and berries.

"The price we pay for local produce is the same as what we get through Sysco if you add in the freight costs; plus, we lower our carbon footprint this way," says Graves. "People get so hung up on price. We're not bottomline-driven as much as we are sustainably and CSR first. For example, we purchase wind power credits that are equivalent to 100 percent of our electricity use, recycle cooking oil to biodiesel and provide healthcare to all of our employees, including those working hourly. We're not your typical QSR."

Nationwide, the Washington, D.C.-headquartered National Restaurant Association's (NRA) Conserve program is an initiative that helps restaurateurs implement conservation practices.

"Educational resources and tools for restaurant operators can make a big impact," says Laura Abshire, director of sustainability and government affairs for the NRA. "Today, Conserve is available to everyone, not just NRA members. With the information we provide, operators can implement their own programs and cut costs while protecting the environment."

WHO PAYS?

"The logical question for consumers when a company says, 'We are responsible,' is 'How?'," says Rafael Goldberg, chief executive of Interruption Fair Trade, based in Brooklyn, NY. "Shoppers, especially Millennials, want authenticity in CSR, not a marketing gimmick or ploy to generate a maximum amount of profit. They want to know a company has a general desire to be better, be responsible,



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Ciruli Brothers, in Rio Rico, AZ, spent two years obtaining Rainforest Alliance Certification for a portion of the company's Mexican mango orchards.

and be good corporate citizens."

One way companies choose to authenticate its CSR is to pay for third-party certifications.

"It is very difficult to give a simple answer to how much in general a certification program costs, because some growers may be further ahead in terms of readiness and adopting these types of practices than others," explains Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer, Ciruli Brothers, in Rio Rico, AZ, who spent two years obtaining Rainforest Alliance Certi-

fication for a portion of the company's Mexican mango orchards.

Certification elements from the alliance include: employee education and training; natural resource protection; responsible use and documentation of pesticides and other ag-chemical inputs; cross-pollinator protection programs; water conservation; waste reduction and recycling programs; and abiding by any applicable labor and environmental regulatory requirements. At the same time, companies must factor in the complexity of their supply chain,

the costs associated with modifying facilities to comply with these requirements, auditing fees, and travel expenses for the auditor and team members.

Does certification translate into more business? Ciruli says he hasn't seen any more orders than usual for his mangos now that they have Rainforest Alliance Certification, even though this is something he and his staff touted to their customers at trade shows and buyer's meetings. It's made Ciruli wonder whether the money he spent on certification would have been more effectively spent doing what he and his family have done for four generations — giving directly to an orphanage near the company's orchards in Mexico.

Price, driven by a supply and demand market that has almost nothing to do with how a product is developed or whether or not the company practices CSR, remains the rule in produce, says Keith Mathews, chief executive of FirstFruits Marketing of Washington, in Yakima (the wholly owned sales and marketing extension for Broetje Orchards). "One benefit, however, is to find a customer who sees what our company is doing, who under-

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stands the baseline rationale, and who sets that mission tone within their own company. We experienced this more than once in the past six years since FirstFruits Marketing was founded."

Shoppers may, or may not, be willing to pay more for CSR. According to the Nielsen Global Survey on Corporate Social Responsibility, released in June 2014, 55 percent of online consumers across 60 countries said they were willing to put their wallets where their beliefs were when it came to purchasing from businesses committed to creating a positive social and environmental impact. However, regionally only 42 percent of North American shoppers were willing to pay more.

"Information on consumers is not easy to interpret," says Chris Dugan, senior vice president and general manager for Chiquita Brands International Inc. "On the one hand, we see consumers spending more on organics, while at the same time, we see regular price discounts in an attempt to boost sales."

While an effective CSR program requires expenditures, "such a program can create efficiencies, improve labor rela-

"I totally reject the premise that practicing CSR means giving up a profit. We can pay more for labor and all our employees (including our harvesters) because our business model enables us to provide fresh, tasty, sustainable produce, with almost no shipping costs at a contracted price."

— Paul Lightfoot, BrightFarms Inc.

tions, motivate employees, strengthen a brand and its reputation, and create new commercial opportunities," says Dugan. "In this sense, many produce professionals consider CSR a cost of doing business."

"We view CSR as an investment that, at the end of X-amount of time, will yield a return," says Alicia Garza, project manager for Triple H Produce Co., in Culiacán Sinaloa, Mexico. "For example, when a producer provides housing to a laborer, it ensures staff turnover is reduced, and this directly impacts the productivity of the agricultural operation."

"I totally reject the premise that prac-

ticing CSR means giving up a profit," says Paul Lightfoot, chief executive of BrightFarms Inc., a Bronx, NY-headquartered company that funds construction of greenhouses growing greens, basil and tomatoes in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Illinois and Virginia through 10-year, fixed-price purchase agreements with supermarkets. "We can pay more for labor and all our employees (including our harvesters) because our business model enables us to provide fresh, tasty, sustainable produce, with almost no shipping costs at a contracted price."

Lance Jungmeyer, president of

"There comes a time when autumn asks, What have you been doing all summer?"



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The Busy Landscape of Sustainability, Fair Trade and Beyond

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAFAEL GOLDBERG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF INTERRUPCION FAIR TRADE, MARKETERS OF TASTE ME, DO GOOD* PRODUCTS

Interview conducted by Jodean Robbins

PRODUCE BUSINESS: The term fair trade is commonly used now; how has interest in certified produce items increased both with consumers and produce companies?

Rafael Goldberg: When Interrupcion first began marketing fair trade in the produce space, there was only a couple commodities available. The term as applied to produce items was almost non-existent. When we first started talking about it, the primary knowledge of fair trade was within the coffee and chocolate categories. Since 2003, fair trade has become much more important within produce. Today's consumers have more information than ever; they care more about where their food comes from and how it's made, and they're asking more questions about it. At the end of the day, what consumers understand and expect is the concept of a fair deal. One of the powerful things about the concept of fair trade is that it guarantees workers and communities are getting a fair deal. Interest not only in fair trade, but the understanding of the food system in general, has grown rapidly in a short amount of time. I think it will continue and accelerate.

PB: We hear the terms fair trade, sustainability and social responsibility used interchangeably. What is the difference?

RG: Fair Trade, as a standard, technically exists. When we talk about fair trade [the philosophy or practice], we are talking about internationally accepted and understood principals such as labor practices, producer costs being covered, fair prices, contractual relationships, meaningful profit to growers, and a social premium going to the community growing the product, among other elements. With these practices come concrete standards that can be certified. When we talk about sustainability and social responsibility, we get into a nebulous, undefined area. While we may feel familiar with these concepts, so many different uses and understandings of the terms make any concrete definition impossible. Unlike Fair Trade-certified, there aren't defined standards or universally accepted definitions; they are dependent on the context in which they are used.

PB: Should buyers be looking for certifications of companies that claim fair trade status; if so, are some better than others?

RG: Certification is important. The particular certifier is not necessarily as important as long as it's a reliable certifier. Similar to organic, as long as you have a reliable certifier being used, you know what it stands for. Certification is important because you want to verify claims are true.

PB: Why should retailers be looking into Fair Trade-certified produce?

RG: Consumers in general are better informed about where products come from, how they are made, and how they impact our world. They have more interest in understanding what they're buying whether based on nutrition or the values they want to see in the world. They are more in-tune with the impact their choices have on the world in which they live. When we talk about differentiating ourselves as marketers and creating an experience for our shoppers, Fair Trade and other values-based methods can be powerful tools for satisfying these increasing consumer demands. This isn't about charity or philanthropy. This is about market-based solutions for creating a better world. Consumers are telling all of us, loud and clear, that when faced with the opportunity to do something good for others they take it, appreciate it, and want more of it.

PB: Lately, there is a new term being used in this genre: biodynamics. What is it?

RG: Biodynamics is basically the origin of the modern day organic movement.

Looking at a methodology of agriculture, we can generalize organic as a methodology where certain things cannot be applied. However, the methodology of biodynamics promotes activities that can positively improve the nourishment of plant life and the creation of healthy ecosystems resulting in optimum plant development and nutrition. It's an agricultural technology for nurturing and growing crops in an entirely natural way that provides them with increased benefits of nutrition.

PB: Can you give us an example of a biodynamic process or method?

RG: Biodynamics relates largely to fertilizers. There are natural bio-fertilizers known as biodynamic preparations. These are made through various means with a variety of herbs, minerals and compounds and applied to crops through certain stages of their development. They promote optimum nutrition for the plant and thus optimum flavor and nutritional development in the fruit.

PB: Are there any produce companies involved in this type of production?

RG: Yes, there are several. Biodynamic agriculture has been largely applied in Europe. It's popular, especially in the production of wine grapes. Currently, Interrupcion has a major push to incorporate biodynamic processes into all our commodities, utilizing the methods on our pears, apples, and berries in particular.

PB: How can retailers best meet the needs of customers who are socially conscious and interested in these types of issues?

RG: This is the major challenge retailers have. It's not enough to just do one thing. There are so many components to bringing values into a produce operation. The real lesson is in knowing our customers rely on us to provide them with the healthiest, most nutritious product grown in ways they would be proud of and want to support.

Retailers are trust providers. They need to constantly work together with suppliers. They also need to be in touch with the questions shoppers have and address those questions for every item they sell. There is no easy answer to this. One thing is key ó be sure to have the right supplier partners and that the supplier partner is helping address the questions shoppers have. In the past, retailers only needed to worry about having quality product stocked. Increasingly, they need to identify and rely on supplier partners who have values and transparency incorporated into their supply system; otherwise they won't be able to accommodate shoppers.

pb



Four Seasons underwent a Green Plus Diagnostic Survey to assess its business' CSR efforts across three categories: People, Planet, and Performance. The company scored 92 percent for its efforts, which range from sustainability management to energy savings and community engagement.

Nogales, AZ-based Fresh Produce Association of the Americas, tells how he saw a move to protected agriculture by Mexican growers during the past 10 to 15 years boost financial as well as environment and social success.

"It's a neat intertwined web that starts with the growing method itself," he says. "Shade houses protect against sun and bugs, so less water and fungicides are needed. These structures also can significantly lengthen the growing season (depending on crop) from two to three months to six, eight or even 12 months. This translates into steadier work and a workforce ripe for investments in training as well as on-site housing, medical clinics, schools and recreational facilities like soccer fields. Several Mexican growers operate multiple farming 'cities' that are populated by up to 5,000 people each."

As Jungmeyer says, this scheme is certainly the right thing for companies to do, but this mode of operation also has the market pushing it as well.

TELL THE STORY

Like food safety, Tom Stenzel, president and chief executive of the United Fresh Produce Association, in Washington, D.C., doesn't want CSR to become a competitive issue.

"The danger of this is that if one company promotes CSR, it shouldn't mean that the rest of the companies aren't

as socially responsible and ethical. Some companies, for example, may stress local while others market themselves as having specialties from around the world. These are two go-to-market images and strategies; one isn't better than the other."

Lou Struble, corporate director of communications and social responsibility at Procacci, agrees. "We do not view CSR, food safety, or sustainability as a competitive edge. Our chief operating officer JM Procacci likes to say, 'A bad tomato anywhere is a bad tomato everywhere.' What JM means is that when consumers hear a negative report regarding worker mistreatment or food safety issues in the tomato industry, the impact isn't limited to only the offending parties — every grower is affected. As such, it is in our best interest to collaborate with our competitors and share best practices."

Communicating CSR activities shouldn't be construed as a marketing tool as much as it is a chance to establish a connection with a customer base that has rising expectations about how companies operate, says PMA's Means. "There's a difference between connecting with customers transparently and a marketing campaign. That said, if a company is not telling its CSR story, it's missing a big opportunity."

Brands/products that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability through their marketing efforts, such as either sustain-

ability claims on packaging or actively promoted sustainability actions through marketing efforts, outperform those that don't, according to Grace Farraj, senior vice president and global client service lead at Technomic. "In fact, they contributed to more than 4 percent greater sales than those that are not demonstrating this commitment," says Farraj.

Story-telling isn't bragging; it's fact-based communication, says Dennis Lombardi, food strategist at WD Partners, based in Dublin, OH. "For example, instead of listing 'peaches' as the menu description, restaurateurs should tell their customers they are fresh peaches grown by Farmer 'Joe' from XYZ farm, located in XYZ area. This should be reinforced with a knowledgeable server staff communicating this same information when they describe the restaurant's peach dish. This tells patrons that you're walking the walk."

Likewise at retail, Sprouts shares its CSR programs with customers through related community events, special in-store signage, and online through its website and social media pages. Also, there's a mural in every store dedicated to the values that make up the retailer's culture. These values include accountability and transparency, which the chain believes is the foundation for trust among its customers.

"CSR efforts are a company rather than a product story," explains Tim Cunniff, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Backyard Farms, Madison, ME, a hydroponic tomato grower that employs a 200-plus workforce year-round. "It's a story that is detailed, not easy to tell, and something that can't and shouldn't be reduced to small sound bites. There needs to be a discussion. That's why I position myself in our retail demo rotation. I start conversations with 'please,' end with 'thank you,' and in between have a dialogue — a discussion about how our company operates that creates an authentic relationship with that particular customer."

In the end, CSR isn't a fad. "It's a fact of life that all suppliers need to embrace and make part their business," says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce. "Consumers will increase the pressure on the supply chain and hold everyone accountable for their actions and ethical behavior." **pb**

"CSR efforts are a company rather than a product story. It's a story that is detailed, not easy to tell, and something that can't and shouldn't be reduced to small sound bites.

— Tim Cunniff, Backyard Farms

RETROSPECTIVE

RETAILER-TURNED-SUPPLIER

STEVE WILLIAMS TALKS ABOUT HIS 30-PLUS YEAR PRODUCE CAREER

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

There were few multi-deck cases in the produce department, free-standing refrigerated tables were considered too expensive to operate, and exotic tropical and tomato carts were a merchandising tool of the future when Steve Williams was promoted to produce merchandiser at Kash n' Karry Supermarkets, a Tampa, FL-based grocery chain with 84 stores back in 1985.

Eight years earlier, a teenage Williams started his retail career as a bagger at the same chain. He moved up to produce clerk the next year, produce manager two years later, and produce merchandiser five years after that — a position he held for 17 years. In 2003, Williams became director of produce and floral and shortly after helped to open the produce departments in Kash n' Karry's then-new concept, Sweetbay Supermarket. A decade later, he transitioned to the supply side, and today is manager of new business development for Raleigh, NC-based L&M Companies, Inc.

Where were you in 1985?

I was produce merchandiser at Kash n' Karry Supermarkets overseeing the produce operations of 25 stores.

What was the produce department like in 1985?

Compared to today's produce department standards, we would consider 1985 produce operations prehistoric. We were just starting to understand the importance of locating the produce department up front to showcase its importance and build customer confidence in our fresh departments. There were still gaps in product availability. But that was cool, because when an item came back into season, you could really have a promotion that got customers excited to buy. One of the biggest areas of change is around food safety. I remember merchandising cut watermelon on an unrefrigerated endcap. Could you imagine

doing that today?

How would you characterize the overall retail environment back then?

Without question, we thought it was very competitive as all retailers were fighting to earn and maintain market share. It was conventional supermarkets that were alike competing against each other for the business. Unlike today, there was not much pressure from the big box stores, well run health and natural food stores, and smaller drugstores that continue to increase food offerings. Technology compared to today was nonexistent. For example, now we have the systems in place to pinpoint shrink down to the item level on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Thirty years ago, we would figure our shrink from the trim/waste barrels going out the back door until the inventory was taken at the end of each month, and actual results were posted.

When did things start to change and what were the drivers of change?

In the early 1980s, when a produce operation that was strictly packaged and located in the rear of the store transitioned to one that aggressively merchandised 80 percent of its product bulk and was located upfront. I saw the future coming to life. It was at this time that much more attention was being placed on signage to help increase impulse purchases. This included item-level signing, which was essentially a picture or art and some nutritional information. Category signing helped customers navigate through the department along with the

over-branding signage of the entire produce department.

What led you to the supply side of the industry? What insights did you gain on the supply side that you wish you had or knew if you continued as a retailer?

I always enjoyed learning how products are grown, harvested, packed and shipped. With this in mind, I approached one of my preferred suppliers to see if they could provide me with what I was looking for. It's been a very educational trip so far. I remember planning promotions on cherries when on the retail side. I thought we had it tough. Cherries are one of the hardest items in terms of scheduling promotional dates, being priced right, and getting quality orders delivered properly to

the DC's. I gained a new perspective on what it takes to work cherries on the supplier side. The pace that people move to secure product, line up orders, secure transportation, and achieve customer satisfaction was something I never saw before.



What are some of the biggest innovations you've seen in the produce industry over the past 30 years?

Bagged salads, fresh-cut fruit offerings, and year-round variety in every single category. However, what I really like to see is a supermarket chain that promotes its 'brand' through creatively designed and eye-catching produce billboards. Retailers today understand the power of using produce to build customer confidence around its standards of

freshness. It's often tied into a local program — thus achieving the perfect marketing trifecta: freshness, variety and local.

How would you describe the produce department today?

Today's produce department could be classified as a theater of art. Many produce departments offer 600-plus SKUs, and it's like shopping in a small exotic market within a conventional grocery store. I see a

new level of excitement taking place with associates working out on the sales floor as they showcase their talent in building beautiful displays that entice consumers to buy.

What do you think was the greatest lesson you learned about retailing over the past 30 years?

Three areas play a critical role in achieving a solid produce operation. Freshness: Allowing a customer to come in contact with off quality product can never take place as it will erode their confidence. Cleanliness: Having a very clean and well maintained department adds to your customer's confidence. Signage: Sales of products unsigned can decrease by almost 98 percent. Being fresh, clean and well signed are the building blocks of running a great produce operation. Now you are ready to talk about merchandising for increased sales.

What do you think will drive the produce industry in the next 10 to 20 years?

We continue to see an increase in the national obesity rate of children and adults, and that is putting a very large impact on our health systems. Our industry must continue educating the masses about the health benefits of eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

What challenges are holding the industry back?

The loss of farms producing the goods we need to sell to our customers. I have a whole new perspective toward the challenges growers are facing to stay in operation and competitive. These are tough times with water restrictions/shortages or devastating weather conditions that can wipe out an entire crop. Are the next generations of farmers willing to battle these challenges? Do they have the resources at hand to stay competitive? Building strong and long-lasting relationships between retailers and growers is critical.

What are your thoughts on choosing produce as a career today?

If you want to work in an industry that is exciting, rewarding and has simply the greatest people, I say, "Jump In!" The opportunities are endless, and our industry is growing in size. We need new and innovative people. From retail, warehousing, sales, farming, marketing, food safety, and so many more; this is a great industry. I loved it for the past 38 years, and I would not have changed a thing.

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THE LUCRATIVE KIDS MARKET

The industry stepped up its marketing efforts to focus on a younger demographic.

BY LISA WHITE

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOLE

Although children don't hold the purse strings, this demographic is a key denominator for produce consumption. Realizing this potential, the produce industry recently stepped up its marketing efforts to target the younger set through their moms, who are historically the main shoppers in most families.

"Probably 95 percent of marketing for kids is geared toward parents, since they're the ones shopping," says Elizabeth Pivonka, president and chief executive of Hockessin, DE-based Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH), a nonprofit organization seeking to increase daily consumption of produce by leveraging private industry and public sector resources, motivating key consumer influencers and promoting fruits and vegetables directly to consumers. "Based on our research, 70 percent of moms consider produce marketing campaigns as good reminders to feed the family more fruits and vegetables."

The foundation recently announced its second annual Formula 5 Marketing Competition, which offers college marketing majors the opportunity to influence fruit and vegetable marketing, sales and consumption in the country. Participating students create a marketing

proposal and plan, including indicators of success and financials. Three to five proposals will be selected, and team representatives will be awarded \$2,000 and invited to attend PBH's 2016 Annual Conference in April. Here, they will present the marketing proposal and plan to all conference attendees during the general session.

From kid-friendly displays, character-based packaging, and engaging activities for kids, retailers and produce suppliers are raising the bar with these types of marketing campaigns.

AT STORE LEVEL

In June of this year, Skogen's Festival Foods, a 20-store Wisconsin supermarket chain based in De Pere, WI, joined the Eat Brighter! movement, a collaboration among Washington, D.C.'s The Partnership for a Healthier America, the worldwide Sesame Workshop, and the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) based in Newark, DE, to encourage younger kids to eat more produce. The program, which was launched in October 2013, targets children between the ages of two and five, their parents and caregivers.

"From what's being reported, program participants first experienced

a 1 to 2 percent jump in sales, and now it's more than 3 percent, so it's working for the industry," says Kathy Means, PMA's vice president of industry relations.

Retailers can participate in Eat Brighter! in two ways, either by creating their own program by purchasing a sublicense or by buying produce from suppliers who are part of the program, which ends in 2018.

Each of the produce departments for Skogen's Festival Foods has Eat Brighter! signs strategically placed throughout the department near fresh fruits and vegetables. In addition, select produce packaging also includes the characters and Eat Brighter! logo.

"These messages in our departments and on our products appeal to parents, children and Millennials," says Lauren Lindsley, RDN, CD, regional health and wellness manager at Skogen's Festival Foods.

"In-store point-of-sale signage, branded products, coloring sheets in our supervised play area called the Tot Spot, blogs, social media and television segments have all worked for us."

During the summer, the chain focused its external efforts on digital, including blogs, social media posts and local television segments that are then repurposed on its social media channels. In the fall, Skogen's dietitians are out in the community at schools and community groups sharing the Eat Brighter! message.

The stores' kid-oriented items include: Clementines, sugar snap peas, berries, baby carrots, cotton candy grapes, and small-bagged apple varieties.

At Publix Supermarkets (a store with more than 1,100 Southeast locations based in

Lakeland, FL), produce marketing campaigns targeting children vary, but are primarily turnkey and turned out in a relatively short amount of time — typically four weeks or less.

The chain participates in Produce for Kids semi-annually. During this campaign, participating vendors donate a portion of the proceeds from sales to the campaign, which benefits Feeding America, which is a Chicago-based nonprofit organization that networks with nationwide food banks to fight food insecurity.

"In addition, Produce for Kids provides fun tips, recipes, games and interactive learning exercises within our stores and on our website," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix. "We also have in-store appearances by childhood favorites, such as The Hungry Caterpillar."

Stores provide a variety of grab-and-go salads, as well as snack packs that include vegetables and dip, fruit and dipping sauce, fruit in grab-and-go packages, as well as various sizes of cut-fruit bowls and fruit and yogurt parfaits geared for kids and families. Publix also offers school tours for younger shoppers that include a stop in the produce departments, along with a healthy snack.

Produce for Kids — an Orlando, FL-based organization that educates families on the benefits of healthy eating, provides simple meal solutions and raises money for children's nonprofit organizations — just wrapped up its Produce for Kids Club promotion. The program ran in County Market's three Michigan stores last spring. (County Market is a banner under Quincy, IL-based Niemann Foods Inc.) The program will be in North-

east locations of TOPS Friendly Markets (a chain headquartered in Williamsville, NY, with stores throughout New York, Pennsylvania and Vermont) this fall.

"Kids who purchase a participating produce item receive a code that they enter on our website to receive free items and also a club card to get a free produce item at their local store," says Trish James, vice president of Produce for Kids. "This not only promotes product from participating supplier sponsors, but it also encourages kids and their families to stay longer in the produce department, which increases basket rings."

Produce for Kids also ran a digital campaign, "Power Your Lunch Box," to encourage moms to pack healthier school lunches for their kids.

"This program went viral last year, raising \$5,000 for health and wellness classroom projects across the country," says James. "We provide recipes, tips and ideas for consumers who want to start the school year with healthy lunch boxes."

Along with these types of initiatives, well positioned and well stocked produce displays can help drive sales of fresh fruits and vegetables by reminding parents of healthy snack options.

"While there are a lot of ways to get kids, and more importantly their parents, to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, the most effective is still the traditional in-store display," says Bil Goldfield, director, corporate communications of Dole Fresh Fruit Co., based in Westlake Village, CA. "Our research indicates that a well-stocked and positioned produce display is most effective at stimulating sales when

Retailers can participate in Eat Brighter! in two ways, either by creating their own program by purchasing a sublicense or by buying produce from suppliers who are part of the program. These pictures are examples from Mars Super Market in Baltimore (a Rosedale, MD-based independent retailer with more than 15 stores operating throughout Maryland), which has Eat Brighter! signs strategically placed throughout the department near fresh fruits and vegetables. In addition, select produce packaging also includes the characters and Eat Brighter! logo.



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it is supported by a strategically positioned secondary display in the front of the store, near checkout, or in the cereal or dairy sections. This is especially effective for grab-and-go items like bananas and other hand-held fruit. Most importantly, these units must be in high-traffic areas and kept stocked with fresh, healthy-looking produce throughout the day.”

SUPPLIER CAMPAIGNS

A number of produce suppliers implemented marketing campaigns geared for kids. Last spring, Cashmere, WA-based Crunch Pak reached out to kids through a joint mobile marketing effort with the National Basketball Association (NBA) that included visiting 40 Wal-Mart stores in four cities. The NBA FIT Van Tour held in Houston, Dallas, Oklahoma City and Memphis, TN was an interactive experience that included basketball-shooting contests and giveaways.

This was the first year Crunch Pak participated with the NBA Fit Tour since the company rolled out its Fit Snackers in 2014. These snack packs contain sliced fresh apples, cheese and pretzels and feature several NBA players such as John Wall, Derrick Rose and Kevin Durant on the labels.

“We also have long-standing partnerships with Disney and Marvel Entertainment to create healthy snacks that are appealing to kids,” says Krista Jones, Crunch Pak’s director of brand marketing and product innovation. Crunch Pak created a kids section on its website called “Crunch Pak Kidz Zone” that includes Disney-themed games, craft projects, party activities and comics.



To attract the younger set, retailers also can maintain an assortment of different package sizes and adjust these according to shopper consumer demographics.

“We are always talking with our produce buyers and category managers about the challenge we face as a perimeter, fresh food item,” says Jones. “Our big competition is at



PHOTO COURTESY OF WONDERFUL CITRUS

the center of the store, so we have to look, think and act like the major consumer packaged goods companies.”

At Los Angeles-based Wonderful Citrus, one of this year’s initiatives has been to teach America’s youth healthy habits at an early age. The company partnered with Boys & Girls Clubs of America, donating \$100,000 to support healthy programming.

“This partnership encourages kids to choose healthier options,” says Britt Beck, Wonderful’s director of marketing.

The company also has a family-friendly app, Halos Fun, available for Androids. This allows users to interact with the Halos brand and learn about healthy eating. Another campaign, scheduled for Valentine’s Day, promotes gifting Halos instead of chocolate.

Wonderful Citrus also provides coloring pages and other in-store merchandise targeting children and families.

“We’re trying to reach moms in many different ways, including through social media, television spots, free-standing inserts and in-store displays that highlight the fun factor of our products,” says Beck.

Social media continues to be an effective platform for getting the attention of kids. Recognizing this, Produce for Better Health Foundation has a kids website, FoodChamps.org. The site contains coloring sheets that can be downloaded and printed.

“Supermarkets can hand these out during store tours for kids to color, and then display the sheets in the produce department to encourage more traffic from participants’ families,” says the Foundation’s Pivonka.

Dole’s Healthy Kids program provides a resource that combines the latest children’s health news with kid-friendly recipes and tips to help parents guide their kids toward healthier snack options.

The company recently launched Get Up and Grow!, a multi-year initiative that is a joint effort between Dole’s Fresh divisions and the Dole Nutrition Institute (DNI). Program elements range from new recipes and healthy-living insights to a summer-long fruit and vegetable tour that includes free tastings and hands-on experiences in 44 U.S. and Canadian cities. Consumers also can take the Get Up and Grow! Pledge and enter a Rewards Program for the chance to receive free Dole produce and other wellness awards.

“Like many of Dole’s produce marketing initiatives, Get Up and Grow! is a long-term program that reaches beyond the traditional back-to-school period to promote increased consumption of fruits and vegetables for kids,” says Goldfield. “Throughout the year, we highlight ways to add fresh produce during every seasonal period and holiday, including a special focus during the summer months, when kids are at home and in need of convenient healthy snacks.”

KID-FRIENDLY PRODUCT POSITIONING

In many cases, it’s the actual product that attracts kids’ attention, leading to the sale. Cuties, a brand from Sun Pacific out of Pasadena, CA, consist of two clementine varieties that are positioned to attract children. The company also launched its Mighties Kiwi brand in November 2014.

“There are more marketing dollars in the center of the store to promote products and create amazing kids’ brands,” says Victoria Nuevo-Celeste, Sun Pacific’s director of marketing. “As growers and marketers of produce, we have a responsibility to ensure we’re competing with those products, and not just developing brands, communications and packaging solutions that attract kids and moms.”

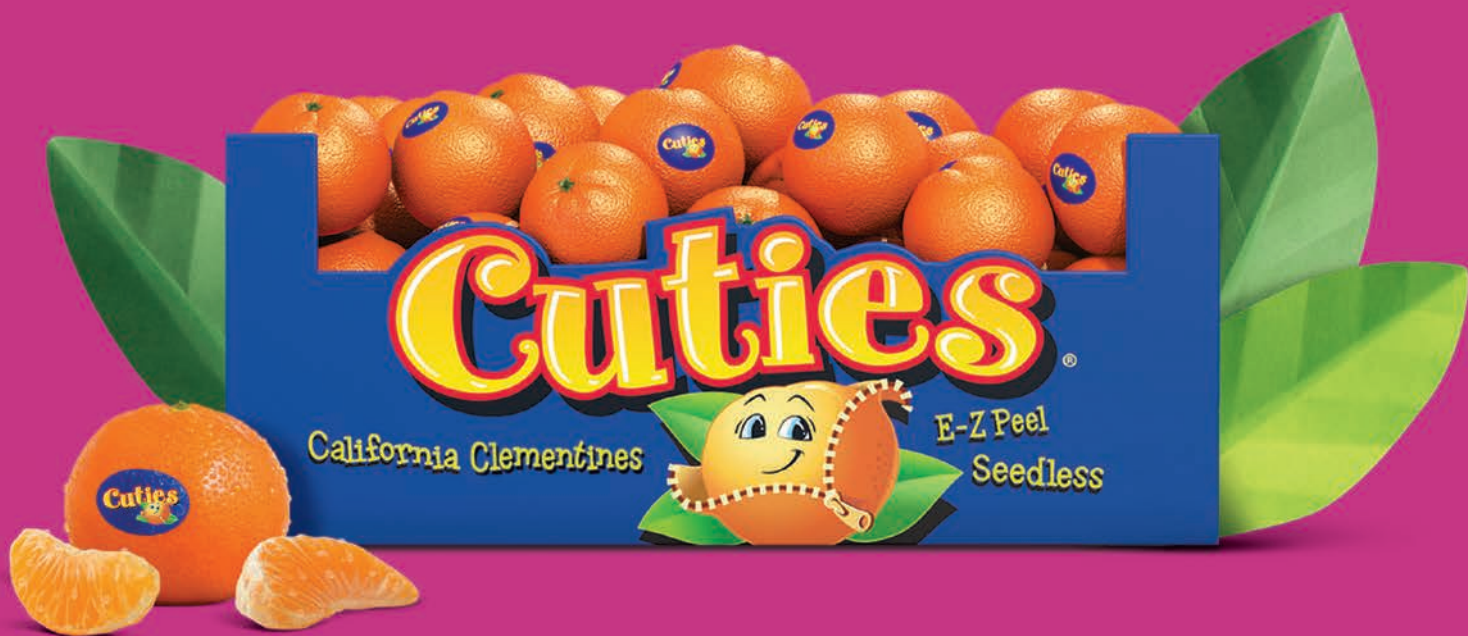
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Available from November to April, Cuties are most effectively displayed in endcaps and other prominent places in the produce department.

“Mighties are more obscure and can get mixed in with exotics and lost,” says Nuevo-Celeste. To circumvent this, “retailers such as Wal-Mart and Safeway are moving kiwis from exotic locations to more prominent spots, like next to Cuties or by the bananas.”

To make produce departments more kid-friendly, retailers can create specific

sections with produce of this type.

“It’s not just about back-to-school campaigns anymore,” says Nuevo-Celeste. “The more effort we put into these programs, the healthier kids will be in the future.”

Naturipe Farms, based in Estero, FL, recently launched a line extension of its ready-to-eat blueberry snack pack. This includes single-servings of blueberry/grape and blueberry/mango blends that are pre-washed and packaged in hard plastic trays.

The company also is involved with the

PMA’s Eat Brighter! campaign, which is advertised on its strawberry, blueberry and blackberry containers.

“We work with retail partners engaged in that promotion, which has been a great advantage to highlight berries,” says Kyla Oberman, director of marketing. “This gives parents another tool to help their kids eat healthier.”

The company positions its marketing efforts toward both kids and parents by incorporating graphics to entice kids and giving parents tools to incorporate berries into menus through social media and websites.

“Retailers participating in the Eat Brighter! campaign stepped up point of sales,” says Oberman. “We’re also currently working on a blogging campaign aimed at encouraging parents to incorporate more color into their kids’ meals.”

In a co-branding campaign, Crunch Pak launched a DipperZ snack tray featuring the Disney character Olaf from the Frozen movie. This includes a unique association, as the tray contains carrots that are associated with the movie character’s carrot nose.

The California Table Grape Commission in Fresno, CA found that, in the U.S., a household’s primary shopper is the one most often eating grapes, followed by other adults in the household. About 40 percent of primary shoppers who purchase grapes have one or more children under the age of 18 in the household. Of those homes with kids, grapes are purchased a high percentage of the time, as well, for the child.

“Abundant, fresh, high quality and well-maintained grape displays generate increased grape sales and appeal to everyone, including primary shoppers, parents and children,” says Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission. “Sampling, in-store tours and demonstrations are effective ways to promote grapes in produce departments.”

The commission’s website includes downloadable coloring and activity sheets for children, along with recipes for kids’ meals.

Looking ahead, there may be additional opportunities in positioning produce to attract older children. For example, the PMA is currently exploring how more sophisticated marketing techniques can attract the tween and teen demographics.

“We have no data on this yet, but it’s another effort to see how we can boost produce consumption for upcoming generations,” says PMA’s Means. “It’s about marketing, but it’s also about getting young kids to eat more produce.”

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Military Commissaries Focus On Fresh Produce

Using health and wellness initiatives for customers, these stores provide unique services for personnel and their families.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

George Washington is most famous as the first U.S. president, yet one of his other great accomplishments was making sure troops had veggies on their plates. It was in 1775, at Washington's urging, that the Continental Congress resolved to add foods like vegetables to soldiers' diets in addition to daily meat and bread rations. This produce prescription helped to stave off debilitating diseases such as scurvy.

Today, fruits and vegetables are still a crucial asset to the U.S. military. This spans from the role produce plays in the Department of Defense's (DOD) cutting-edge research into the dietary requirements of its combat soldiers to assuring its non-deployed force remains fit in order to pass regular weigh-ins and physical fitness tests. The U.S. military's current-day culture of health and wellness is an ideal environment in which to promote fresh produce. To this end, commissary staff not only stocks a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables for its shoppers, but they also offer creative nutrition education programs that feature produce. This creates a win-win for troops, their families, and the produce industry.

NUTS & BOLTS OF COMMISSARY PRODUCE

"The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) set the standards very high for the quality it desires for its produce departments. Only the freshest and highest quality will do," says Sheila Norfus, chief of the resale commodities branch at DeCA headquarters in Fort Lee, VA.

DeCA operates a worldwide chain of commissaries. This federal government agency purchases its fresh produce through a competitive bid process. Each bid requires potential suppliers, which must be small businesses or companies with less than 500 employees, to describe in detail its quality assurance program to ensure Good Agricultural Procedures (GAP) and Good Manufacturers Procedures (GMP) for

fresh-cut/value-added products. Contracts need to be in compliance with Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations and any applicable custom requirements for imported or exported fruits and vegetables. DeCA uses a best value, trade-off method to solicit, evaluate and determine which proposal is the best for the government. The benefit for commissary shoppers — military personnel, retirees and their families — is prices reflect a cost in addition to five-plus percent surcharge for building new and renovating older commissaries. This translates to a savings for military families of more than 30 percent on groceries — including fresh produce.

"There is no one-size-fits-all where produce assortment is concerned," says Bridget Bennett, DeCA's Fort Lee, VA-based category manager for produce. "The military shopper is a global consumer who has often spent many years traveling in different parts of the country or to countries overseas. They have favorite dishes and our suppliers excel at offering these specialty items. Depending on store size, the number of produce items offered can range up to 700."

DeCA does dictate certain core produce products must be stocked in every commissary. These include, for example, bananas, oranges, broccoli and corn. Beyond this, Bennett then uses syndicated scan data and panel data to determine the appropriate selections within regional areas. Produce managers can also pick and choose items that are good performers in their area to enhance item selection. To this end, they tend to carry as much seasonally available, locally sourced, organic and value-added products as practical.

"Local and seasonal are both very important factors when determining item selection. During the growing season, it is not uncommon to see 50 percent local produce in our stores. We also have farmer markets that include farmers visiting in-store to discuss their products

with the consumer. This doesn't go without challenge as in some areas there are no local growers that can sustain the required volume needed. On the other hand, imports are necessary to provide a larger variety all year long. For example, we promote Chilean fruits, citrus from South Africa, and avocados from Mexico, among many others. Commissary staff is well educated on market conditions and which items are on the way as well as on the way out. Just like any retailer, we have consumers who want to know where their products are from and peak seasons," explains Bennett.

Ever-increasing demand for organic translates into a greater number of such items offered in DeCA's commissaries. While there are pockets within the country that have a higher demand than others for organic, Bennett says, stores typically offer up to 75 items dependent on store size.

"Value-added also continues to grow each year to accommodate those consumers with busy schedules — allowing them to make meals quicker and snacks on-the-go. As the industry continues to grow along with the items available in the value-added category, our offerings also grow. This category shows consistent growth for the past five years," says Bennett.

Produce departments in DeCA consists of five different classes or sizes of commissaries. Produce ranges from 8 to 13.5 percent of the sales floor (or up to 8,500 square feet) at these commissaries. Sales of produce as a percentage of total store sales span from 6 to 14.5 percent with an average of 9.8 percent worldwide. Each store's minimum goal is 10 percent of produce sales to store sales. Regionally, Hawaii, the Far East, and metro areas like Washington D.C. top the charts, but there are stores individually that excel among their peers.

"The produce managers love to compete with the meat managers for the largest sales," says Bennett. "To do this they push a lot of tonnage to keep up with the bigger rings in the meat department."

NUTRITION EDUCATION

Registered dietitians are the people primarily responsible for helping military community members meet their wellness goals by promoting healthy eating and healthful food purchasing habits.

"DeCA's aim is to support the dietitians in their education efforts," says Deborah Harris, DeCA's dietitian assigned to the Shopper Insights Division out of the agency's Fort Lee headquarters.

Base dietitians build their nutritional



Healthy Base Initiative (HBI) is a DOD project aimed at increasing the health and wellness of the total base force — including civilians and military family members.

messages on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and USDA's food guidance system, MyPlate, which recommends consumers fill half of their plates with fruits and vegetables. This educational messaging is shared with military shoppers via social media channels (such as Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter) as well as through DeCA's dedicated Healthy Living website. Dietitians host in-store events, such as the "Cooking Matters at the Store" healthy shopping tour at the U.S. Army's Fort Sill commissary, in Lawton, OK. The tour is free, held two to three times monthly, and anyone from the military community can attend.

"Participants are empowered with four key food skills during the 1.5-hour tour: Reading food labels, comparing unit prices, finding whole grain foods, and identifying three ways to purchase produce. A good percentage of the tour is spent in the produce department with the dietitian explaining the value of eating fruits and vegetables daily," explains store director, Billy Benner. "Our produce manager is also there to meet the participants and assist the dietitian. The tour ends with a \$10 Challenge, an activity where participants use the skills they learned to buy a healthy meal for a family of four for under \$10. Participants take home a booklet with recipes and shopping tips, a reusable grocery bag, and \$10 worth of healthy groceries — courtesy of Share our Strength and the Healthy Base Initiative (HBI). We've seen an overall 2.5 percent increase in produce sales as a percentage of store sales since the cooking matters tours began in 2014."

Share Our Strength is a Washington, D.C.-headquartered campaign dedicated to ending childhood hunger, while the HBI is a demonstration project for Operation Live Well that the DOD launched in 2013 at 13 bases. It is aimed at increasing the health and wellness

of the total base force, including civilians and military family members.

Harris, from DeCA's headquarters level, provides content to the commissary sales flyer on the website's "Produce Corner" section. This section speaks to the benefit of produce plus supplies recipes and techniques for preparing fruits and vegetables. She tells store personnel what items are being featured in the sales flyer and gives them information on nutrition benefits so that the staff can call out healthy choices to commissary shoppers.

"DeCA's nutrition messaging and health promotion is timed to be consistent with National Public Health and DOD health promotion initiatives while also being aligned with DeCA's sales themes and promotions," says Harris. "The reason for this is to assist the military community in making the most of the commissary benefit while also giving them options if they want to maintain or improve their health and wellness."

Building upon lessons learned in DeCA's participation in the DOD's HBI pilot along with feedback from patrons and private industry retail practice, DeCA will soon implement its Nutrition Guide Program commissary-wide. This program identifies foods at shelf-level that meet specific nutrient criteria, plus it provides ideas for quick, health meal solutions that feature items on promotion.

"DeCA will be working to partner to a greater degree with DOD health promotion staff at all levels, to include installation dietitians, with the goal of developing consistent, articulated nutrition messaging and education efforts that better identify food and product choices as well as help make our patrons' lives healthier," says Harris.

Commissary staff receives education about the benefits of fruits and vegetables through



Free produce tour teaching children about healthy food options at Port Hueneme location.

“We started by giving the children a 15-minute interactive talk where we identified and described different types of fruits and vegetables. At the end of each session, the children participated in a question-and-answer session, and our industry partners provided them with a healthy-snack-pack bag filled with healthy produce and grocery items.”

— Ronald Smith, Quantico Commissary

direct partnerships and via in-store resources provided by produce managers. DeCA headquarters also supplies promotional resources to the stores that not only assists with publicizing in-season items, but it also presents information on the health benefits of specific produce items that staff can share with their customers.

A good example of this is at Altus Air Force Base, in Altus, OK, where Gary Gillispie regularly offers fruit and vegetable samples and nutrition-related pamphlets. Gillispie — who

was named one of the 25 produce managers of 2015 by United Fresh — also conducted cooking classes with chefs. During April’s Month of the Military Child, he taught base children about the 5-2-1-0 Challenge. This program — promoted by the Centers for Disease Control’s Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity, as well as Healthy People 2020: Nutrition and Weight status initiatives — is founded on four messages: 5 servings of fruits and vegetables, 2 hours less

TV screen-time, 1 hour of physical activity, and replace sugary drinks with water.

April’s Month of the Military Child was the platform for a kid-friendly produce-oriented nutrition activity at the U.S. Marine Corps Base Commissary in Quantico, VA. Commissary staff and industry partners from the Produce-Supplier-Military Produce Group visited the base’s Children Development Center to educate these 3- to 5-year-old kids about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables.

“We discussed how eating healthy could lead to building strong bodies,” says Ronald Smith, store director at the Quantico Commissary. “We started by giving the children a 15-minute interactive talk where we identified and described different types of fruits and vegetables. At the end of each session, the children participated in a question-and-answer session, and our industry partners provided them with a healthy-snack-pack bag filled with healthy produce and grocery items. Our kids loved it; they’re more involved now with their parents in the commissary shopping experience.”

Quantico Commissary staff at the same time built in-store displays of various kid-friendly produce items such as bananas, apples and clementines. These items were specially displayed a specific area of the produce department titled, the “Kids Zone.” In addition to produce items, the “Kid Zone” highlighted various cartoon characters with associations to produce, such as Popeye the Sailor Man and his love of spinach.

“We experienced approximately a 29 percent increase on selected items during April’s Month of the Military Child promotion. What’s more, these activities created awareness, increased knowledge and understanding, as well as initiated creativity, excitement and family togetherness,” says Smith. **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHILEAN FRESH FRUIT ASSOCIATION

¡Viva Los Avocados!

Versatile fruit lends itself to multiple uses and promotional opportunities.

BY MARK HAMSTRA



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

Avocados are on a roll! They are also on the grill, in salads, and of course in a variety of interesting guacamole recipes. Groups promoting this versatile fruit seek to inspire consumers with new ways to incorporate avocados into their diets, and retailers are taking note.

Wilson Estupinan, director of fresh foods at America's Food Basket, the Lake Success, NY-based operator of about 20 Ideal Markets and other supermarket banners in the Northeast, says using Hass avocados for grilling, and on sandwiches as an alternative to mayonnaise, is catching on.

"Not everyone is used to the avocado taste in that way, but once they try it, they fall in love with it, and they just keep buying," he says.

The sales data seems to validate his viewpoint. The Hass Avocado Board reported about 1.86 billion pounds of Hass avocados hit the U.S. market in 2014, which is up about 10 percent from 2013 when the U.S. market received 1.69 billion pounds of Hass avocados.

The fall season marks a shift toward Hass avocados from Mexico and Chile, as the crops

from California and Peru wind down.

This year in particular, the crop from California, which started in April, has been running about one month early, according to Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing at the Irvine, CA-based California Avocado Commission. The early crop means volume from the state will be "very light" this fall, she says.

Still, DeLyser points out that retailers have many opportunities to promote fall avocados, including the back-to-school season, Labor Day, college and professional football games, Major League Baseball games, tailgating-themed promotions, as well as Halloween and Thanksgiving.

She suggests retailers display avocados with other produce items used in recipes appropriate to the holiday.

"There are some great stuffing recipes with avocados for Thanksgiving, and avocados with leftover turkey on sandwiches has become an



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

“Every occasion that brings people together is a great opportunity for avocados, and in the fall, there are many occasions that can be leveraged for themed promotions.”

— Jan DeLyser, California Avocado Commission

increasingly popular usage idea,” says DeLyser.

Retailers “first and foremost” must display ripe avocados, she says, and must also use signage to draw attention to avocado displays. “Displaying multiple sizes of avocados has also been shown to increase sales,” she says.

“Every occasion that brings people together is a great opportunity for avocados, and in the fall, there are many occasions that can be leveraged for themed promotions,” says DeLyser. “Calling attention to ideas for entertaining with avocados encourages multiple purchases.”

Dan Acevedo, director of business development at Murrieta, CA-based West Pak Avocado says the company works closely with its retail partners to plan promotions during the optimal time periods and also works closely with the avocado boards and commissions to support retail marketing programs.

“During the fall season, MLB playoffs begin, and then we plunge into the NFL and college football season,” says Acevedo.

“These events provide the perfect platform to cross-merchandise avocados with several produce and non-produce items alongside themed displays.”

Acevedo echoes DeLyser’s message about ripe avocados. “A preconditioned avocado takes the guesswork out of when an avocado becomes ripe and ready to eat at home,” says Acevedo. “When consumers can take a ripe avocado home, they tend to purchase them more frequently. Produce clerks rely on a consistent stage of ripeness each and every time.”

BIG YEAR FOR CHILE

Chile is expected to produce a bountiful crop of avocados this fall, as 2014’s yield was light, according to Karen Brux, managing director-North America for the Santiago, Chile-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association. Avocados tend to alternate between heavy and light annual crop yields. “We expect much more fruit in the pipeline” for this fall season,

says Brux.

The Association is projecting volume of 100 million pounds for the U.S. market, compared with about 30 million pounds last year. “We expect to have fruit in the market by September with a strong promotion push starting in late September/early October and continuing through March of 2016,” says Brux.

“There are many retailers who appreciate the high quality offered by Avocados from Chile, but they want a consistent supply. Our goal is to support our customers throughout the Chilean avocado season, from the start to the finish.”

Brux says Avocados from Chile will deploy “many different tactics” to help retailers promote avocados, depending on the specific retailer and the retailer’s customer base. “This will likely include partner demos, specialized display materials, display/sales contests and social media promotions,” she says.

■ CHILE EXPERIMENTS WITH TARGETED AVOCADO MARKETING

This fall, in an effort to be more targeted with its marketing messages, the Avocados from Chile marketing group, for the first time ever, will launch a digital marketing program. Plans call for using technology to target individual neighborhoods that match the customer profile for Avocados from Chile, explains Karen Brux, managing director-North America for the Santiago, Chile-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association.

“Highly targeted display ads and interactive videos will put Avocados from Chile front and center with our key audiences,” says Brux.

“We’re also going to take social media to the next level and run numerous promotions throughout our season,” she adds. “We’ll be

partnering with popular food and lifestyle bloggers to deliver compelling information about the wonderful origin of Avocados from Chile, their superior taste and versatility, and numerous health benefits.”

While Avocados from Chile has long incorporated the story of avocados in its marketing messages, this year it will focus on the story of Chilean avocados, says Brux, and “the people who grow the avocados, the regions where the avocados are grown, and growing methods that make avocados from Chile unique.”

Marketing will include videos, photos and other promotional materials. The group’s website recently offered a hint of this Chile-centric marketing strategy, with

a “Get ‘Em While They’re Chile” message in large block letters on the opening page. Scrolling through the mobile-friendly site reveals a large recipe section, of course, but also information about the nation of Chile and its people.

The “longest country in the world” — it stretches more than half the length of the South American coast — boasts 71,660 acres of avocado groves, according to Avocados from Chile.

“The myriad uses and many benefits of Avocados from Chile are a reflection of the country they come from; a place and people defined by diversity and a joyous celebration of life,” the website concludes.

pb

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- 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.



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Brux agrees that the fall holidays provide prime promotional opportunities for marketing avocados. "Avocados from Chile has numerous new recipes and photos that are perfect for a retailer to promote both in-store and online," she says. "Creamy tomato soup with avocado, chorizo and white beans; crunchy parmesan avocado wedges; bacon, avocado and cheese melt; and pulled pork and avocado on toast are just a few of the warm, cozy ideas we have ready for the fall avocado season. Retailers are always looking for new usage ideas to boost consumption, so we'll be developing new concepts with photos for the holidays and fall entertaining."

Brux agrees the fall holidays, especially Halloween and Thanksgiving, present opportunities for promoting avocados.

Instead of simply promoting traditional guacamole for parties, Brux suggests consumers might be interested in "Ghoulish Guacamole," which, as the Avocados From Chile website explains, involves placing a bowl of guacamole inside a larger bowl or cauldron filled with dry ice.

She also agrees avocados can be promoted as a spread for leftover turkey after Thanksgiving. "There are so many entertaining occasions during the fall months that we even had a retailer request marketing materials showing appetizer/party ideas with avocados," says Brux. "It's all about giving consumers easy ways to expand their usage of the fruit."

Brux advises when suggesting avocado recipe ideas to consumers — or when promoting menu-preparation ideas for any produce items — it's best to keep the recipes as simple as possible.

"People don't want fancy, complicated recipes," she says. "On the other hand, they're very interested in learning how they can take some familiar foods to the next level, and avocados are perfect for this."

"You can add some diced avocados to scrambled eggs. You can cut in half, scoop out the pit and stuff it with any type of salad or grain you like, using the half-cut avocado as a salad bowl. Or how about throwing some avocado chunks into a bowl of soup?"

Avocados provide a colorful addition that can ramp up the nutrition and flavor of many traditional recipes, says Brux. "This is what retailers need to show their customers — how they can make everything better with avocados."

THE MEXICAN CONNECTION

Mexico is the largest producer of avocados, according to the U.S. Department of Agricul-



The "Tastiest Tailgate" promotion slated for Sept. 15 through Oct. 31, from Avocados from Mexico features a new display bin. The display will include a consumer sweepstakes and an offer of a free can of Ro*Tel diced tomatoes and green chilies with the purchase of three avocados — which are the two main ingredients in the guacamole recipe that accompanies the promotion.

ture, which estimates the crop from the fall/winter 2014/2015 season to have been about 1.5 million metric tons, a "modest increase" over the preceding season. Exports were estimated to be about 700,000 metric tons.

Exports to the United States are "expected to continue to be strong and growing," the USDA reports.

The Mexican state of Michoacán is the world leader in avocado production, according to the USDA, and accounts for 85 percent of total Mexican avocado production.

The outlook for this year's Mexican crop is "outstanding," says Maggie Bezart Hall, vice president of trade and promotion at Avocados from Mexico, who notes Mexico accounts for 80 percent of the fall crop.

"We are currently running 22 percent over last year," she says.

Avocados from Mexico will have national media, retail and foodservice programs running in the fall. Programs will include in-store coupons/tear pads, in-store radio, display bins and headers, vinyl wraps, innovative permanent rack displays to encourage cross-merchandising throughout the store, trade media and public relations, social/digital programming, retail display contests, consumer sweepstakes and more.

The marketing group has a "Tastiest Tail-

gate” promotion slated for Sept. 15 through Oct. 31, featuring a new, unique display bin. The display will include a consumer sweepstakes and an offer of a free can of Ro*Tel diced tomatoes and green chilies with the purchase of three avocados — which are the two main ingredients in the guacamole recipe that accompanies the promotion.

“Fall is a time that consumers get excited about football season,” says Hall. “Guacamole is the No. 1 way avocados are consumed in the U.S.”

The partnership with Ro*Tel aims to drive consumption and increase profitability in the produce department, she says.

“Avocados from Mexico, Ro*Tel and the ‘Rockin Guac’ recipe is an ideal partnership, and a great way to offer ‘speed scratch’ recipes during the tailgate season,” says Hall.

Consumers will also be directed to the

AvoFan promotional website for the chance to win “The Ultimate Tastiest Tailgate Prize Pack.” Other media will include Avocados from Mexico posts on Facebook and Twitter, branded commercials on network TV, and an electronic billboard in Times Square.

There will also be opportunities for retailers to win prizes for creativity in their displays. Sources told *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, Avocados from Mexico also will have a float in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, and will make a second appearance in the Super Bowl advertising lineup. When asked about those potential activities, Hall replied, “Stay tuned!”

Avocados from Mexico also has other plans to drive avocado sales around the year-end holidays, including a new promotion called “Seasons Eatings” for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

“It’s a time to have a smashing holiday with

Avocados from Mexico and Tabasco,” says Hall. “It will add fresh ideas to holiday celebrations by incorporating avocados into festive menu options and leftover ideas.”

For retailers, promoting avocados can often revolve around suggesting recipes to help consumers make guacamole at home. The Avocados from Mexico website lists 16 different varieties of the creamy dip, from seafood guacamole to blue cheese guacamole, for example.

AVOCADOS FROM FLORIDA

Brooks Tropicals, the Homestead, FL-based supplier of the SlimCado, a green-skinned avocado containing less oil than the Hass variety, offers retailers an array of ideas for promoting its avocados in the fall.

“SlimCados are perfect for fall’s tailgating events,” says Mary Ostlund, marketing director at Brooks Tropicals. “Grill SlimCado halves and you’ve got a delicious bowl for a side dish or salad. Add to any tailgate display. “Substituting mashed SlimCado for mayonnaise not only makes perfect low-fat and low-calorie sense for lunches and fall’s outdoor eating, but avocados are better at withstanding the heat than mayonnaise. So add SlimCados to your ‘back-to-school’ or ‘fall event’ displays,” she says. Around Columbus Day, she suggests a “Columbus Discovered More Than the Americas” display to highlight fruits and vegetables that are native to the Western Hemisphere.

“And it’s a great way to introduce tropical produce that your customers may not be familiar with,” adds Ostlund. Customers interested in locally grown produce “won’t mind stretching their idea of local if you present SlimCado avocados from Florida to them,” she says. “Domestically grown should pique their interests.”

Florida’s crop was hitting late-season levels normal for summer, according to Bill Brindle, vice president of sales for Brooks Tropicals. “However, there may be shortages in green-skinned avocados if the Dominican Republic’s fruit is not allowed in,” he adds.

A medfly outbreak in the Dominican Republic recently led the USDA to restrict imports of green-skin avocados from that country.

For retailers interested in promoting variety, the SlimCado offers an option with nutritional benefits.

“Expand avocado category sales with variety,” says Ostlund. “SlimCado avocados can drive interest with the health-conscious, the weight conscious and those whose native cuisines prefer this avocado.” **pb**

■ DIGITAL PROMO EFFORTS

LeighAnne Thomsen, marketing manager, Mission Produce, an avocado grower/packer/shipper based in Oxnard, CA, says that the company is also revving up its digital presence for a fall push.

The company is planning to launch a new website by October, and is designing a new booth for the fall Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit. The company has been working with photographers to “spruce up the Mission look,” she says.

“We did a lot of investing the past few years in our operations to bring more quality and more product to the market and to our customers, so we are working on the imaging and materials that will reflect the work we did internally,” says Thomsen.

Mission recently completed building its own packing facility in Peru, which adds to the lineup of Mission employee-operated packing facilities in Mexico, Chile and California, she says.

Thomsen is also considering options such as recipe contests, or another type of recipe- or idea-sharing platform, to drive buzz around the avocado brand.

Although she acknowledges that it can be difficult to promote brands in the produce department, she points out consumers have become much more aware of the stories behind the fresh foods they buy.

“They are a little more open to brand awareness,” says Thomsen.

For the most part, however, she says

Mission relies on the major avocado marketing groups like the California Avocado Commission and Avocados from Mexico to promote avocados, and Mission simply does all it can to keep its retail customers in stock.

Thomsen says she’s especially looking forward to the fall promotions this year from Avocados from Mexico.

“It’s exciting for them, and it’s exciting for the industry in general,” she says. “In the fall, the California season will have come to an end, and the Peruvian season will be over, so the fall is when Mexico really kicks into gear.

“In the fall, the Mexican crop is very tasty, with lots of oil, as long as we don’t see too much rain down there.”

Mission worked with retailers on specific promotions, including a demo program with guacamole seasoning that Thomsen says “did well” at Demoulas Market Basket chain in Tewksbury, MA, a high-volume regional operator in New England.

“We’re looking forward to a strong fall,” says Thomsen. “The American consumer has become much more acquainted with avocados than they used to be.”

Thomsen also cites Thanksgiving as a “great time to promote avocados to have with your turkey leftovers. For house parties around Halloween, it’s a great time to have guacamole, and there are lots of other ways to eat avocados — they are so versatile and can be eaten in so many ways.” **pb**



Gearing Up For Peruvian Onions

These beautiful, high-quality South American flat onions hold their own against Western varieties.

BY BOB JOHNSON

When the supply of sweet onions from the iconic Vidalia area of Georgia dwindles, attention turns to Peru — the most important counter seasonal South American source of this popular flat, short day variety, according to Marty Kramer, vice president of Keystone Fruit Marketing, Greencastle, PA.

Sweet onions have become so popular that a year-round supply from somewhere is a necessity.

“Over the past several years, demand for sweet onions has been steadily increasing,” says Kramer. “This demand has been fueled by increased consumer awareness and growing popularity of sweet onions. For a period of time, the available supply of authentic sweet onions was lagging behind the demand. Today, a reliable steady supply of year-round authentic sweet onions is available to meet increasing demand.”

For half the year, these beautiful, high-quality South American flat onions will compete with Western varieties that are grown for sweetness, but lack the distinctive color and flat shape of the Vidalias.

“By August, the Peruvian will be the only true sweet onion in the marketplace,” says Brian Kastick, president of OSO Sweet Onions, Savannah, GA. “How do you know if a yellow onion is sweet? You don’t.”

Once they arrive in the summer, these sweet onions from the Andes should be readily available into next year.

“The Peruvians start in late July in a small way, and reach their peak around September 1,” says Barry Rogers, president of Sweet Onion Trading Company, Grant, FL. “They will be in the market all the way until February.”

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE SWEET

Regardless of how they are labeled, or where they are grown, sweet onions open up a wealth

of cross-merchandising options.

“Sweet onion usage is very diverse and cross-merchandising opportunities are limitless,” says Kramer. “Many retailers strive to take advantage of cross-merchandising by strategically placing onions and products that can be utilized with sweet onions. The sweet mild flavors of onions make them fantastic on a hamburger or in a fresh salad — simply slice and enjoy. As an ingredient, they are guaranteed to enhance favorite recipes; sweet onions will take any menu offering to a whole new level. Perfect with steaks, burgers and kabobs — grilling promos are always a hit!”

The merchandising possibilities open up locations throughout the store for secondary displays.

“Many retailers strive to take advantage of cross-merchandising by strategically placing onions and products that can be utilized with sweet onions,” says Kramer.

“Sweet onions present an opportunity for

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incremental produce sales if merchandised. Sweet onions offer ample opportunity for promotion and cross-merchandising with a variety of products in and out of the department.”

Some of these promotions work well beyond the produce department and increase sales in other areas of the store.

“Sweet onions pair well with numerous items inside and outside of the produce department — that’s why they continue to drive the onion category,” says John Shuman, president and director of sales for Shuman Produce, Reidsville, GA. “For example, a display including sweet onions, bagged salad, tomatoes and refrigerated dressings could be used to create a flavorful salad promotion. Sweet onions drive onion category sales as well as the sales of other produce items. A basket containing sweet onions is 40 percent larger than the average produce basket.”

The category has grown so much, it is advisable to carry sweet onions in bulk, and in bags of varying sizes.

“Due to increased demand of sweet onions, many retailers found it advantageous to carry bulk or loose jumbo sweet onions as well as consumer bags of medium sweet onions,” says Kramer. “Endcaps, standalones, value-added product offerings, multi-size strategies and consumer bagged displays offer consumers multiple buying options and ensure sales lift.”

The Peruvians have become an essential part of the year-round supply of quality sweet onions.

“Both the volume and sales of Peruvian sweet onions remained steady as a result of sweet onions continuing to be a staple in many consumers’ kitchens,” says Shuman. “While it’s still too early to make any estimates of this year’s crop in terms of volume, sweet onions

“The short day onions have low pungency, high sugar, and a flat shape. You might get a premium based on the quality and appearance.”

— Brian Kastick, Oso Sweet Onions

remain the onion category driver and account for a third of total sales. Keeping a consistent supply of sweet onions throughout the year will help retailers capitalize on those sales all year long.”

Indications are that the supply this year should be good, in both volume and quality. “The early sweet onion crop in Peru is coming in nicely,” says Kramer. “Demand and high quality sweet onions from Peru are expected to be excellent throughout fall and the winter selling season.”

THE PERU TIME OF YEAR

The sweetness of onions goes deeper than the label, and even deeper than the flat shape of the iconic variety, because it depends on how and where they are grown.

“Sweet onions are sweet because they have less sulfur and more water,” says Derrell Kelso, president of Onions Etc., Stockton, CA, which is a division of Farmington Fresh. “Short-day onions are planted before October 15. They don’t grow much in the winter, and then explode in the spring and are harvested in April or May. They’re sweet, because they’re

grown in soil that is mainly sandy. The county of Vidalia is all sand.”

Because they have more water, truly sweet onions like those from the sandy Vidalia soil, do not store very well.

Once the supplies of Vidalias is exhausted in the late summer, the only source of these distinctive flat onions is the sandy soil of Peru.

“Peru is so sandy they have to bring in organic material,” says Kelso. “The onions are grown in volcanic soil, like the Maui onions, with very little sulfur. In my opinion they are definitely better than the intermediate day onions from Washington at the same time of year.”

The Peruvian onions cost more, according to Kelso, because of the freight, increased risk and labor costs, but they do not always fetch a retail premium.

“They are sweeter than the intermediate day onions from Washington,” says Kelso. “Some customers don’t want to pay the extra for Peruvian onions, and some do.”

Many industry experts extol the virtues of these sweet onions from the sandy, volcanic Andean soils.

“The Peruvian onion is brighter, cleaner and has the flat shape,” says Kastick. “The short day onions have low pungency, high sugar, and a flat shape. You might get a premium based on the quality and appearance.”

Other industry experts do not find such a clear-cut distinction in quality among the sweet onions available from different regions in the fall and winter.

“There is no premium for the Peruvian,” says Rogers. “Their main competition will be Western sweet onions. Which is better depends on who grows it, and who you ask.”

Even some major shippers from Vidalia, however, emphasize their counter seasonal supply of Peruvian sweet onions.

“Shuman Produce recently completed construction on a new sweet onion packing facility in Peru to promote efficiency in our supply chain during the season throughout the fall and winter months,” says Shuman. “Currently in operation, our new facility allows our program to have a new level of flexibility to provide better service to our retail partners and improve our overall Peruvian sweet onion program.”

Early indications are the quantity and quality of sweet onions from Peru will be good this year.

“The Peruvian sweet onion season is underway with very nice quality and a mix of sizing expected this season,” says Shuman. “The earlier production looks to be of good sizing

leaning heavier to the bulk size profile while the next tier of harvesting will provide more of a balance in sizing with bulk and mediums. Peruvian sweet onions will be in stores mid-to late-August. The season is expected to continue into late February 2016 giving retailers a 6-month season to offer consumers a consistent look.”

Supply of the long day onions that predominate in the West can be more reliable, because they store better.

“There are short-day, intermediate and long-day onions,” says Kelso. “The long-day onions are planted in the spring and grow in the long days. They are from high desert areas without a lot of dew in the fall in Washington, Idaho or Oregon. These areas on the eastern slopes of the mountains don’t get dew in the morning, so the onions don’t get black mold. They store longer, because they don’t have a lot of water.”

Regardless of where they are grown, sweet onions have become an indispensable item in produce.

“Onions are a flavorful ingredient in many recipes, and Giant Eagle is dedicated to delivering customers a high quality onion selection,” says Dan Donovan, spokesperson for Giant Eagle, Pittsburgh, PA. “Year-round, customers will find yellow, red, white and sweet onion varieties available at their local Giant Eagle or Market District location.”

This retailer counts on Peru to fill supply gaps from the West in the fall and winter.

“While not an everyday Giant Eagle offering, Peruvian sweet onions are occasionally brought in if the availability of other varieties is limited,” says Donovan. “Throughout the typical Peruvian onion season, we source a majority of our sweet onions out of Nevada and Washington. When promoting onions, we highlight variety, and not shipper or origin, with the exception of Vidalia or local Pennsylvania onions, which are advertised as such.”

BRANDS SELL, NOT COUNTRIES

Although onion experts understand the quality of the Peruvian product, most of them believe the only geographic origins that can be marketed are Vidalia, and some relatively local harvests.

“I market everything under my brand,” says Kastick. “OSO Sweet.”

Many Vidalia-based shippers, in addition to promoting their fabled corner of the Peach State, have brand names for their sweet onions.

“Shuman Produce markets our Peruvian sweet onions as a part of our year-round Real Sweet sweet onion program,” says Shuman.

“Throughout the typical Peruvian onion season, we source a majority of our sweet onions out of Nevada and Washington.”

— Dan Donovan, Giant Eagle

“They allow retailers to maintain a strong level of consistency in their sweet onion offerings all year long.”

Supermarkets generally promote the supplier, because these major sweet onion brands resonate with consumers better than the Peruvian origin.

“Most retailers will promote the brand, if they’re carrying a highly touted one,” says Kelso of Onions Etc.

The country of origin information is required, but it is almost always the smallest print on the case.

“You have to put country of origin on everything you sell, but we also have our own brands,” says Rogers of Sweet Onion Trading Company. “If you look in the market, the brands would overwhelm the country of origin in the size of the label.”

Down the road, those sweet, flat Peruvian onions may become more difficult to find, because multinational concerns are finding more profitable uses for that ground.

“Investors are putting in higher value crops on that land like avocados, grapes and citrus,” says Kastick of Oso Sweet Onions. “That market remained steady for the past three years.”

Investors are already working, however, to ensure year-round supply from other locales around the world.

“We have ongoing research and development projects in a variety of other countries throughout South and Central America, even Europe and others,” says Kramer of Keystone Fruit Marketing. “Future availability of authentic sweet onions from these emerging markets is yet to be determined.” **pb**

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NEW YORK APPLE REPORT

How varieties perform and what types are up-and-comers.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



PHOTO COURTESY OF ERNEST BAREUTHER

Apples first bloomed in New York's conducive climate in the 1600s, when European settlers planted the seeds of this sweet crispy fruit. Today, nearly 700 commercial growers harvest an average of 30 million bushels of apples annually, an estimated \$300 million crop, according to the New York Apple Association (NYAA), based in Fishers, NY.

"Our customers look for New York apples," says Jeff Cady, director of produce and floral for Tops Markets, a 162-store chain headquartered in Buffalo, NY. "We go lightly at the start when the first early varieties come in. Then, when we get into the heart of the season, we carry many more varieties. There's a section in our ad that identifies not only the New York apples but often the grower as well. We also connect the dots and lead consumers to our New York apples in-store via social media platforms."

The 2015/2016 season crop estimate is slightly down from the state's five-year average.

"Western New York, east of Rochester to Niagara, experienced a frost incident in May, and this effected some varieties such as Ginger Gold," says Tim Mansfield, director of sales and marketing for Sun Orchard Fruit Co., in Burt, NY. "There are mixed reports

about what this did to the Empires, but Empires grow all over the state. In the eastern part of the state, the Hudson Valley to Lake Champlain is heavy with a full crop."

A FULL PALATE OF FLAVORS

New York-grown McIntosh apples are a staple at Morton Williams, a 13-store chain based in the Bronx, NY.

"We carry them all the time and buy them out of the Hunts Point Produce Market," says produce director, Marc Goldman.

The McIntosh boasts a strong customer following from New York City to Boston. In addition, many New York growers ship this variety to retailers in the southeastern U.S., the upper Mid-West and even a few into West Coast markets.

"McIntosh is heirloom-like in its iconic flavor. Strains developed in the past 10 to 15 years stay firm in storage and are out in front of customers longer than some other varieties. They always get their own space on the shelf, especially with East Coast retailers," says Tony Maresca, sales manager at Stanley Orchards Sales, in Modena, NY.

Empire, like the McIntosh, is another variety synonymous with New York. In fact, it's a New York native released in 1966 by the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) of



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Cornell University in Geneva, NY.

“Empires were specially developed for our growing conditions here and are named for the state,” says Barbara Caron, in sales at Pavero Cold Storage Corp., in Highland, NY. “They are a strong, good eating apple with a good shelf life.”

Other traditionally favorite apple varieties on the East Coast are Macoun, Cortland and Stayman/Winesap.

“Macoun doesn’t command the price it used to, but there are pockets of interest, and in some places, more so than the McIntosh. Cortland is very good, but consumers in the southern U.S. and Midwest don’t want this apple. Stayman/

Winesap is very popular in the South Jersey market,” says Stanley Orchard Sales’ Maresca.

In addition to McIntosh and Empire, other best-selling apple varieties grown in New York are Gala and Fuji.

“Gala entered into the Top 3 varieties in the state in the past 10 to 15 years. It demands a good return, and in our climate and conditions, we are able to produce an excellent piece of fruit. Many retailers will use totes as a vehicle to promote Galas in the fall,” says Maresca.

“On the other hand, Fuji is a variety that there’s room to grow more of in New York. We’re not always able to get the size our retail customers require, so Washington Fujis often

■ 4 WAYS TO SELL APPLES IN A NEW YORK MINUTE

The best ways for retailers to sell more New York-grown apples are to make sure consumers can recognize and find the product in-store, change up the packaging, demo the flavor, and run multi-faceted promotions.

“I make sure the Macintosh are signed, because customers know they are from New York just by the name. We also feature them in the ad at least once a month,” says Marc Goldman, produce director for Bronx, NY-based Morton Williams.

Tops Friendly Markets kicks off its fall reset with an apple display contest among its stores. “Everyone wants to win, so we have some really creative displays. The apples sell through fast and furious,” says Jeff Cady, director of produce and floral for Tops Markets.

By October, Tops stores will display an abundant selection of 10 or more New York-grown apples such as McIntosh, Empire, Gala, Fuji and Honeycrisp showcased in a 12- to 24-foot display depending on store size, with additional apples sold in high graphic bins. Items such as baked goods, apple crisp mix, caramel wraps and caramel dips are brought into produce to cross-merchandise with the apples. The chain keeps customers apprised of when New York apple season starts, when specific varieties are in-store and provides recipes and other educational information via its social media platforms.

“Many New York retailers will call out the state’s apples in their own special section, especially during the fall harvest,” says Molly Zingler, director of marketing for the Fishers, NY-based New York Apple Association (NYAA). “This season, we are offering a new high-graphic bin header

that calls out ‘fresh crop.’”

Beyond signage, grower/shippers as well as the NYAA make it easy for retailers to spotlight New York apples via packaging. New this season, Red Jacket Orchards will offer a 4-pound branded tote bag that touts their farm and story as a grower, while the NYAA put their “Apple Country” logo on a pouch bag.

Tasting translates into sales; therefore, the NYAA sponsors many retail demos annually. The organization equips demo staff with kits complete with talking points and recipes.

“We sample varieties we think many of our customer’s haven’t tried, such as the Macoun or RubyFrost,” says Cady of Tops Markets.

Sampling is one way Fowler Brothers, Inc., in Wolcott, NY, helped to introduce SnapDragon at retail last season. “As growers, we visited in-store, talked with customers and sampled the fruit,” says Lee Peters, vice president of sales and marketing. “It was quite effective.”

Price is always a critical element in promotions, according to growers and retailers alike. Therefore, the NYAA will continue its digital coupon program. Last year, in partnership with Tops and the retailer’s Click-to-Card loyalty card plan, digital coupons were offered to customers for 75-cents off products such as 3-bags ‘Apple Country’ poly bags of McIntosh and Empire apples and 5-pound bags of Red Delicious apples. The redemption rate was a whopping 26 percent, according to Zingler.

“Coupons are a good way to get customers who don’t normally buy apples and to get regular apple buyers to try something new,” says Cady. pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOPS FRIENDLY MARKETS

Last year, high-graphic pouch bags were the way Tops Friendly Markets introduced one of two new apple varieties.

fill in the slack on the shelf," he adds.

"Honeycrisp is a proven winner, and there is great interest in this variety. It's a difficult variety to grow, but it does well in our cool climate. We expect to have Honeycrisp available into January this season," says Maresca.

Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Jonagold, Braeburn, Ginger Gold, Jersey Mac, Idared, Rome and Paula Red as well as managed varieties such as SweeTango and Zestar are grown commercially in the state. So is a variety called 20-ounce.

The East Coast's humidity makes organic apple production difficult in New York.

"Since there's not readily available volumes of New York-grown organic apples, many of our customers look for heirloom varieties instead. Near the holidays, we bring in an apple called the 20-ounce. It's not actually 20-ounces, but it's a great baking apple," says Tops Markets' Cady.

Red Jacket Orchards, a family-run farm in Geneva, NY, grows, ships and markets several heirlooms such as the Newtown Pippin, Baldwin, Cox Orange Pippin and Golden Russet. "This season we will introduce a 2-pound pouch bag of mixed heirloom apples," says Mark Nicholson, co-owner. "There will be product information, including an heirloom apple recipe, either on or in the pack. We'll have this pack available from October into December."

High-graphic pouch bags were the way Tops Friendly Markets introduced last year one of two new apples developed by Dr. Susan Brown at the NYSAES (New York State Agricultural Experiment Station) at Cornell University.

"The pouch bags are classy and stand out," says Cady. "Graphics and messaging on the bags let customers know what was new and different about the RubyFrost apple. We also offered coupons for the variety in our ad circular. We'll be doing the same with the

SnapDragon this season."

RubyFrost and SnapDragon are being marketed by Wolcott, NY-based Crunch Time Apple Growers, formerly New York Apple Growers LLC, which has a licensing agreement with Cornell University to name, grow, market and sell these apples. A total of 145 growers throughout New York, from Long Island to Buffalo, signed on to grow both new varieties.

RubyFrost is a Braeburn-Autumn Crisp cross that is large, red-skinned, sweet and

crunchy. The variety develops its flavor in storage, and therefore comes to the market in January, hence Crunch Time Apple Grower's tagline, "Winter Beauty."

"This will be our third season of commercial production for the RubyFrost. We expect volume to be triple what we had last year. Last year, six retailers participated. We expect to work with up to 15 retailers, including those as far south as Florida, to sell the RubyFrost this season," explains Crunch Time's business manager, Robin Leous.



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■ LOOK TO CORNELL FOR THE ANSWER!

Cornell University's apple breeding program at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, in Geneva, NY, is one of the largest in the world. It's also one of the oldest, established in the late 1890s. Since then, the program released more than 60 varieties that are grown around the world, including the Cortland, Macoun, Empire and Jonagold. Cornell's latest releases, the 65th and 66th respectively, are the SnapDragon and RubyFrost. With this kind of history, Cornell's apple breeders are well positioned to give retailers an inside peek at apple varieties of the future.

Dr. Susan Brown, professor of horticulture science and director of Cornell's apple breeding program, says consumers still want the same value from apples — "flavorful fruit with a crisp texture."

SnapDragon, a Honeycrisp offspring, is tag-lined "Monster Crunch." The fruit naturally sizes smaller making it perfect to market as a sweet snack for children. One retailer, Wegmans, an 86-store chain headquartered

Brown and her team, which uniquely includes a plant pathologist, ethnobiologist, food scientist and post-harvest physiologist, leverage Cornell's century-plus old living library of generic material plus they have access to a nearby USDA collection of apple germplasm that represents more than 3,000 varieties. What the team comes up with are naturally-bred varieties with innovative appeal for customers.

"I'm like a kid in a candy shop when I look at the tremendous diversity of apples that result," says Brown. "What ultimately makes the grade is a variety that is better than one or both parents. To measure that, we see how an apple fits our initial objective. For example, we may say we want a green apple, with a certain crispness and juiciness, with distinctive (yet no off) fla-

in Rochester, NY, debuted this variety last year. Leous expects volume will be available to more retailers this season. The fruit comes to market in mid-October and finishes by the end of December, ready to give its shelf space over

vors, and that ripens consistently. We may look for other consumer attributes too such as its ability to sit in a bowl on the table and not turn mushy too fast."

What can retailers look forward to showcasing on their shelves in the next 3 to 5 years?

"Youth today, Millennial shoppers, are looking for full flavored apples," says Brown. "One variety we are looking at has a robust spiciness (or a combination of high sugar and acid), which is not what you usually see in a bi-color apple. Another is incredibly firm, sweet, has a good mouth-feel and juice the consistency of nectar. A third has a slight hint of anise. Those who tasted it either love it or hate it. It is more of a niche market apple favored by folks with a Mediterranean heritage." **pb**

then to the Ruby Frost. Crunch Time Apple Grower's extensive marketing program for both varieties include logo high-graphic display bins, in-store demos, mid-season couponing and consumer contests on social media. **pb**

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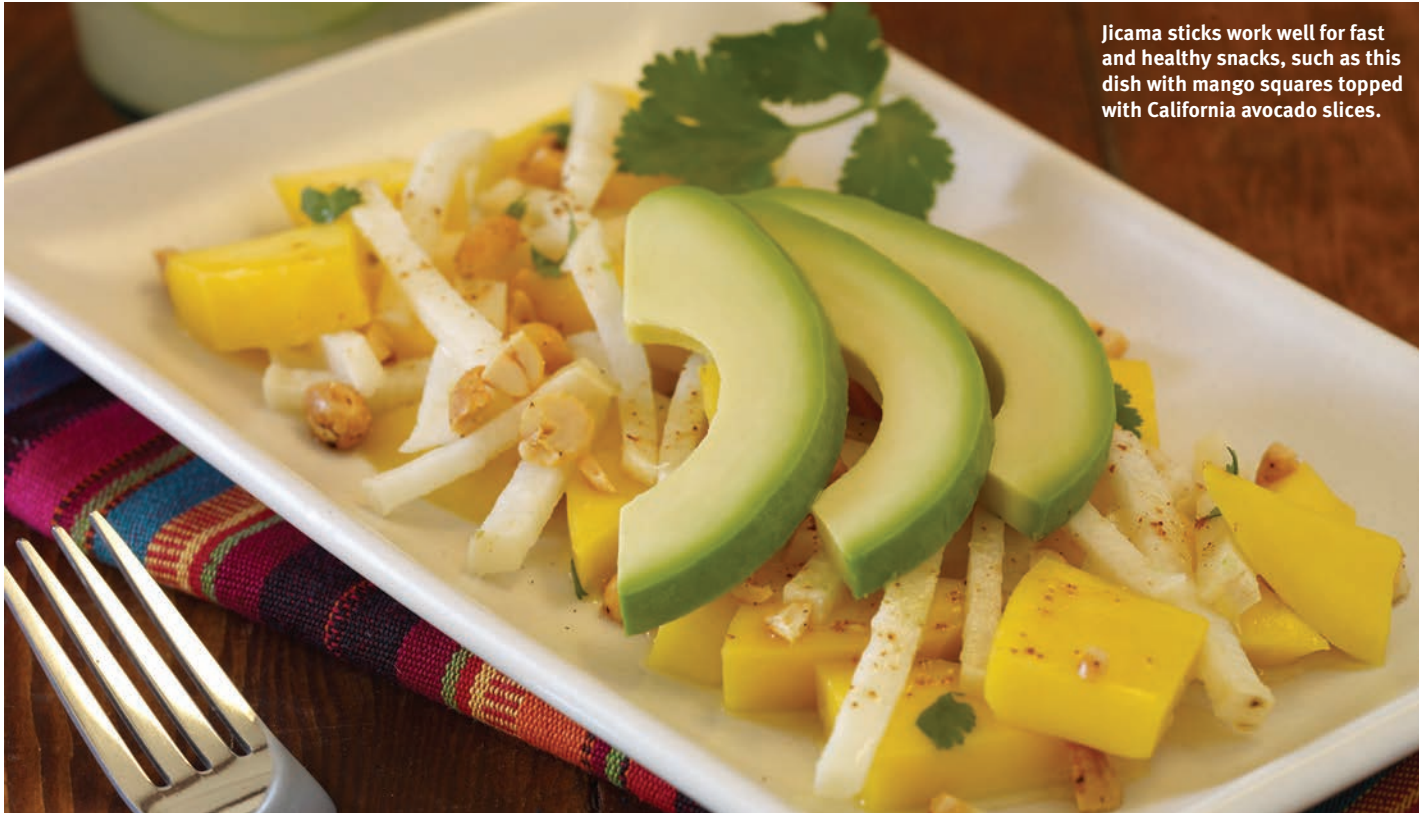
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JICAMA

Packs A Healthy Punch



Jicama sticks work well for fast and healthy snacks, such as this dish with mango squares topped with California avocado slices.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

Latin tuber gains popularity among health-conscious Millennials.

BY KRISTEN POPE

One fantastically crunchy root vegetable is starting to pop up in produce departments all over the country. Jicama, which is also sometimes called a “Mexican potato,” is popular in Mexico and in Asia, but its popularity is spreading across the nation. Consumers in the U.S. are starting to enjoy jicama’s fresh taste and crunch, and the market is growing rapidly.

Jicama suppliers are finding consumers are starting to snap up the tasty tubers. “The jicama market has grown significantly during the past several years,” says Nelia Alamo, director of

marketing for Renaissance Food Group, headquartered in Rancho Cordova, CA. “During this past year alone, our national sales on jicama sticks are up more than 35 percent. During the past five years, Renaissance Food Group has seen the category more than double in size.”

Las Vegas-based wholesaler and distrib-

utor, Fresh Mix (Part of Get Fresh Sales), is seeing similar gains. “With the jicama sticks, we’ve seen an increase of 35 percent within our marketplace year to year during the first two quarters of 2015,” says Todd Ponder, the company’s chief operating officer.

Based on these gains, Fresh Mix is looking to prioritize its jicama sales and find ways to increase market share. “Right now, we’re looking at emerging market segments,” says Ponder. “Jicama sticks, like Brussels sprouts and kale, are becoming mainstream. We’re looking at upcoming commodities. Jicama sticks are one of the big push items for 2015, and our strategic plan for the next two years following.”

“The flavor profile has been compared to water chestnuts, sweet crisped-up cucumber and nutty watered-down apple,” says Alamo. “While jicama tends to take on the flavors of its accompaniments in most dishes, the succulent, crisp texture is what makes it so appealing to most.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF RENAISSANCE FOOD GROUP

Jicama can be eaten raw or cooked and many retailers are starting to offer fresh-cut varieties. Chili powder, lime juice, and cilantro are popular flavor accompaniments. When cooked, it is commonly included in stir-fries, steamed, boiled, mashed, or fried. “Try tossing julienned jicama with spices such as Tajin or curry powder and adding it to your favorite tropical fruit salads to give a bit of kick and crispness,” recommends Alamo.

FAST-GROWING MARKET

Much of jicama’s success is regional, and the vegetable primarily appeals in southern markets. “It’s been increasing for a number of years, maybe four or five or six years,” says Ed Hunter, director of purchasing for Hearn Kirkwood, headquartered in Hanover, MD. “It’s stronger in some markets and not quite as strong in others. That probably has a lot to do with the Latino population and southern influence.”

Hunter finds jicama’s regional niche is slowly spreading, largely based on the health appeal of the crunchy snack. “It’s been creeping more toward the Northeast for a number of years now along with better choices and healthy eating lifestyles,” says Hunter.

MILLENNIALS AND LATINOS DOMINATE MARKET

The two major groups purchasing jicama are Latino customers and Millennials. “The demand is primarily ethnic and Millennial. We’re looking at both,” says Ponder.

These two key markets, Latino consumers and Millennials, are buying jicama, but often for different reasons. “From our case study, we found Millennials were not being introduced to the market from a cultural standpoint, but were introduced based on mainstream activity and a healthy, well-being focused lifestyle,” says Ponder.

By offering jicama as fresh-cut sticks and packaging it as a grab-and-go item, this becomes a handy snack for busy Millennials. “The majority of our business is sticks,” says Ponder. “It’s a grab-and-go item. It’s something really easy to eat, it has a convenience mark-up to it, and the healthy profile that consumers are gravitating toward. Our sales are driven predominately by the Millennial market.”

While Millennials are snapping up this healthy snacking option, the Latino community is also a huge player in the game. The tuber is native to Mexico, and familiar to Latin consumers. “Within southern Nevada, the Latino market increased 20 percent in the past five years,” says Ponder. “Jicama is a very strong



“The majority of our business is sticks. It’s a grab-and-go item. It’s something really easy to eat, it has a convenience mark-up to it, and the healthy profile that consumers are gravitating toward. Our sales are driven predominately by the Millennial market.”

— Todd Ponder, Fresh Mix

commodity within the population. We’re going to market toward it.”

Other consumers are also latching onto the item that has long been a staple of Latino cuisine. “There is a shift in food culture and ethnic and exotic foods are being sought out more by numerous consumer groups,” says Alamo. “Some Hispanic foods are going mainstream and jicama is one of those items.”

As people strap on their Fitbit health-tracking bands and make healthy living a priority, consumers are eating more jicama, since the snack boasts many healthful qualities. A half-cup serving has only 25 calories, no fat, and is high in vitamin C. “I think just like any of the markets, anything that promotes healthy eating has seen an increase in demand,” says Hunter.

CONVENIENCE IN A SNACK PACK

While peeling and slicing the unfamiliar tuber might intimidate the average consumer, snack packs and convenience sizes are a great way to go to increase impulse purchases. Whether looking for a ready-to-eat snack to pack in kids’ lunches, bring to work, or simply munch on while watching TV, fresh-cut jicama is the way many are going.

“Jicama is a difficult item to peel and cut,” says Alamo. “It is cumbersome, and that makes it a natural fit for the fresh-cut category. We take a somewhat ugly root vegetable and give you a clean, 100 percent ready to eat convenient snacking item.”

Fresh Mix also notes convenience is a big factor in fresh-cut jicama stick purchases. Fresh Mix offers several different options for

“Jicama is a difficult item to peel and cut. It is cumbersome, and that makes it a natural fit for the fresh-cut category.”

— Nelia Alamo, Renaissance Food Group

consumers looking for a quick and healthy snack. Their two most popular options are 7-ounce and 12-ounce cups of fresh-cut jicama sticks that have a flavor pack on top featuring a red chili pepper dipping sauce. “That seems to be our most popular item within the commodity,” says Ponder. “It adds a little spice and flavor.”

The company originally combined jicama with two other popular dipping vegetables: carrots and celery. However, they soon found that jicama was the big draw. “We originally started with jicama sticks, carrots and celery, but the mix did not sell as well as jicama by itself,” says Ponder.



With fresh-cut jicama, retailers have a number of different options for merchandising, but a popular one is to include the items in the grab-and-go section. “They are merchandised as snacking items and in vegetable trays as well as in the grab-and-go section at retail and convenience stores,” says Alamo.

In addition to being a handy convenience item, jicama is a popular holiday snack. “It can

be cross-merchandised with occasions in the deli, and it’s ideal for Super Bowl sets, Cinco de Mayo promotions, and all major holidays,” says Alamo.

As the market grows more in the coming years, retailers will no doubt find other ways to market the product and other holidays where people will enjoy this crunchy and refreshing snack item.

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Transportation Technology Brings Produce To New Age

Growers, shippers and retailers follow their rolling inventory to ensure better quality.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Produce transportation is entering the modern age with the widespread use of simple equipment that lets everyone in the supply chain know where product is and how it is doing in transit.

“What’s been a long time coming is the use of devices that let shippers and receivers know the location, as well as the temperature and humidity,” says Paul Kazan, president of Target Interstate Systems, Bronx, NY. “The majority of produce trucks are owner operators or small fleets, but they are completely wired.”

Because produce is wired as it rolls down highways, it is connected to a matrix of record-keeping hardware and software unimaginable just a few years ago.

“Email is becoming old-fashioned,” says Ken Lund, vice president of operations at Allen

Lund Company, La Cañada, CA. “Electronic data interchange (EDI) helps a lot, because there is less bad information. There’s faster and better information. Instead of sending out emails to 30 truckers, you do it all at once.”

The adoption of tracking technologies follows by years and even decades the widespread use of new technologies to better the selection of fruits, nuts and vegetables.

“Growers continue to embrace new technologies in an effort to be competitive with different seeds, new and improved fertilizers, expansion of greenhouses, and so forth,” says Ross Burnett, director of business development at LMTS, the transportation arm of L&M Transportation Services, Raleigh, NC. “Transportation is a significant portion of the delivered cost for any given item. As such, we are key partners in the supply stream.”

‘IT’S 10 IN THE MORNING, WHERE IS MY PRODUCE?’

New age transportation technology begins with putting a simple device in the back of the truck that lets a variety of parties remotely follow the location, and collect other vital information about the load.

There are software programs available that let both shippers and receivers easily use this information to know in advance if a load of produce is in danger of spoiling.

“The shippers are getting more sophisticated; they’re using transportation management software (TMS) systems,” says Lund. “They’re connecting to live tracking devices that tell you where the product is and the temperature [of the shipment]. It lowers the number of claims, and it allows the growers and receivers to be more proactive.”



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The “black box” devices in the backs of many produce trucks relay far more information than just the location of the load.

“The devices tell you where you are, the temperature, whether the door is open or closed, the amount of fuel in the tank, and the direction and speed of the truck,” says Tom Finkbiner, chief executive at Tiger Cool Express, Overland Park, KS. “It even tells you the amount of jolting of the load. We started using it in February 2014, and we put it on all our loads. The telematics we use get better every year.”

Some larger retailers are asking for this higher-end level of information about the produce heading their way.

“These devices do temperature and GPS, and a lot of the big stores want to have this traceability,” says Kazan. “With some of this equipment you can tell when the refrigerator is on, and when it is off, not just see a record of the temperature later.”

Even the smallest companies already use devices in each of their trucks to get through toll bridges, and these devices could also be used to track movement of the load.

“Most of the fleets are already using RFID or GPS to go through tolls without stopping,” says Kazan. “Apps are coming where you can track the driver’s cell phone. We’ll be able to get a ping two or three times a day to know

“Traceability and the broader food safety regulatory environment are mission critical concepts for growers, packers, distributors as well as transportation companies.”

— Ross Burnett, LMTS

where he is. Our customers will be able to go online and see where the trucks are on a map. The weakest link has always been knowing where my truck is.”

Electronic data exchange also lets all parties quickly and easily integrate this information about the location of a load into inventory and accounting software.

“We use electronic data interchange,” says Ethan Siegel, manager at LD Logistics, Bronx, NY. “We have a system that we use to track our loads/trucks, broker loads, as well as our accounting software.”

Another advantage of EDI is it lets the shipper or receiver use the cloud to communicate with dozens of truckers or other parties at once, rather than sending out a slew of emails.

Adoption of technologies that let you follow where produce is on the road to the distribution center, and even how it is doing, received a tremendous jolt from the public and governmental demand for safe food.

“Traceability and the broader food safety regulatory environment are mission critical concepts for growers, packers, distributors as well as transportation companies,” says Burnett of LMTS. “The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, the most sweeping reform of our food safety laws in more than 70 years, was signed into law by President Obama on January 4, 2011. It aimed to ensure the U.S. food supply was safe by shifting the focus from responding to contamination to preventing it.”

The increasing importance of locally grown produce is the one current trend that makes this sophisticated tracking hardware and software a bit less essential.

“Today consumers are clearly communicating that they desire local produce,” says Bob Biesterfeld, vice president of North American truckload at C.H. Robinson, Eden Prairie, MN. “When consumers receive produce from local farmers, not only do they perceive it to be a more fresh product, but they also feel good about supporting local farmers.”

Although the buy fresh, buy local produce movement is important, most consumers still want a year-round variety of produce, which only comes with national or even international sources of supply.

“Despite this trend, consumers still desire a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables to be available consistently throughout the year,” says Biesterfeld. “Local growing seasons are measured in weeks and are usually not large enough to meet large-scale demand. Depending on the part of the country one lives, the products available to be grown locally can be somewhat limited. Local is an important part of the fresh fruit and vegetable supply chain, but only one component. Successful retailers have supply chains that can ensure in-stock, fresh product — regardless of its origin — through traditional domestic growing regions including California, Arizona, and Washington, or sourced from global locations.”

THE LOW COST OF GOING MODERN

The technology that lets shippers and receivers track produce as it moves, and integrates the information into inventory and accounting records, pays for itself in more



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ways than one.

“When the carriers know you are watching more closely they do a better job,” says Lund. “It creates higher expectations, and the truckers rise to meet them. If you use the new technology there is definitely less spoilage.”

Not only is spoilage reduced, but everyone in the supply chain can move more quickly to adjust to changes.

“The technology makes it easier to streamline production, shipping, and receiving,” says Siegel. “Changes can be relayed from grower, to shipper, to buyer, to receiver, to trucker, with the click of a mouse. Not to mention, the technology that some of these shippers are using to harvest, pick, and pack products greatly improved over time allowing more product to be shipped in a faster period of time.”

This speed and efficiency can even reduce the amount of produce that must be stored at distribution centers, because some of the inventory is rolling down the road, or even still on the road to being ordered.

“TMS increases velocity,” says Burnett of LMTS. “Companies are able to plan better, and reduce inventory. They’re able to streamline the process. The improved efficiency in your inventory can include product that is not yet at your warehouse or distribution center.”

There has been a dramatic change in a short time in how some growers, shippers, truckers and retailers talk to each other.

“Gone are the days of relying on phones and faxes as sources of communication,” says Biesterfeld. “New transportation technologies provide retailers with increased real-time visibility to inventory within the supply chain and more accurate information.”

The cost for devices that transmit location and temperature information is surpris-



ingly low, but the sophisticated use of this technology also includes software and cloud access that lets you access and integrate this information.

“The telematics [the use of wireless devices and black-box technologies to transmit data in real time] add less than \$2 to a load,” says Finkbiner of Tiger Cool Express. “The biggest cost is the communication, the electronic cost.”

The expensive communication, however, is where this new technology really pays for itself. “In today’s fast-paced world, information is the key to success,” says Belle Hilton, marketing

coordinator at Locus Traxx, Jupiter, FL. “Managing the traffic along the supply chain — whether over land or sea — requires sophisticated tracking tools and massive volumes of data. That’s where we come in. Locus Traxx Worldwide has the ability to design and build the necessary technology to monitor the data generated effectively.”

Locus Traxx offers a range of hardware and software products that let shippers and receivers monitor the location, temperature and other conditions of the produce, and automatically integrate the data with other inventory systems.

“Our core products and services are focused on improving on-time deliveries, food safety, shelf life and security through advanced IoT (Internet of Things) technology and highly innovative services,” says Hilton. “The result is a revolutionary way to maintain the safety and quality of products while in transit.”

The advanced products from Locus Traxx and other firms make these systems more expensive, but they also make them really reliable.

“From a transportation supply chain perspective TMS is revolutionary,” says Burnett from LMTS. “The adoption of a TMS system increases visibility, reduces transportation costs, and improves efficiency. Everyone in the supply chain is able to see when and how the produce moves through the system.”

“Managing the traffic along the supply chain — whether over land or sea — requires sophisticated tracking tools and massive volumes of data.”

— Belle Hilton, Locus Traxx



“With real-time monitoring software (RTMS) you save money through transportation costs. You gather information on your cost per pallet, and even per box.”

— Ken Lund, Allen Lund Company

Even if the cost of the technology easily pencils out, and is pretty low by the truckload, suppliers are still looking for ways smaller shippers or receivers can handle the upfront expense.

“Years ago in order to use a TMS a company would have to write a large check upfront,” says Burnett. “Now we have software as a service. There’s no long-term contract; you pay as you play by the month for a cloud-based system.”

Brokers who aggregate small trucking companies, but are large enough to jump into the technological deep end, provide another essential piece of the financial puzzle.

THE IRREPLACEABLE CONSOLIDATORS

A substantial amount of produce is transported by thousands of fairly small trucking companies. “The North American truckload market is what some call a ‘near perfect’ market,” says Biesterfeld. “There are approximately 500,000 providers in the for-hire truckload marketplace in the U.S. and an equal number of private fleets. When considering the for-hire market, the average size of a fleet is around 28 trucks and almost half of the carriers in the for-hire market only have one truck.”

There are important advantages to having small trucking firms play such a vital role in carrying produce from field to fork.

“Produce continues to be dominated by the small carriers,” says Lund. “It’s hard to do, and you have to have a commitment to doing it well. Companies with five trucks don’t have driver shortages. For example, the owner drives along with his sons and an uncle. They’re all invested in doing a good job.”

The family trucking businesses may have a higher level of commitment, but they are not likely to have the resources for extensive investment in new technology.

“Someone who owns five trucks certainly isn’t putting in this expensive equipment,

because he already knows where he is; he’s in the truck,” says Kazan.

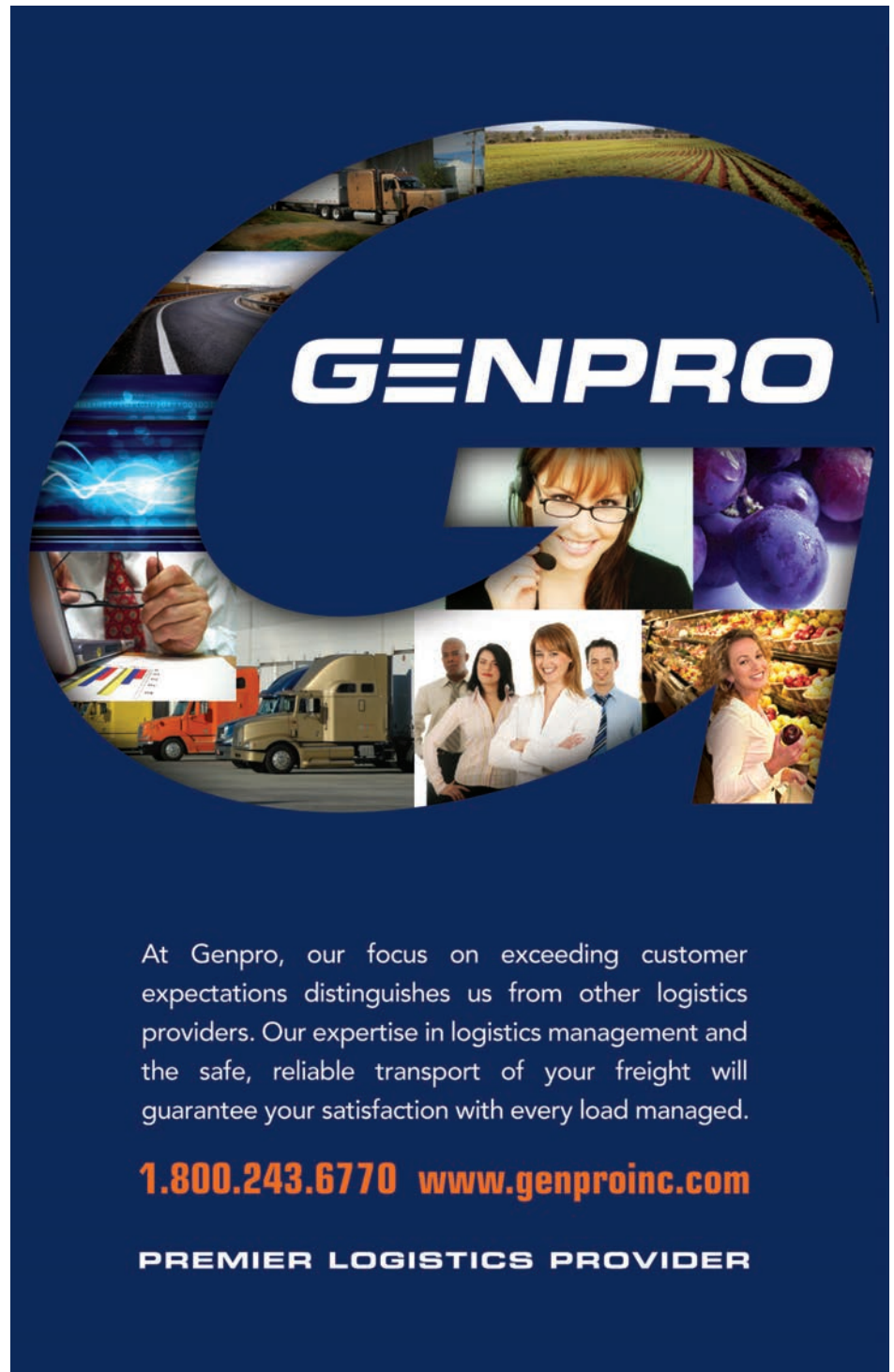
That’s where the brokers, the consolidators, play an indispensable role in making this high-end technology available in shipments carried by small trucking companies.

“Ten trucks or less do so much of the transportation, so brokers like us are important to aggregate the small trucking companies,” says Lund. “We’re a broker. Forty-five percent of what we do is refrigerated, and more than half of it is agriculture. With real-time monitoring

software (RTMS) you save money through transportation costs. You gather information on your cost per pallet, and even per box.”

Some brokers simply offer tracking as an option their customers can choose to buy or not by the truckload.

“We have the ability to track and trace by load,” says Ben Batten, vice president for sales at Des Moines Truck Broker, Norwalk, IA. “You put a device on the truck and it monitors temperature and location. We started using it about a year ago. This allows us to offer it by



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“Sometimes, it makes more sense for a shipper to sell products locally and cut out the freight costs, as well as alleviating concerns over product breakdown and a possible rejection across the country.”

— Ethan Siegel, LD Logistics

the load to our customers if they have a very temperature-sensitive product like bananas.”

The cost per load for tracking hardware and software services is quite affordable. “It costs about \$25 to \$40 a load, and we build it into the rate,” says Batten. “We’re a third party broker, we don’t have our own fleet, and we’re using it on less than 5 percent of our loads now.”

This pay by the load or box for technology is widely used by the trucking brokers.

“Shipping costs are factored into the price of every box,” says Siegel. “If the cost is too high, there may be no profit in sending it across the country. Sometimes, it makes more sense for a shipper to sell products locally and cut out the freight costs, as well as alleviating concerns over product breakdown and a possible rejection across the country.”

Some large consolidators take on the role of providing technology for a large number of small trucking firms.

“C.H. Robinson provides value by organizing the fragmented network of 66,000 contract carriers,” says Biesterfeld. “C.H. Robinson is able to bring capacity to customers who are not capable of managing it themselves, and bring customers to carriers who may not have the infrastructure to manage the demands of a sophisticated retailer.”

Another approach is for the consolidators to offer trucker-clients more affordable versions of the technology.

“While EDI is usually an appropriate method for larger carriers, there are other effective means of engagement including the C.H. Robinson smartphone app, the C.H. Robinson web portal as well as many other third-party devices that provide real-time track and trace information and ambient temperature of cargo that C.H. Robinson is integrated with,” says Biesterfeld.

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5 WAYS TO SELL MORE

Michigan Apples

Retailers and marketers share their favorite tactics.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Johnny Appleseed may have sidestepped Michigan on his apple-cultivating travels in the Midwest, however today, it is Michigan that outpaced all other states except Washington and New York in its production of apples. Some 850 family-run farms are expected to harvest an anticipated 22.5 million bushel crop during the 2015-16 season, or about 15 percent above the five-year average, according to the Lansing, MI-based Michigan Apple Committee (MAC). Forty percent of this crop is sold fresh from August through July at locations such as retail chains in Michigan as well as in 25 other states and 18 countries.

“Michigan apples are a big item for us,”

says David Kidder, produce buyer for Meijer, a Grand Rapids, MI-based 220-store chain that operates supercenters and grocery stores in six Midwest states. “In the fall, we work with our grower-packer-shippers in a timely manner to get apples from the orchards to our stores and into our customers’ refrigerators in 24 to 48 hours. The flavor during that right off the tree window, well, it doesn’t get any better than that.”

1. CALL OUT MICHIGAN-GROWN

Michigan growers earned a reputation for producing excellent-eating apples.

“We call out that the apples are from Michigan at point of sale, in our ads and on our

website,” says Joseph Perotto, category manager for Roundy’s, a Milwaukee, WI-headquartered retailer operating 150 grocery stores under the Pick ’n Save, Copps, Metro Market and Mariano’s banners in Michigan’s neighboring states Wisconsin and Illinois.

Michigan apples stand out to customers because of flavor and eating quality, says Don Armock, president of Riveridge Produce Marketing, Inc., in Sparta, MI. “The combination of sugars and high acidity that develops in our non-desert growing conditions — tempered by Lake Michigan with daytime temperatures that rarely go over 90 degrees — creates a rich flavor in our apples.”

The MAC conducted consumer focus



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group research in November 2013 that showed consumers preferred the taste of Michigan apples compared to those grown elsewhere. Specifically, 12 adult participants in Canton, MI and Schaumburg, IL, blindly tasted, scored and ranked six varieties of apples. Researchers purchased both bagged and tray packed apples within a day of the sampling session and from three different retailers within 50 miles of the test site. Results showed Michigan-grown Honeycrisp ranked first, compared to Honeycrisp and other varieties grown in Washington State and New Zealand.

Michigan-grown apples stand out to retail buyers for two key reasons, says Armock. "First, our packing operations may not be on the same scale as those in Washington, but this smaller size, plus a level of sophistication, gives us a lot more flexibility in packaging. We can

"The most popular Michigan-grown apple for us is the Honeycrisp. It has a strong following and demand by our customers mostly due to its flavor."

— David Kidder, Meijer

change our pack lines several times a day to stay in tune with our retail customers' needs. Secondly, we are an overnight delivery away to our core eight to 10 states in the upper

Midwest. The Southeast and central U.S. states are important to us too and no more than two to three days away.”

2. SPICE SALES WITH VARIETY

Michigan is known as the “variety state,” says Barry Winkel, general manager and partner at Greg Orchards & Produce, in Benton Harbor, MI. “We grow more than 20 varieties of apples commercially and are always testing new varieties.”

“The most popular Michigan-grown apple for us is the Honeycrisp. It has a strong following and demand by our customers mostly due to its flavor,” says Meijer’s Kidder.

Honeycrisp and Macintosh are the two best-selling Michigan apples at Roundy’s. “The Honeycrisp is No. 1 selling during the three month period it’s available in the fall. The Macintosh sells best overall, because it has a longer 8 to 9 month season of availability,” says Perotto.

Michigan Honeycrisp is typically available from mid-September to December. “We expect to have some Honeycrisp this year into February. That’s because one of our growers was one of the first to plant this variety back in 1995, and fruit from more mature trees stores better,” says Riveridge’s Armock.

On a season-long basis, Gala is the No. 1 seller in Michigan followed by Red Delicious, Macintosh, Fuji and Jonagold, according to several Michigan growers.

“Gala has seen increased plantings in Michigan during the past 15 to 20 years,” says John Schaefer, president of Jack Brown Produce, Inc., in Sparta, MI.

Cortland, Empire, Ginger Gold, Golden Delicious, Idared, Jonathan, Northern Spy, Paula Red, Rome and Winesap are other well-known varieties grown in the state.

“We are mindful of the new varieties and like to get those out. For example, we had good success with the Sweetango grown in Michigan,” says Meijer’s Kidder.

Some Michigan growers planted a new strain of Pink Lady that harvests earlier and isn’t as susceptible to early season frosts.

“We just started growing the managed varieties KIKU and Kanzi and will have them available in limited quantities,” says Bruce Heeren, vice president of Heeren Brothers and in sales with All Fresh GPS, LLC, in Comstock Park, MI.

Several growers planted test plots of the new EverCrisp apple. This variety was naturally cross-bred, developed and released in 2012 by the Midwest Apple Improvement Association, in Newcomerstown, OH. The

EverCrisp resembles a Fuji, is sweet with the texture of a Honeycrisp, ripens in mid-October and stores well.

“Commercial volumes of the EverCrisp is about three years away,” says Riveridge’s Armock.

3. OFFER 50-50 BULK & BAGGED

“Michigan is primarily a bag state, but there’s been a shift to more tray packs in the past five years,” says Diane Smith, the MAC’s executive director. “Nowadays, I’d say

it’s pretty equal between bulk and bag. That’s because consumers like to select their own fruit and some of the newer varieties like Honeycrisp size bigger and lend themselves to bulk displays.”

However, Michigan growers are jacks-of-all-trades when it comes to packaging capabilities.

“We have the capability of producing up to 750 different pack styles. This is important, because every retail chain has its own criteria of how they want to present and merchandise

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apples. We pack to order,” says Jack Brown Produce’s Schaefer.

Fifty percent of apples grown and marketed by Riveridge are sold in some type of packaging, says Armock. “We’re seeing a lot more calls for totes, especially in the fall. Clamshells are popular to differentiate small snack sized fruit or high flavor varieties. Last year, we introduced a 2-pound pouch bag for high flavor apple varieties. The pouch bag makes for a nice merchandising presentation on the shelf, offers the ability to provide usage ideas on pack and to romance the customer with a story about the piece of fruit.”

Three- and 5-pound poly bags and mesh bags are other popular pack styles.

4. DISPLAY & DEMO

The MAC runs display contests in several chains in the fall. In addition, Michigan apples rate their own well-signed displays at retailers like Roundy’s.

“In September, we host a farmers market in store. Michigan apples are a big part of this as well as other items such as cider, pumpkin and squash. Locally or regionally grown is important to our customers. In September and October, we run bin promotions with 3- and 5-pound bags. Then in November, during the run up to Thanksgiving, we’ll demo Michigan Macintosh or Cortland apples for baking,” says Perotto.

Last season, the MAC went beyond offering plain apple slices at demos to hosting chefs in-store using apples in several recipe applications. This included apple salsas, soups, in chicken quesadillas and a chicken dish with apples and feta. The idea encouraged shopping

the entire store as well as purchasing Michigan apples for eating out of hand and as an ingredient. Kroger, Jewel, Mariano’s and Meijer in Chicago and Detroit markets were among the retailers that participated.

5. PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE

Price is a key component in promotions. “We offer up to 14 varieties of small- to medium-sized apples with aggressive line pricing each October. This is part of a tote promotion with a farmers market feel,” explains Meijer’s Kidder.

Shake up the regular ad plan by offering apples priced by the each rather than always pricing per pound, suggests Riveridge’s Armock. “Another technique is to feature a variety of the week or month in a separate display, in the ad, and highlight on the retail website. Many consumers don’t know what they’re not buying.”

This fall, in addition to continued work with demos and chefs in-store, retail price and customized point-of-sale promotions and bin programs, the MAC will launch a new consumer campaign.

“We are reaching out to Gen-X and Millennial shoppers to communicate with them in the medium they use most — social media. The idea is to increase brand awareness and information on where our apples are grown in a way that engages these consumers. We are working with retailers as part of this campaign to provide them with content they can use on their social media sites. The idea is to attract these young shoppers to Michigan apples in a fresh, humorous, fun and engaging way,” says Smith from the MAC. **pb**



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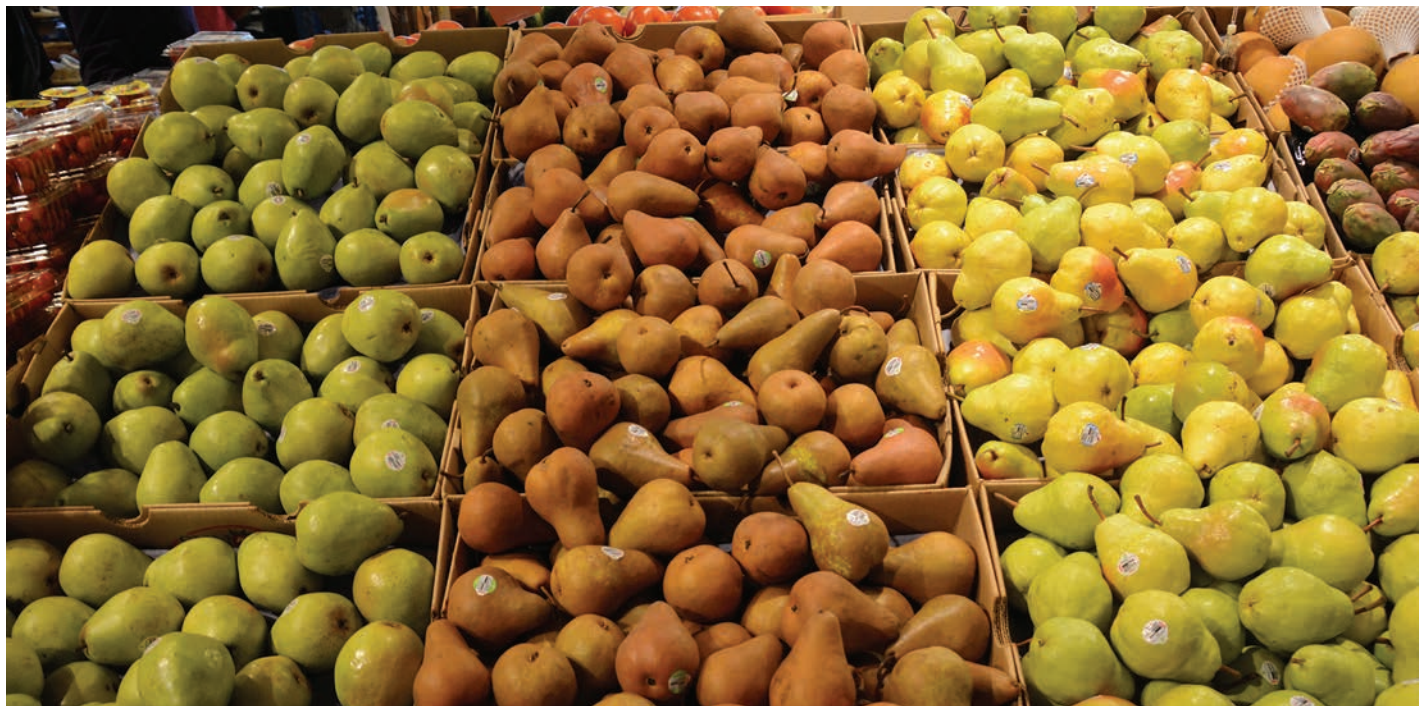
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Prolific Pears In Produce



Industry leaders provide inspiration for usage options and ideal marketing strategies for the fruit.

BY KEITH LORIA

Industry insiders are impressed with the way that U.S. consumers are flocking to pears during the past few years. In fact, the first estimates for the fresh pear crop for 2015 is coming in at a little more than 20 million standard box equivalents. While this is 2 percent below last year, it is 2 percent above a five-year average and would make it the fourth largest crop historically for the U.S.

Kevin D. Moffitt, president and chief executive of the Pear Bureau Northwest, headquartered in Milwaukie, OR, notes even with this past season's record apple crop, the pear market was good with both retailers and growers making money.

Recent third-party research commissioned by the Pear Bureau showed the heaviest pear purchasers are young people, with most under the age of 34.

"This is an exciting revelation for our industry as the generation under 35 is eating

more healthy foods and, many are in their family-formation stages," he says. "Having this large generation buying and eating pears more than the average consumer bodes well for the pear category."

Brianna Shales, communications manager for Stemilt Growers, LLC, based in Wenatchee, WA, says pear season is coming early to Washington this year, with harvests nearly 10 days ahead of schedule.

"The good news about being early is we'll have pears ready for 'back to school' season and we're pushing to be in the early September ads," she says. "They are great to include in lunch boxes, and retailers should be marketing more to this segment."

YEAR-ROUND CHALLENGES

Most experts agree marketing pears year-round can be a challenge in the late spring and summer months when competition from summer fruits and berries is high.

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing for Sage Fruit Co., based in Yakima, WA, says the pear category — unlike the apple category — hasn't really changed much during the past couple of decades. Predominant varieties continue to be Anjou, Bartlett, and Bosc.

"The challenges of marketing pears year-round are in the summer time there tends to be a drop off in the category," he says. "Summer

fruits are arriving and pears don't seem to come back into focus until new crop Bartletts start when kids are heading back to school after summer break."

Vic Savanello, president of the Eastern Produce Council and director of produce and floral for Allegiance Retail Services, LLC, based in Iselin, NJ, says despite best efforts, there's really no way to keep pear sales consistent throughout the year.

"Pears sell better in the fall and winter months — it's just a fact. You can promote them during the summer, but the summer fruits and berries will always win out," he says. "The main varieties — Bosc, Anjous and Bartlett are promoted heaviest, and sales can be driven by retailers."

Moffitt says to enhance pear sales during the late spring and summer, retailers should consider merchandising pears with berries or with summer fruit.

"The Pear Bureau offers many recipes and ideas for paring pears with strawberries and blueberries, such as smoothies and salads," he says. "Pears are often impulse items, so keeping the pear display in a conspicuous place within the department can increase impulse sales without cannibalizing items that are on shoppers' lists in the late spring and summer."

Shales says it's important for retailers to give pears attention and market multiple varieties at

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one time. “Throughout the year, it’s important to continue to run ads to drive sales to the category,” she says. “It doesn’t do a retailer any good to just promote one variety, because that will do great, but everything else will kind of fall. Promoting several at one time will see lift in the category overall.”

PROMOTING TIPS

Lee Peterson is executive vice president, brand, strategy and design at WD Partners — a retail marketing agency that started as an architecture firm focusing on multi-unit restaurant and retail spaces and now provides integrated engineering, strategy, and brand development services for companies in a variety of industries — headquartered in Dublin, OH. He says in studies the research company has done, it found the idea of sampling is very

underutilized in the grocery store, yet consumers listed sampling as a major factor in eating healthier foods. For that reason, he suggests retailers provide tastings for pears and label it as a healthy snack.

“There is no more important idea to get across than eating healthier, living longer, reducing calories and eating something that tastes great,” he says. “Pears do have a more season-oriented selling period, but I’d use them to frame a ‘healthy alternative’ conversation for any time of year.

Steve Lutz, vice president of marketing for Wenatchee, WA-based Columbia Marketing International (CMI) says a study done several years ago by the Northwest Pear Bureau showed pears are one of the most impulse oriented fruit purchases. “Consumers need to see pears at retail, because they are much less

likely to seek them out. So one key is keeping the displays in more visible, higher trafficked locations in the produce department. Second, look for packages and products that will entice new consumers,” he says.

At Allegiance, Savanello says it strictly carries a Washington pre-conditioned pear in stores, which “is ready-to-eat and eats wonderfully.”

“They cost more, they have higher shrink percentages, but they sell better. It’s a way of setting yourself apart from your competition,” he says. “Another thing we do is create cross-merchandising opportunities for further appeal. We created wine pairing signs, as well as cheese pairings, to make the consumer think of pears differently.”

Savanello notes showcasing pears with a great cheese adds a level of excitement about a fruit that hasn’t been exciting in a while.

Research from the Pear Bureau shows offering conditioned pears can increase sales by nearly 20 percent with larger increases over time, and merchandising conditioned pears does not have to be complicated at all for the retailer.

“Rotation is always important, placing riper fruit on the top or in the front of the display for easy consumer access,” says Moffitt. “It is not recommended to stack pears more than two layers to curtail bruising.”

The Pear Bureau has many tools to help retailers initiate a conditioned pear program including access to a ripening consultant who can work with the ripeners at the retail/warehouse level. If the retailer is buying conditioned pears from their supplier, it offers training for the warehouse receivers and produce personnel on what to expect and how to handle conditioned fruit.

“We also offer in-store sampling to help showcase a retailer’s conditioned pears,” says Moffitt. “Most consumers want to eat pears today or tomorrow with only a small percentage wanting to wait more than four days. Providing consumers with pears they can consume within a few days will bring them back for more.”

Sinks says pears are a huge impulse item, and any displays or merchandising that can grab their attention is beneficial; it’s a delicate balance, because retailers also are working to capture sales on seasonal summer items, and pears tend to take a backseat.

“We encourage retailers to handle a two-stage type program. Put some ripe pears out on the rack along with some unripe pears,” he says. “One way a retailer can execute this strategy is to place some pears in the backroom at room temperature and keep some pears in a cooler.

THE LATEST ON IMPORTS

According to the most recent data by the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, the U.S. exported nearly \$200 million in fresh pears last year and approximately \$25 million in organic fresh pears. Still, the number of imported varieties of pears continues to increase.

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing for Sage Fruit Co., based in Yakima, WA, says imported pears become available when domestic crops wrap up.

“Most of them come from South America, and the most popular is the Bartlett,” he says. “This is one of the most recognizable pears to domestic consumers and there is some demand in the summer, but again the main focus for retailers is on summer fruit.”

Kevin D. Moffitt, president and chief executive of the Pear Bureau Northwest, headquartered in Milwaukie, OR, says pear imports have been stable the past several years with the majority coming from Argentina. There are also some instances where imported pears can provide access to unique varieties that are not available in specific domestic locations due to limited growing conditions.

Christine Seible, sales associate with Specialty Produce, a wholesale distributor doing business out of San Diego, CA, says imported pears have become less prevalent than they were about four or five years ago.

“However as domestic harvests increased in bounty and with improvements to cold storage facilities the

domestic pear crops are available for an extended time to meet the demand in our markets,” says Seible.

There has also been a renewed movement promoting the benefits of sourcing and eating seasonally and locally. With this type of focus, chefs have become more aware of what they are utilizing as ingredients and source more fresh produce based upon local and domestic seasons.

“Restaurants are highlighting their rotating seasonal menus as a way to keep current and showcase innovation through their food. Due to this increase of seasonal sourcing, we see less demand for imported pears,” says Seible. “However, there will always be a market for imported pears as there are consumers who desire to eat and use pears year-round. There are some benefits to imported pears as the product is being imported from an in-season area, so there is potential for better flavor or quality that may sometimes be lost if the item is in cold storage for too long.”

Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Supermarkets, headquartered in Lakeland, FL, notes for the previous two years, the store offered customers the New Zealand Taylor’s Gold pear.

She says the season is very short this year — basically the month of June; however, “the flavor profile is exquisite and creates an enjoyable eating pleasure,” says Brous. “We provide our stores with talking points around pears as well as in-store POP.”

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Source: 2014 Fresh Pears Usage and Attitude Study shows over 50% of consumers want to eat their pear within two days of purchase. Retailer sales data showing sales increase with conditioned pears was for 9 weeks period ending April 2012.



Pears

merchandising review ▶ pears

The ones at room temperature will naturally ripen faster than the ones in the cooler, and this strategy enables a retailer to put some ripe pears (ready to eat now) and some unripe pears on the rack at the same time.”

Lutz from CMI suggests merchandising using free-standing displays to create instant secondary selling locations in the store.

Many packers are now using pouch bags to pack their pears and this is helping consumers buy more pears at a time.

Shales says pears are also a great item for

kids, so the company takes its smaller-sized pears and markets them in a 3-pound pouch bag, which has been very successful.

GENERATE EXCITEMENT

Pears are very versatile, and with so many shapes and flavors they can be merchandised in many creative ways.

There are 10 varieties of pears available from the Northwest, each with its own flavor profile and characteristic. For example, Moffitt notes while a Bartlett pear is great eaten out of

hand or used in a green salad, a firmer-fleshed pear such as a Bosc may be better for baking or grilling. Some varieties, such as the Comice, are popular during the winter holiday season and can be merchandised as a gift pear, while smaller pears such as Seckels and Forelles are beautiful when used as decoration in addition to their great flavor.

Recipes and usage suggestions at retail are certainly a popular way to generate consumer awareness and interest. Many retailers are taking it a step further and conducting sampling activities with simple recipes or usage ideas.

“We encourage this type of enhanced sampling and will have partners this season such as packaged lettuce, cheese and yogurt,” says Moffitt. “Our research shows 91 percent of consumers are snacking. Fruit is the second-most frequent snack behind candy. We will be talking this year about combining high fiber pears with other real, whole foods for healthy, satisfying snack solutions, such as yogurt, nuts, and whole grains.”

Mac Riggan, director of marketing for Chelan Fresh, based in Chelan, WA, says it sells nearly 1.5 million boxes of pears a year, and that number held pretty steady over the years.

“There’s been a latent opportunity for years, the more that people use pre-ripened pears at the stores, the better it is,” he says. “Cross-merchandising with crackers and cheese and having demos with a large display is going to help retailers sell a lot of pears.”

He suggests offering an in-store coupon such as “buy a bag of pears, get a discount for cheese or crackers” to give people an idea of how they can utilize pears other than just eating them out of hand.

“That’s where retailers can utilize their website and build a craving for that sort of stuff before people even walk in the store,” says Riggan. “Offer recipes that include cutting a pear in half, baking it, putting some brown sugar on it, and some ice cream. They also make a great apple pie. The goal is to get people eating more pears.”

Sage Fruit worked with a chef to create some very good pear recipes, and they also recommend retailers beef up the cheese and wine pairings.

“Certain varieties of pears do have better uses than others,” says Sinks. “Bosc, for example, is an excellent cooking pear, but we don’t necessarily see it marketed that way. We haven’t seen a tremendous change in how pears are marketed besides the important of consumers selecting ripe fruit. This has been the push in the industry during the past 10 to 12 years.” **pb**

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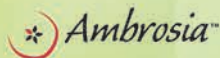
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7 Questions For Maximizing Potato Sales



This mature category offers new challenges and opportunities.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Some might say potatoes are as mature as produce categories can get regarding signature commodities; yet there are still newly important varieties as well as important shifts in how consumers are buying the product.

Although they can drive sales throughout produce and beyond, there may be an unfortunate tendency to neglect potatoes and miss opportunities.

“The potato category is a significant dollar and volume contributor to the produce department, but too often it is taken for granted,” says Mac Johnson president and chief executive of Category Partners LLC, Aurora, CO. “The displays aren’t worked as often, ad circulars are not as frequent, and the POP is not exciting.”

In an effort to help spice up the program, here are the answers potato shippers and other experts give to seven key questions relevant to maximizing sales in this large, fully mature, yet newly exciting category.

1. WHAT IS THE OPTIMAL MIX OF VARIETIES?

There are four basics, but after that, the answer depends on your demographics, who you ask, and what they grow.

“You need to have a nice, wide variety,” advises Marc Turner, sales manager at Bushwick Commission Company, Farmingdale, NY. “There are four primary varieties: red, yellow, white and the traditional Russet, and most retailers carry all four.”

Some experts suggest it is important to have more than one size of some of these basic varieties.

“Yellow flesh A’s and B’s, Red A’s and B’s and C’s, and Russet A size are the basic varieties,” says Paul Dolan, general manager at Associated Potato Growers, Grand Forks, ND.

There are subtle changes worth noting in consumer preferences among the four main varieties. “Consumer preferences are changing rapidly in favor of reds and yellows over Russets,” says Ted Kreis, marketing and communications director at Northern Plains Potato Association (NPPA), East Grand Forks, MN. “Make them available year-around and prominently display them. White potatoes are continuing to decline in popularity, but should also be stocked in areas of the country that they still do well — the East Coast in particular.”

The potato landscape is changing, however, and some demographics will expect to find additional varieties in the department.

“All these specialty items, such as Fingerlings, are becoming more mainstream,” says Turner. “Some retailers are thinking outside the box with products like a medley, a combination of sizes and colors. Before these products were found at higher-end stores such as Whole Foods Market, but now it’s more mainstream.”

The emergence of specialty potatoes leads some experts to believe there may be a new definition of basic varieties. “Reds, yellows, whites, ‘bakers,’ ‘chefs,’ ‘creamers’ are the important varieties,” says Richard Leibowitz, president of Culinary Specialty Produce, West Mountainside, NJ. “Purples and Marbles for the high-end stores. Bagged and open displays combined — depending on the demographic. Potatoes are both regional and ethnic. These are barriers we work to break through.”

Smaller specialty potatoes are impacting and increasing the cash value of total potato sales. “The category as a whole has been growing in dollars, but not in volume,” says Seth Pemsler, vice president of retail and international sales for the Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID. “There are specialty items that weigh less and cost more, such as Fingerlings. There are opportunities to increase profit in

the category. There are potatoes that are no longer just restaurant items such as Fingerlings, 'creamers,' and everybody has reds and yellows."

The mix of varieties should suit the store demographics, and should also leave a little room for new items plant breeders are creating.

"White potatoes play a major role in the Eastern part of the U.S., and stores with a higher-income shopper are much better candidates for carrying Fingerlings or purple potatoes," says Johnson of Category Partners. "The other thing that's happening, which is exciting to see, is the industry is getting behind new varieties and are working with U.S. breeders — along with breeders from around the world — to find new varieties."

There has been an important recent move toward breeding potato varieties suited to consumer preferences. "The big change we're seeing is that these efforts in the past had always focused on agronomics, better yields, disease resistance, better storage capabilities, while those aspects are important, more effort is being put forward to look at eating quality, taste and flavor," says Johnson. He adds as these new varieties become available, those standard elements will be important, and they will add excitement to the category since the varieties are responses to consumers' requests.

Even with the growing complexity of the category, however, there is still a No. 1 variety, and that potato is from Idaho. "We do exclusively Russet Burbanks," says Ryan Bybee, sales manager at GPOD of Idaho, Shelley, ID. "That is the potato people are used to buying and cooking. There are other potatoes that look like Russet Burbanks, but they aren't. People take them home, cook them, and say, 'That's not the potato I'm used to.'"

2. WHAT SIZE PACK SELLS BEST?

There has been a shift away from the larger packs, but it is worth paying close attention, because this change is complex and not the same in all stores.

"While the size packaging varies greatly by region, the overall consumer trend has been toward smaller pack sizes of 5 pounds and smaller," says Chris Wada, director of marketing at Wada Farms Marketing Group, Idaho Falls, ID. "Some of the factors influencing sizing include less pantry stocking and more frequent shopping trips. Today, meal planning is more often what's for dinner tonight compared to the shopping list for the entire week or two."

At the same time, as consumers are moving away from the largest bags, paradoxically, they

are shopping at the discount stores.

"Traditional supermarkets have been steadily losing market share to club and supercenter outlets that sell at much lower retail profit margins," says Ralph Schwartz, vice president of sales, marketing and innovation at Potandon Produce, Idaho Falls, ID.

The trick here is to find the mix of packs that suit the demographics of the particular store. "I would say that 5-pound [bag] is the No. 1 seller, and then 3-pound, and some 10-pound," says Dolan of Associated Potato

Growers. "They need to get rid of the stripper size in Russet and market only an A-size product, and it would be better for everyone. You should also have a No. 2 (or all purpose potato) for the bargain shoppers."

Although sales vary by store, in general, the smaller potatoes are gaining market share at the expense of the large bags. "Mini/petite potatoes are posting double digit gains and now account for more than 10 percent of the category dollars at retail," says Schwartz. "Large retail bags, 10 pounds and up, continue to

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decline in sales, giving way to smaller packages, with the one to four pound segment showing the most promise.”

The trend toward smaller packs reflects changes in household size, and in how we are shopping. “Large families, or those working on a tight budget are looking for value, so a bag size and price that meets that want is important, and typically it will be a 10-pound bag,” says Johnson of Category Partners. “But today, more than 60 percent of U.S. households are one and two person households, and we’re seeing rapid growth of the 3-pound and under segment, so responding to that segment is required.”

This section can be complex and shifting enough to warrant a little time sketching out a 12-month display plan. “A successful retail planogram (space management diagram) should include a representation of the entire potato spectrum (Russets, reds, yellows, specialty items, and white potatoes — where geographically relevant),” says Schwartz. “In terms of category management, potatoes are a routine category — this means that its focus is profit generation and transaction building. Expand assortment in specialty and premium items to grow the category — those items add

a strong sense of differentiation and help your potato identity.”

3. ARE VALUE-ADDED POTATOES IMPORTANT?

This is an important area to look at for new developments, because value-added is a mega trend that barely touched potatoes. “Adding value to America’s already favorite vegetable commodity is the most important challenge,” says Wada.

Although more innovations are around the corner, the most popular success story in value-added potatoes still holds strong. “The individually wrapped, single microwaveable potato was a great innovation,” says Turner of the Bushwick Commission Company. “Nothing could be simpler. Everyone is trying to play catch up when it comes to value-added.”

4. WHAT IS THE BEST SIZE DISPLAY?

Go to Idaho and you might get some expansive answers to this question. “The optimal display size,” says Wada, “is as large as possible.”

Other experts suggest that a more modest display might be preferred in order to protect the potatoes against damage from the elements.

“I feel that too big a display is not good, because they are not kept in a cooler, so it is important to have a good turnover of the product and it doesn’t sit in the light or heat too long,” says Dolan of Associated Potato Growers.

In general, the size of the display should be adjusted to suit the volume of potato sales. “The optimal size is one that is large enough to maintain a well stocked shelf, even after the department is finished with stocking for the day, but not so large that product is difficult to keep turned,” says NPPA’s Kreis.

The main section can be augmented by secondary potato displays, which can be particularly effective for cross-merchandising. “Experiments with smaller, portable display units that are merchandised with specialty potatoes or sale items have proven successful when placed in the meat department — positive category sales lift, a slight increase in meat sales, and a slight increase in basket ring were observed,” says Schwartz of Potandon Produce. “The items featured had very large incremental sales increases which carried forward at higher levels once they were off the display.”

In planning the display(s) it is helpful to ensure that any advertised specials catch the eye.

“Put advertised items near the end of the traffic flow when it makes sense — you want your customers to see the entire category before making their decision to purchase the items that are generating the lowest profits and/or sales dollars,” advises Schwartz. “Use bulk potatoes to break up bags whenever possible to add life to the appearance, and allow some flexibility in your set for store level specific tweaks based on that location’s special needs.”

Some experts point out that the look may be more important than the size of the display. “The optimal size varies,” says Leibowitz of Culinary Specialty Produce. “Just keep whatever display you have fresh, clean and full.”

A good looking, well maintained display can go a long way toward increasing potato sales. “People buy with their eyes; having eye-catching displays will work wonders for you,” says Turner. “There’s always something that can be done to increase sales.”

It is worth the effort to plan for the time needed to keep the potato display looking clean and fresh. “Display potatoes in a cool dry area of the department on non-refrigerated racks or Euro-tables,” says Schwartz. “Proper rotation and sanitation are critical to maintaining a quality rack. Keep space available for in/out opportunities — they drive incremental sales and help solidify your image as a variety leader. Creating a destination for ‘newness’ takes some

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work, but the post-effect offers a very strong future value proposition to both retailer and consumer.”

Consumer surveys show that most potato displays have a ways to go, particularly in the area of offering information.

“We know most potato sales come from pre-planned purchases, so strategically it makes sense for the retailer to focus on helping to convince consumers to increase consumption — to get fresh potatoes on a shopping list,” says Schwartz. “Shoppers agree that despite high quality and freshness levels, most potato sections are uninspiring. Key areas that were rated low were: being informative, motivating for a new purchase, and providing new usage ideas.”

To answer the question of the best size display — it depends. It depends on the customer base and the mix of products they buy.

“Sufficient space should be allocated to allow for a mix of bulk, bag sizes, and variety to match a store’s customer base,” says Johnson of Category Partners. “If a store caters to large families, 10-pound bags will play a bigger role than a center-city store where many of the customers walk to or ride a bus to shop.”

5. DO ORGANICS MATTER?

When you consider how organics have become mainstream, you get a surprising diversity of answers to this question.

“Organics now account for 2.5 percent of category dollars — despite being in limited distribution nationwide,” says Schwartz. “If organics are part of your program, position them first in the traffic flow. Based on what we’ve seen throughout the past couple years, organics are here to stay, and it makes sense to have them represented in your set.”

The most recent statistics show continuing strong growth in organic potato sales. “Organic potatoes while still a small piece of the overall category, continue to see double digit growth,” says Johnson. “For the period October 2014 through June 2015 organic potato volume is up 32.5 percent and dollars are up 30.9 percent, according to Chicago-based IRI FreshLook Perishable Service, and the growth doesn’t appear to be slowing. As more retailers focus on organic sales, it’s a trend likely to continue.”

Some insiders expect and are preparing for a steady increase in demand for organic potatoes.

“We strongly believe the demand for organics will only continue to increase, and we are positioning ourselves to be a large supporter

of this, especially in Idaho,” says Wada. “Traditionally, the mix of varieties includes Russets, reds and golds. Today, you’d be behind the curve if you don’t also provide some selection of organics, smalls, specialty varieties and convenience value-added packages.”

Other experts believe, however, there is not much in the way of a premium to be enjoyed for organic potatoes.

“I think there is a demand for organic potatoes, but as far as added value I would have to say that there is no added-value to the organic potato,” says Dolan of Associated Potato Growers.

There is a body of thought that organic has gone too mainstream, and there may be interest in more biodynamic methods. “Organic is a marketing tool. Organic no longer works, because you can use excessive organic chemicals and lots of water while still calling it organic,” says Leibowitz of Culinary Specialty Produce. “Healthy soil is what it will eventually come down to. I guess organic is a step in the right direction, but it can easily fool many customers.”

This category will rely on a major shift in how potatoes are grown, and how they are prepared. “Education is the most important

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“The value is mainly to drive consumption by showcasing potential meal solutions while in the retail environment. This creates a higher overall basket ring and inspires consumers.”

— Ralph Schwartz, Potandon Produce

challenge — understanding that potatoes are very healthy and do not require large quantities of condiments to make them taste good,” says Leibowitz. “Potatoes, due to the massive Russet production for contract growers, get a bad rap for pesticides, but in the specialty potato category that is just wrong. There is a bio-organic movement that works on a simple philosophy: ‘Take care of the soil, and the soil will take care of the plant.’ This [philosophy] is microbe based (single-celled organisms, which include bacteria, archaea, fungi and protists) and many growers are adopting this philosophy and benefiting from reduced cost in chemicals and less use of water. Also, the soil released less carbon, which is good for the atmosphere.”

6. HOW DOES CROSS-MERCHANDISING HELP?

“One thing we’re doing more of is cross-merchandising,” says Pemsler from the Idaho Potato Commission. “We’re cross-merchandising with bacon bits. We’re working on a cross-merchandising campaign with Unilever’s Country Crock. They’ll merchandise together, and they fit. Retailers could do more of this for themselves without waiting for us. You’re going to get a significant lift.”

The increased sales from this program are impressive, considering the maturity of potatoes and spreads. “The program we did last year with Unilever increased sales 10 percent in both categories,” says Pemsler.

The opportunities for cross-merchandising go well beyond produce to many other areas of the store. “Center-store product cross-promotions within the produce department are a win-win,” says Wada.

A little imagination can go a long way in promoting potato cross-merchandising programs. “Dairy, deli, butcher, seafood and prepared foods work for cross-marketing,” says Leibowitz. “Potatoes and onions together in the produce department as well.”

It is worth planning, because optimal cross-merchandising programs for potatoes change with the seasons. “Some seasonality does exist in fresh potatoes — the summer



months often get overlooked as fresh potato consumption is down — this is a good opportunity to capture incremental dollars and volume if you focus on usage like potato salad recipes, or convenience items,” says Schwartz.

Including the cross-merchandising promotions in the weekly flier drives up sales of both items.

“More advertising helps,” says Bybee of GPOD. “Price is always a factor. Advertised price specials sell more potatoes.”

A good program capitalizes on the role potatoes can play as a key ingredient in a meal. “Cross-Merchandising can be a very valuable tool to drive incremental sales,” says Schwartz. “The value is mainly to drive consumption by showcasing potential meal solutions while in the retail environment. This creates a higher overall basket ring and inspires consumers.”

7. HOW CAN CONSUMER EDUCATION BE APPLIED?

One way it helps is opening the eyes to the many new ways potatoes, especially the less familiar varieties, can be prepared.

“Emphasizing flavor and getting the customer to taste the product is most important,” says Leibowitz. “That’s why we go through the time and trouble of cooking at every food show. It is both satiating and educational.”

One of the targets of an education campaign is a new generation of consumers that may have

new things in mind. “The most popular ways of preparing potatoes are baked or mashed, but with today’s changing consumer and the growing importance of Millennials, offering new ideas, and recipes for how potatoes can be prepared in exciting and quick ways will support category sales,” says Johnson. “This can be through POP, recipe cards, or a retailer’s website.”

It also pays to stress the nutritional value of potatoes.

“Stressing the fact that potatoes are good for you and have a wide variety of easy ways to prepare them is most important,” says Dolan of Associated Potato Growers. “The most important challenge to marketing potatoes is educating consumers about the value of potatoes and how easy they are to prepare.”

There are many outlets in and out of the store worth using to spread the word about potatoes. “Focus on communicating with your customers with sign packages, POS materials, retailer websites, store mailers, and in-store printed ads,” says Schwartz. “Maximize your efforts on the elements you can control directly like store-level fixtures, choice of package, avoiding light, variety offerings,”

Free help is available in gathering material for a potato consumer education program. “The U.S. Potato Board has all kinds of good information,” says Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee, Monte Vista, CO. “The market is pretty flat, but we can sell what we grow in Colorado. We sell our entire crop every year. Water is limiting what we can grow somewhat; and growers are careful not to plant too much.”

One of the more intriguing new ways to promote consumer potato education is literally a vehicle. “We have a promotional committee that works with a number of shippers,” says Tamas Houlihan, executive director of the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, Antigo, WI. “We spend about \$325,000 a year promoting Wisconsin potatoes. Our biggest vehicle is literally a vehicle, the spudmobile. It’s acts as a 37-foot billboard.”

This motorized promotional vehicle has a larger-than-life photograph of Wisconsin potato fields on the outside, and on the inside, interactive games, a video, and a display of Wisconsin potato varieties with information about how to use them.

“We take it all over the state,” says Houlihan. “We take it to schools, festivals, Green Bay Packers’ games, anywhere there is a large gathering of people. We launched it last August at Farm Tech Day, and we tried to keep it on the road 15 to 20 days a month.” **pb**

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*Tim Ryan
of Carnival Foods
in Heath, OH*

For the past 24 years retailers from coast to coast eagerly await the annual Idaho Potato Commission's (IPC) retail competition, which this year was extended from four weeks to eight weeks to allow time for ample potato shipments.

More than 5,100 retailers competed for upwards of \$150,000 in cash and prizes this year. The contest generated great demand in participating supermarkets, independent retailers and military commissaries.

"Most of the displays sell out during the contest, so those extra weeks from mid-January through mid-March ensured there were enough Idaho potatoes for everyone throughout the competition period," says Jamie Bowen, marketing manager for IPC.

For the third year in a row, Hormel Real Bacon Bits teamed up with the Commission — doubling the promotional punch for retailers.

Contest entries were judged on a variety of criteria including: use of Potato Lover's Month signage, creativity of the display, incorporation of the partner products, and perceived salability of the display.

Retail winners included: Scott Sharer of Marsh Supermarket in Brownsburg, IN, who



*Scott Sharer
of Marsh Supermarket
in Brownsburg, IN*

took home top honors in the 10-plus cash registers category; Tim Ryan of Carnival Foods in Heath, OH, a store in the 6 to 9 cash register category, and Robert Skutack of Ray's Shursave in Old Forge, PA, who took the winning prize in the 1 to 5 cash register group.

First place in the Military Display categories went to Maribel Cruz of North Island Commissary in San Diego, CA in the K-1, K-2 class and Raul Ganancial of Pearl Harbor Commissary in Pearl Harbor, HI, who took

the top spot in the K-3, K-4 and K-5 group.

"We love to see all the new concepts that our retailers come up with for the displays every year," says Bowen. "We also love the fact their creativity is rewarded by the big jump in Idaho potato sales every year during the contest."

PRODUCE BUSINESS congratulates the winners and applauds the IPC's initiative in its highly successful efforts to celebrate the Idaho potato in such an engaging and entertaining way. **pb**



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in San Diego, CA




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of Ray's Shursave
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HELP CONSUMERS FIND THEIR SWEET POTATO SPOT

Making consumers more aware of the health benefits, taste and year-round availability of the vegetable can boost sales.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD



If you ever saw sweet potato spelled “sweetpotato,” it isn’t a typo or a regionalism. Sweetpotato is actually the formal spelling for this root, according to Sarah Alvernaz, sales/general manager with California Sweet Potato Growers, a cooperative packer/shipper based in Livingston, CA. “We’re trying to help people understand that a sweetpotato (or sweet potato) is a different thing [from the potato category],” she says.

Essentially, the vegetable is not just a sweet-tasting potato — it’s a totally different vegetable with its own varieties. Sweet potatoes are tuberous roots that belong to the *Convolvulaceae* family. Potatoes are nightshades and belong to the *Solanaceae* family. That difference helps explain why sweet potatoes are so much healthier than potatoes. But it doesn’t address the difference between a sweet potato and a yam.

For U.S. consumers, there isn’t one, explains René Simon, director of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission in Baton Rouge, LA. Everything grown and marketed in the United States is a sweet potato. (Yams are mostly grown in Africa and are tubers, not roots.) Louisiana farmers trademarked the term “yam” in the 1940s as a way to differentiate their sweet potatoes from those grown in other states.

“A lot of people, when they think of yams, they think of canned sweet potatoes,” says Simon. And the image of limp yams smothered

in brown sugar and marshmallows is one modern sweet potato farmers and marketers want to get away from.

When it comes to selling more sweet potatoes, “we stress flavor, versatility and availability,” says Sue Johnson-Langdon, executive director of the Benson-based North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission. “Nutrition is also important.” Keep these characteristics in mind when creating a sweet-potato merchandising plan.

SWEET POTATO FACTS

There are four main types of sweet potatoes grown in the U.S., explains Alvernaz. The most popular varieties are those with orange skin and flesh, including Beauregard, Centennial and Jewel. Garnet and Covington are two examples of vegetables with red skin and orange flesh. White-skinned, white-fleshed sweet potatoes come in varieties such as Jersey and O’Henry. The Oriental or Japanese variety has purple skin and a white interior.

North Carolina is the country’s top sweet potato producer. According to the United States Department of Agriculture’s Crop Production Summary, the state produced nearly 16 million cwt in 2014. California was a distant second with 5 million cwt. Mississippi, Louisiana and Florida produce more than a million cwt of sweet potatoes annually.

Sweet potato consumption increased dramatically during the past 14 years. A report from the USDA's Economic Research Service shows Americans ate an average of 4.2 pounds of sweet potatoes in 2000. By 2014, that number was 7.5 pounds, an increase of 80 percent.

Johnson-Langdon doesn't see the popularity of sweet potatoes waning anytime soon. "We have seen a dramatic rise in the buzz around sweet potatoes, especially in the media," she says. "With the advent of value-added

products like sweet potato fries, I don't think the interest is leveling off. I think there's going to be a measured, steady increase."

CREATING A MARKETING PLAN

There are several things to take into consideration when creating a marketing plan for sweet potatoes. First of all, you don't need to do it alone. Trade associations, wholesalers, even individual businesses such as Scott Farms International in Lucama, NC, can provide resources.

"We like doing things in conjunction with retailers to support their stores," says Jeff Thomas, the company's director of marketing. "We're really a partner in promoting and marketing sweet potatoes. We want to help you tell a story. We work through retail partners to reach the consumers and say, 'These are the things you can do with sweet potatoes.'"

While these partners can help with specific ideas, there's one thing produce retailers know better than anyone else — their customers. Think about what they want and how that might differ from store to store, says Steve May, director of central warehouse, produce and floral at Kansas City, KS-based Balls Food Stores.

"Our Hen House stores are more upscale, so people are more aware of the nutritional value of sweet potatoes," he says. As a result, those outlets advertise them at various times through the years. On the other hand, "At Price Chopper, we advertise them mainly during the holidays."

"Social media is a great way to promote sweet potatoes," says Brenda Oglesby with Southern Produce Distributors, a sweet potato grower/packer/shipper headquartered in Faison, NC. The North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission shares recipes on its Facebook and Twitter page. Searching Instagram and Pinterest will pull up hundreds of mouth-watering photographs of savory and sweet dishes.

RETAIL ACTION PLAN

Emphasize the taste and nutritional value of sweet potatoes.

Chart out various ways to market them during different seasons. Think about traditional and new holidays where sweet potatoes are served as well as other times people might want to purchase them.

Look for trade associations and other partners that can provide resources and information.

Include information about sweet potatoes in advertisements, in-store signage and social media.

Do in-store demos featuring sweet potatoes cooked in unusual ways. Share recipe cards with instructions for making the dishes. If possible, have a dietician available to answer questions.

Place large sweet potato displays near the front of the store. Include sweet potatoes in displays featuring produce items that are great for grilling.

Carry single sweet potatoes as well as boxes, bags and convenience products. **pb**



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Traditionally, sweet potatoes were most popular at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. But they're now available year-round, so they can be marketed to consumers in a variety of different ways throughout the seasons.

Sweet potatoes do quite well in the summer, says Oglesby. She recommends promoting them around Memorial Day, Fourth of July and "any holiday where people are grilling. Sweet potatoes are really good on the grill and in summer salads."

"I like to sprinkle foil-wrapped sweet potatoes into displays," says Rick Hogan with Hugo's Family Marketplace, a family-run and -owned chain based in Grand Forks, ND. "You can see the shininess of the aluminum foil in the display. It gives people the idea they can grill them along with their meats."

MERCHANDISING MATTERS

"Most people have a preconceived idea of what sweet potatoes look like," says Jason Tucker with the California Sweetpotato Council, based in Livingston. That image typically involves lots of marshmallows and corn syrup. Today, he says, "Most people are looking for a healthy way to eat. Sweet potatoes are so delicious when they're served naturally and in a healthy way. You just let the flavor of the product and the natural sugar come out. But most people don't know how to cook sweet potatoes. They need to see it."

"Sweet potatoes are being reintroduced to consumers with things like sweet potato fries," says Alvernaz with California Sweet Potato Growers. "It's letting people get to know them in a whole different way, a savory way."

But there are many ways to prepare sweet potatoes beyond fries. When preparing sweet potatoes in-store, think about offbeat ways to serve them. "Have a nutritionist or chef put together recipes for your fliers," suggests Alvernaz. "Make recipes and recipe leaflets available to customers."

Oglesby likes them mixed with apple pie filling or grilled and sprinkled with rosemary, sea salt and olive oil. Cheese and bacon bits are equally delicious on sweet potatoes and potatoes, she says.

"Here in Louisiana we love our seafood boils," says Simon with the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission. Sweet potatoes can easily be substituted for the white potatoes traditionally included in boils.

Sweet potatoes are delicious in potato salad, says Gina Nucci, director of foodservice marketing with Mann Packing, a women-owned company in Salinas, CA. "It's better and healthier. You can do half sweet pota-

"Have a nutritionist or chef put together recipes for your fliers. Make recipes and recipe leaflets available to customers."

— Sarah Alvernaz, California Sweet Potato Growers

atoes and half traditional potatoes. Instead of making a mayonnaise-based dressing, try a vinaigrette-based one to make a German-style potato salad."

"A lot of people don't know you can use sweet potato mash in recipes to replace the oil," says Sylvia Clark, secretary of the Mississippi Sweet Potato Council in Vardaman, which represents about 90 growers in a region known as the Sweet Potato Capital of the World. "You get that little bit of vegetable and vitamins." She suggests using sweet potato mash in cornbread, cakes, rib sauce and smoothies.

"Sweet potatoes are so naturally sweet, you can actually eat them raw," says Thomas with Scott Farms International. "Put them on a veggie tray. They're really versatile in that way."

In addition to helping customers understand how to eat them, emphasize why consumers should add them to their diet. "Really advertise the health benefits of sweet potatoes," says Clark. "In the past 15 years, lots of diets promoted sweet potatoes. Play up that aspect of how healthy they are. Lots of runners like sweet potatoes. Anyone interested in health likes sweet potatoes."

"We do in-store signage with nutritional information at Hen House," says May with Ball's Food Stores. "We include that information in our ads as well."

The location and size of any sweet potato displays can make a big difference, says Hogan with Hugo's Family Marketplace. "Placing the product more to the front of the department than the back, where potatoes normally end up, will draw people in. I've always trained our associates that if you make a small display, you'll get small sales."

When setting up those displays, handle the sweet potatoes carefully, says Tucker. Sweet potatoes are very susceptible to scarring and bruising if they're dumped on a shelf. They can be difficult to arrange given their unusual shape. "Take time when transferring them from the package to the shelf. You'll get a longer shelf life and a better response from the consumer."

Sweet potatoes can also be cross-merchandised in the produce department or other parts of the store. Place them near the fresh herbs. Create a grilling display that features sweet

potatoes, zucchini, mushrooms and onions. Put a basket of sweet potatoes near the spices, meat or seafood.

CONVENIENCE PACKAGING

Another way to successfully merchandise sweet potatoes is through convenience packaging. Many packagers offer sweet potatoes wrapped in cellophane that can be popped straight into the microwave.

Mann Packing sells sweet potatoes that have been peeled and cut into three-quarter cubes for roasting, mashing or steaming right in the bag. They also have crinkle-cut French fries that are ideal for roasting or pan frying.

Hogan is partial to cubed sweet potatoes in a microwavable convenience tray from Crazy Fresh. The trays come pre-packed with onions, fresh herbs and butter.

Sweet potatoes can be bagged in a variety of quantities, including 1.5-, 2-, 3- and 5-pound bags and 10-pound boxes. Some California growers made the switch to packaging made from bioplastics, says Tucker, adding a little bit of "green" to this orange product.

Wayne E. Bailey Produce Company in Chadbourne, NC sells sweet potatoes in several types of convenience packaging including steamer bags, tray packs and individually wrapped for the microwave.

By far, the best seller is the steamer bags, says the company's president and owner, George Wooten. "We launched this product four years ago. Since we started, our volume has grown 30 times. People want healthy, they want quick, they want flavorful. This product does every bit of that. It fits every category."

Wayne E. Bailey recently started growing and selling sweet potato fingerlings.

Wooten highly recommends demoing sweet potatoes, especially those sold in convenience products such as steamer bags. "My wife and I went and demoed for two days at a store opening," he says. "If a store orders seven cases a week, that's a good week. When we demoed, we sold 40 cases in two days."

Since many people aren't familiar with the steamer bags, it's very important to educate consumers about them. "This product needs to be shown. Show it, tell it, and you'll sell it," says Wooten.

pb

Lettuce On The Menu



Italian Salad

PHOTO COURTESY OF EARTHBOUND FARM

Restaurants innovate with new varieties and uses.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD

Consumption data suggest lettuce is on the decline. Leaf and Romaine dropped in 2014 compared to the previous five years, according to the USDA. Still, lettuce, both head and leaf, is the third most consumed fresh vegetable in the United States behind tomatoes and potatoes.

At the menu level, ongoing shifts belie these macro trends. The Datassential MenuTrends — U.S. Chains & Independents research database shows at least 10 percent one-year increases in dishes with frisee, Bibb, Belgian endive, or arugula on restaurant menus. Four-year growth tops 50 percent for several lettuce and greens varieties, including Butter lettuce, arugula, Bibb, spring mix, baby arugula, and frisee. At 45 percent, Romaine has the highest menu penetration, followed by arugula (17 percent) and Iceberg (15 percent).

VARIETY & COLOR PREVALENT IN FINE DINING

As diners move across the spectrum of restaurants, they're likely to see more lettuce

on menus. The approximately 40 percent penetration of Romaine, 10 percent penetration of Iceberg, and 8 to 10 percent penetration of arugula on quick serve (QSR) and midscale menus jumps to penetrations of 54 percent, 18 percent, and 24 percent respectively on casual menus, according to Datassential's 2014 MenuTrends survey. Fine dining menus feature not only these three — nearly half offer Romaine and arugula — but also endive, frisee, watercress, and radicchio.

“Fine dining chefs often shop by farm and season,” says Benjamin Walker, director of marketing and business development for Baldor Foods, Bronx, NY. “We see them buying more greens like frisee, chicory, baby mustard greens, and mibuna.”

Chef Gavin Schmidt, executive chef, Corners Tavern, Walnut Creek, CA, enjoys changing greens with the seasons. “We take standard lettuces and make them more exciting with seasonal flavors from chicories, arugula,



Saigon Summer Rolls

PHOTO COURTESY OF P.F. CHANG'S

Tuscan Spring Mix



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHURCH BROTHERS

watercress, and whatever vegetables are at peak of season. I like to pair traditional with innovative.”

Chef Fred Sabo, executive chef, Metropolitan Museum Members Dining Room, New York City, likewise creates his salads from both traditional and more varied greens. “I might use just arugula, as I do in my butternut squash salad with goat cheese, walnuts, and fruit, or up to 20 different greens. Sometimes I have a flavor or texture profile in mind — bitter, peppery, mild, fluffy — and other times I use what’s available. My daytime clientele are pretty traditional, but I innovate for our evening patrons with something like a radicchio and Butter lettuce salad with a tart grapefruit vinaigrette, smoked nuts, and avocado.”

LETTUCE GETS TOSSED

Lettuce is making its way onto other sections of the menu. Sarah LaCasse, executive chef for San Juan Bautista, CA-based Earthbound Farm, uses deeper greens in a grilled mélange under fish or blended into smoothies.

“Chefs look for new ways to excite the guest, and baby lettuce does that while giving chefs good control over plate costs.”

— Benjamin Walker, Baldor Foods

Chef Sabo sautés Butter lettuce and braises it into a sauce for scallops. He also adds juiced baby tatsoi to dashi broth.

Chef Bill Fuller, executive chef, big Burrito Restaurant Group, Pittsburgh, PA, offers a spicy pork lettuce wrap with Iceberg lettuce leaves. (He tried Butter and Bibb lettuce, but the hot pork wilted the lettuce.) P.F. Chang’s pairs Bibb lettuce cups with Chicken Satay and Bibb lettuce wraps in its Saigon Summer Rolls and Chicken Lettuce Wraps. Fuller and other chefs also grill greens such as Romaine, Little Gems, endives, radicchio, and chicory.

Lettuce trends differ somewhat across the country. According to Datassential’s 2014 menu survey, more arugula appears in the Northeast while Iceberg is popular in the Midwest and South.

Kori Tuggle-Dinner, marketing vice president of Salinas, CA-based Church Brothers, acknowledges that although kale is mainstream, it is more popular in the coastal regions of the country, where it might be mixed with Romaine as a “new” Caesar salad.

“Little Gems are big with our customers across the country, but particularly on the East Coast,” notes Caitlin Antle Wilson, sales and marketing director, Tanimura & Antle, Salinas, CA.

Gina Nucci, director of foodservice marketing, Mann Packing, Salinas, CA, sees trends starting both East and West, where restaurant trends are driven primarily by urban Millennials.

LETTUCE MOVES WITH HEALTH

As Americans pay more attention to health, salads and lettuce are more prevalent on menus. “People order salad, because it makes them feel healthy,” observes Chef Fuller with big Burrito Restaurant Group.

Indeed, salad’s health halo extends to restaurant menus. In May 2015, salads were among the most added new or limited-time-offer (LTO) items on chain restaurant menus, according to the monthly update from Datassential INSIDER, which includes new menu items, LTO’s, and test market products. Fuller notes specific health movements, for example, low carb, propel forward such items as tacos and burgers in wrapped lettuce rather than in tortillas or on buns. Antle Wilson says her company sells lettuce for breakfast wraps as an alternative to morning burritos and also for juicing.

Gib Papazian, president of Lucky Strike Farms, Burlingame, CA, notes because people are eating more fruits and vegetables than ever before, growers can expand choices with

Fred Sabo’s Butternut Squash



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRED SABO

Fred Sabo’s Tardivo, Castelfranco



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRED SABO

Gavin Schmidt Beets Chicories and Walnut



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAVIN SCHMIDT

“While blends are not new, what chefs ask us to blend continues to change. Chefs might request more variety, a specific cut style, or a particular leaf size.”

— Kori Tuggle-Dinner, Church Brothers

items like artisan lettuces with varied textures and color.

Samantha Cabaluna, vice president marketing and communications, Earthbound Farm, explains that the company is responding to the need for more robust nutrition by offering various SKUs with deeper greens.

“In 2013, a survey we did with Chicago-based Technomic highlighted the relationship between health and nutrition and darker leafy greens and red greens,” says Nucci of Mann Packing. “Additionally, the pop of color really adds richness and simplifies salad preparation by eliminating the need for as many condiments or additional veggies. The color is already there.”

Greens also mean money. “We have economic motivation to increase the vegetables and decrease the protein on our plate,” says Farmer Lee Jones, Chef’s Garden, Milan, OH. “Protein is expensive.”

(NOT) TOSSING THE OLD

Classic lettuces — Iceberg and Romaine — continue to be popular. According to Papazian, Iceberg is particularly popular in the Hispanic community and is undergoing resurgence in the classic wedge salad.

Baldor’s Walker sees variations such as big circles of Iceberg topped with blue cheese crumbles and tomatoes, while Tanimura & Antle sells little 30-count Iceberg heads that are used in mini-wedges with creative dressings.

“Restaurants like baby Iceberg and baby Romaine because they are cute and fun,” says Walker. “Chefs look for new ways to excite the guest, and baby lettuce does that while giving chefs good control over plate costs.”

Romaine usage is way up, notes Papazian, who often partners with Coastline Family Farms in Salinas, CA. Steve Henderson, Coastline president, explains: “Romaine hearts are popular, because they’re sweet, delicious,

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Baldor Chicory Salad

PHOTO BY SEBASTIAN ARGUELLO

and 100 percent usable, which means less food waste.” In contrast, Papazian notes both green leaf and red leaf are dropping in popularity.

Tuggle-Dinner of Church Brothers says value-added, ready-to-eat is still a main format for foodservice leafy greens, with a lot of end users procuring direct field-packed carton leafy greens and investing in labor to chop the greens on site. She adds, “demand for whole leaf ready-to-use/eat product continues to increase for ease of use and labor savings. We offer multiple formats, including our “Crunch Leaf” variety with crunch like Iceberg and the green end frill of green leaf.”

“We’ve broken down barriers by prewashing lettuce blends to save on prep time and labor,” says Cabaluna. “We introduce and reintroduce lettuce blends for foodservice customers interested in more than Romaine, for example, [combinations of] spinach, arugula, mustards, or Butter lettuce.”

NEWER KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Datassential’s 2014 MenuTrends reports a modest presence on menus of a number of less common greens, including watercress, endive, radicchio, baby arugula, frisee, and escarole. These are joined by a growing number of new varieties being bred to maximize appearance, shelf life, taste, and convenience.

Tanimura & Antle’s Artisan line features petite Oak, Tango, Little Gems, and Romaine lettuce, as well as the George T., a hybrid named in honor of founder George Tanimura. “This new item has been about 10 years in the making. It is a new colossal Romaine heart with the crispy crunch of Iceberg,” says Antle Wilson. “The George T. reduces waste and is a very sustainable item because not as many

outer leaves need to be removed and discarded.”

Innovation is particularly active among niche farmers such as Chef’s Garden, which offers lettuce varieties at several stages of their life — micro, petite, ultra, baby, and young. Chef’s Garden also plants varieties with high visual appeal, such as an oak leaf lettuce with burgundy speckles.

In an effort to differentiate salads, many restaurants and chefs request custom leafy green blends. “While blends are not new, what chefs ask us to blend continues to change,” says Church’s Tuggle-Dinner. “Chefs might request more variety, a specific cut style, or a particular leaf size. They also are shifting toward heartier, textured salad blends that maintain crunch when dressed.”

“Softer lettuces and blends don’t stand up to the heavier vegetables in our popular chopped salad,” says big Burrito’s Fuller. “We switch to chicory or frisee, or we go back to Iceberg.”

California chefs are known for their salad innovations. “Menus had mainly Caesar or mixed greens 20 years ago, but now people are venturing off regularly into stronger flavored greens such as frisee, radicchio, and chicory,” says Chef Schmidt of Corners Tavern. “I try to balance the strong flavors with sweetness and an acidic dressing, or [balance] the crunch and bitterness [of a green] with an ingredient such as walnuts.”

Creativity reigns on salad menus. “I recently dined at Bestia in Los Angeles, and I saw numerous salads on the menu, including one made with wild greens, purslane, and endive, as well as another with Little Gems in a vinaigrette with fresh radishes,” says Sharon Palmer, RDN, author of *Plant-Powered for Life*, Los Angeles.

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Nogales: Building A Future On A Successful Legacy

Banking on a solid foundation in produce trade,
Nogales continues to reinvent itself.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS



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The Nogales produce industry dates back nearly a century, growing and evolving to progressively serve customers. "The Nogales community served as a gateway for fresh produce for nearly 100 years," says Sabrina Hallman, president and chief executive of Sierra Seed Company in Nogales. "The business continues to grow annually with billions of dollars and millions of pounds of produce crossing our ports each year."

Nogales, AZ, emerged as a significant produce player, proffering a thriving community to serve shippers and buyers. According to the Nogales-based Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) and based on USDA data, 4.1 billion pounds of produce crossed through the Nogales port in the 2014 season (September 2014 to April 2015), representing 35 percent of all produce crossing by land from Mexico.

"Nogales is the premier cross-distribution point for Mexican produce entering the U.S.," says Lance Jungmeyer, president of the FPAA. "There are more than 100 companies serving the industry here, from importers to brokers to other service providers — all in a compact geographical area. When putting together a mixed load, there is no better place to get such an array of Mexican produce."

The area's geographical location affords

PHOTO COURTESY OF FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION OF THE AMERICAS



Nogales, AZ, emerged as a significant produce player, proffering a thriving community to serve shippers and buyers.

an inherent benefit for its trade. "Nogales is ideally situated geographically as a place where produce from the breadbasket of Mexico during its peak season (November through June) comes through

our corridor to serve the U.S. and Canada," explains Alejandro Canelos, chief executive of Apache Produce Imports LLC in Nogales. "Due to this geographical advantage, Nogales developed a large industry with diverse players and it keeps growing year after year."

RELIABILITY AND CONSISTENCY

Nogales has become known for the reliability of its players and its product. "Over the years, buyers around the country have become confident in us as a reliable source for many commodities," says Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing in Nogales. "One of the greatest things a buyer can offer a consumer is consistent reliability, and buyers know they get that with us."

Since the 1930s, Ta-De Produce Distributing Co. has been part of this experienced and innovative Nogales industry. "Many of the new products and practices we introduced became standards in the

“Nogales is ideally situated geographically as a place where produce from the breadbasket of Mexico during its peak season (November through June) comes through our corridor to serve the U.S. and Canada.”

— Alejandro Canelos, Apache Produce Imports

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(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION OF THE AMERICAS AND TA-DE

industry,” says Robert Bennen, president of Ta-De. “This depth of knowledge and experience is just not common today with so many start-ups.”

Nogales’ reputation extends to its companies’ abilities to facilitate new standards and regulations. “Nogales shippers learned to deal with stringent food safety requirements during the past 20 years,” says FPAA’s Jungmeyer. “Now with food safety systems in place along the supply chain, they are well-positioned to comply with the Foreign Supplier Verification Program of the Food Safety Modernization Act.”

“Mexico consistently ranks as a top source of many fresh import items, and Nogales is one of the primary U.S. ports of entry for produce crossings,” says Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers, LLC in Nogales, AZ. “Mexican crossings through Nogales complement U.S. growing seasons to ensure buyers get consistent supplies and competitive prices, especially during the colder months.”

The Nogales community also points to its paradoxical diversity yet cohesive-

“Now with food safety systems in place along the supply chain, they are well-positioned to comply with the Foreign Supplier Verification Program of the Food Safety Modernization Act.”

— Lance Jungmeyer, Fresh Produce Association of the Americas

ness as beneficial for buyers. “We have a cohesive industry in that we have a strong association of importers, and we all understand the rising tide lifts all boats,” explains Canelos. “While we’re competitors, we also all work together to ensure the industry functions as efficiently and effectively as possible. Having everyone in a tight-knit community is good for the flow of information. The more information both buyers and sellers have, the faster you can get to a real price to maximize everyone’s business — day in and day out.”

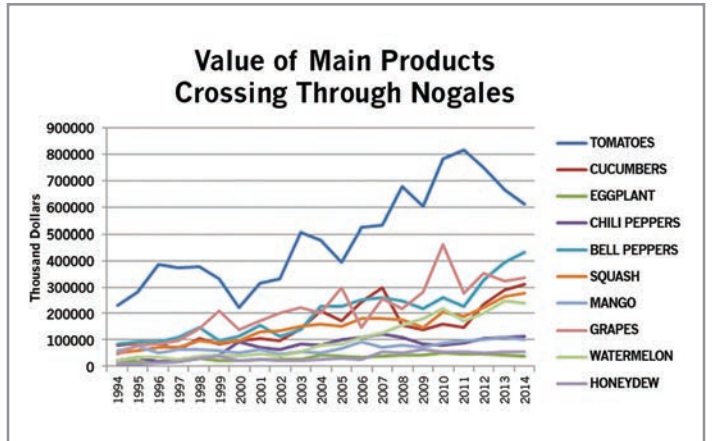
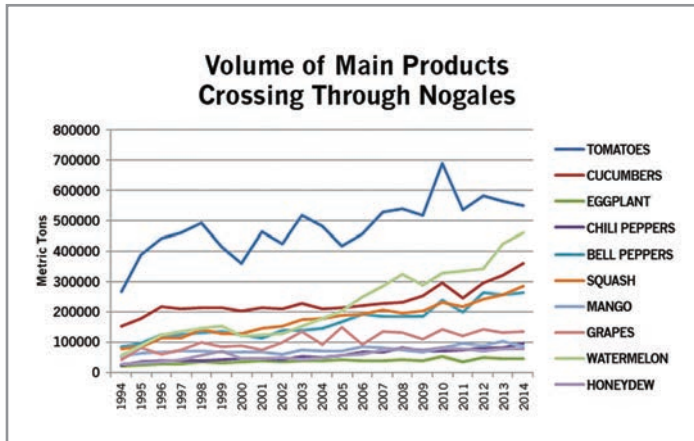
Proximity aids in cohesive benefits. Bobby Astengo, managing partner for Healthy Trends Produce, LLC in Nogales,

describes the Nogales community as the “Nogales Terminal Market.”

“Our unique distribution center is not unlike terminal markets in major cities,” he asserts. “We offer many commodities in ample volumes all centered in a radius of 10 miles or so. We service our customers through state-of-the-art cooling facilities, many of them recently built to feed the demand and some encompassing from 25,000 to 100,000 square feet.”

“Nogales warehouses are also relatively close to one another, allowing for quick consolidation of mixed loads of a very wide selection of produce thanks, in part, to the renovated Mariposa port,” says Ciru-

CHARTS COURTESY OF FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION OF THE AMERICAS





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li's Aguilar.

"The port renovations have had tremendous positive impact on trade crossings, which benefits our customers in the form of faster shipments and better quality control," says Aguilar. "The new port has facilitated speedier processing times and increased the capacity of daily truck crossings to upwards of 4,000 trucks, providing, of course, that the port is adequately staffed. This is up from 1,500 to 2,000 crossings per day in a port that was originally built to handle about 750. The revamped port is definitely better equipped and boasts much improved operational efficiencies."

Canelos calls the community a full service microcosm of fruits and vegetables for customers. "Because there are so many importers in a small area, buyers can send a truck and make 10 stops easily," he explains.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRULI BROTHERS

EXTENDING SEASON AND OPTIONS

The Nogales produce industry offers a variety of products during an increasingly extended season for buyers. "The Nogales port of entry and the growers/distributors

utilizing it are a vital source of consistent fine quality fruits and vegetables," says Astengo. "Nogales and its Mexican-grown crops are a major food source for North America for a good six to eight months

of the year."

This diverse variety works to meet numerous buyer needs. "Nogales is the source for large volumes of produce for retailers," says Bennen. "It's also a one-stop

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PHOTO COURTESY OF TA-DE

resource over an increasingly-longer period (no longer just winter) and new products from new growing regions. This meets retail needs for a year-round seamless supply and excitement for consumers. Finally, it offers the safeguards, logistics and handling sophisticated retailers need — in essence the peace of mind of partnering with top practitioners.”

Increasing product diversity through value-added options provides additional opportunity. “Nogales produce companies have long looked for ways to add value to their produce in place of the bulk package dominating the industry,” reports Omar Cabrera, president of Agri-Packing Supply, Inc. in Nogales.

For more than 25 years, Agri-Packing has been providing growers and shippers in Nogales and in western Mexico with a variety of growing and packaging products. “Through the years, we experienced a big increase in new and innovating packaging ideas directly or indirectly mandated from the big chain stores,” says Cabrera. “Many new forms of these innovative packages have been implemented — mainly to increase savings in freight to destination. Others in particular have been to increase appearance and/or decrease spoilage.”

PRODUCT GROWTH

According to USDA-AMS statistics, the top commodities on a volume basis crossing through Nogales during the most recent years include: watermelon, cucumbers, squash, tomatoes, peppers, grapes, mangos, honeydew and eggplant. However, product mix can be affected by various factors. “The Nogales corridor has most recently focused on: tomatoes, watermelon, cucumber, peppers, squash and grapes; additional avenues are open

for melons, mangoes, and most recently avocados,” reports Hallman of Sierra Seed. “Market trends and politics all play a part in the ebbs and flows of each product, and the market varies year to year as to which product will be the market leader. Of course, market trends and politics will always play second fiddle to Mother Nature — the effects of hurricanes, droughts, and diseases can make or break any one crop or season.”

Watermelon growth, up 21 percent from 2013 to 2014, continues to be extraordinary. “More growers in Sonora and Sinaloa are helping supply the U.S. market, and the shipping window is getting longer every year,” says FPAA’s Jungmeyer. “This year, imports were coming well into June. The water pressures in California are contributing in part to extend this window, but the Mexican growers are putting up quality packs of good, ripe fruit.”

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In response to consumer demand, crossings in Nogales of peppers and cucumbers also increased. "Bell peppers in all four colors (red, yellow, orange and green) are Healthy Trends' core commodity and account for about 75 percent of our volume," says Astengo. "New items showing good growth are mini sweet peppers and mini cucumbers — items catering to the convenience and snack trends at retail level."

Apache reports an increase in seedless cucumbers coming through Nogales. "We were a big seedless cuke house as of 10 years ago, but we were pretty much the only one," says Canelos of Apache. "Now we see a lot of seedless cukes. This is in line with changing consumption patterns in the U.S. as consumers switch from eating the slicer cuke to the seedless cuke."

Tropical items not traditionally shipped via Nogales are also posting increases. "We're becoming a larger player for tropical items like pineapple, avocado and papaya," says Chamberlain of J-C Distributing. "These items historically shipped through the Eastern part of Mexico but now more shippers are crossing here."

Vision Produce Company handles limes, mangos, chili peppers, honeydews, cucumbers and watermelons via Nogales. "We saw an increase in the volume from our lime and mango growers," says Donald Souther, vice president of marketing/sales development for Vision Produce Company in Los Angeles. "There are many factors from reduced freight costs to increased demand on the West Coast."

In addition to the standard winter vegetables giving Nogales its claim to fame, the port is experiencing greater movement of specialties. "We offer much greater assortment to buyers than we used to," says Ta-De's Bennen. "This is evidenced in the expansion in volume of tropicals, citrus and ethnic vegetables such as Asian specialties. One of the key changes has been the transition of what used to be exotic items to mainstream, such as mangos."

Increased offerings of staple items with greater brand recognition are also on the rise. This year Healthy Trend boasts an ample supply of winter/hardshell squash. "We will have acorn, spaghetti and butternut from November through May," advises Astengo. "We will introduce these under our new Original Hardshell Co. Brand. Our grower partner has been passionately growing these squash for more



PHOTO COURTESY OF HEALTHY TRENDS

Healthy Trends peppers enter through Nogales and serve as a food source for North America for about six to eight months of the year.

than 25 years and honed in on producing great quality and delivering consistent supplies."

Healthy Trends will also introduce Roma tomatoes under its Angelo's Brand. "These tomatoes will be grown by two grower partners with experience in growing fine quality tomatoes," says Astengo.

“We’re becoming a larger player for tropical items like pineapple, avocado and papaya. These items historically shipped through the Eastern part of Mexico but now more shippers are crossing here.”

— Jaime Chamberlain, J-C Distributing



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Though the flagship item of Ciruli Brothers has traditionally been mangos, most notably the company's Champagne® and other round mango programs, Ciruli is now a growing shipper of a wide line of products. "Our line now includes bell peppers, eggplant, cucumber, summer squash, winter squash, tomatoes and other specialty items such as tomatillos, hot peppers and other eggplant varieties," explains Aguilar. "We are shipping many of these items on a year-round basis thanks not only to growing deals throughout Mexico but through partnerships in California, Texas and other states. We recognize our customers need to maintain quality and continuous supplies in the marketplace, and we communicate those needs to our growers on an ongoing basis to continue improving our supply chain."

WHAT'S NEW

Nogales companies look to innovate and invest in a myriad of ways from branding to packaging to physical expansion. Vision Produce Company expanded its brand "La Vision" into cucumbers, honeydews and watermelons. Apache is also launching new label "Even Steven" this winter.

Ta-De is combining branding with social marketing. "We are introducing better-for-you products," explains Bennen. "These are more natural products meeting consumer demand for socially-responsible and sustainably-grown items such as our Rio Sonora Rose garlic."



New moves in physical space promise even greater effectiveness for customers. PDG Produce in Rio Rico, AZ, is expanding by adding 22,000 square feet to its warehouse. "This will give us more than 75,000 square feet of refrigerated warehouse space between our two warehouses," reports Paul Guy, owner of PDG. "It will add about 30 percent to the volume we can handle."

J-C Distributing is remodeling its whole facility. "This is a milestone for our company and part of our growth process," says Chamberlain. "It's part of continuing to give our customers and growers the service and confidence we are known for. We're constantly evolving, and this is one more step to make things more efficient. During the past 40 years, we added on and remodeled, but this is a bigger undertaking affecting the whole facility. We expect to increase our pallet position by 40 percent and save between 25 to 40 percent on our electrical costs. We're putting in brand new refrigeration and will be much more energy efficient."

Some Nogales companies have seen growth in human resources. Over the past 26 years, Sierra Seed has grown from a lone salesman in Los Mochis (city in Sinaloa) to salesmen located throughout Mexican territories such as Sonora, Sinaloa and Guajuato. "We are all working to provide the seeds and service for commercial growers who export produce into the United States through the southern border," says Hallman of Sierra Seed Company.



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Logistics And Infrastructure

Advances in infrastructure placed Nogales in a prime position for produce movement.

The Nogales port facility underwent extensive renovation and expansion that was finished in 2014, allowing it to improve processing, inspections and traffic flow. "The expansion of the port improved logistics and crossings so we can deliver better, fresher products," says Robert Bennen, president of Ta-De Produce Distributing Co.

The Nogales port provides significant transportation advantages. "It gives buyers west of Texas another option to reduce freight costs and increase shelf life by reducing travel time," reports Donald Souther, vice president of marketing/sales development for Vision Produce Company in Los Angeles.

Even though the Durango-Mazatlan Bridge threatened to divert West Mexican produce to South Texas, Nogales continues to see volumes growing. "This suggests the market demand is growing overall," says Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Amer-

icas (FPAA). "Buyers may not be aware of how this same bridge is making it easier to get Eastern and Central Mexican produce to the West Mexico corridor, to be shipped up Mexican Highway 15 and imported through Nogales. We are starting to see onions from Zacatecas, Mexico, limes from Veracruz, Mexico, and broccoli from Central Mexico. Going forward, this will further strengthen Nogales as a one-stop shop where buyers can get any item."

The most recent change on the produce horizon in Nogales is the possible return to transporting produce via railcar. "Practice runs have been done and lessons continue to be learned, but the possibility of moving produce via train has the potential to pass on savings in transportation costs to the consumer," says Sabrina Hallman, president and chief executive of Sierra Seed Company.

The boost in imports in general bodes well for Nogales. "In Nogales there are many facilities being remodeled, brand new facilities being built and plans for even more," reports

Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing. "There are companies now appearing who never before had a hand in the Mexican deal and many Nogales multi-generational companies are growing. We are growing in an unlimited way."

The Nogales community welcomes buyers to view the industry's investment and growth first-hand. "The investment in Nogales continues and buyers should come visit Nogales," advises Lance Jungmeyer, president of the FPAA. "Especially in early November, during the FPAA's Fall Convention, it's a great opportunity to network and visit top-notch warehouses."

A visit may inspire even better business decisions. "Understanding the industry and the culture is important," asserts Alejandro Canelos, chief executive of Apache Produce Imports LLC. "Just like we visit our customers, I encourage our customers to visit us — see the products, warehouses, trucks, look at the border, see what the challenges are. The more first-hand information I have as a customer, the better decisions I'll make." **pb**

“We believe one of the most successful innovations still going very strong is the individual plastic pouch bag.”

— Omar Cabrera, Agri-Packing Supply, Inc.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRULI BROTHERS

Innovation and adaptation of packaging continue to play a role in the Nogales industry. "New products include high graphic watermelon bins and The MAP conservation shipping bags," says Cabrera of Agri-Packing. "We believe one of the most successful innovations still going very strong is the individual plastic pouch bag. Many commodities are being packed in a convenient 1- or 2-pound bag. The printing capabilities and the amount of information given to the end user in this form of packaging is key to increase sales. It gives more awareness and more convenience to produce shoppers at the retail level."

J-C Distributing is bringing back its 2-pound bag of beans. "There is a particular customer we're doing it for right now," reports Chamberlain. "We hope other customers will like what they see and request it as well. It provides a convenience product with a value aspect. With consumers living in a tough economy people are looking for value products that provide a convenience factor as well." **pb**

Philly's Evolving Companies Find Fruit In Investments

WHOLESALEERS ARE HARNESSING VENTURES AND REINVIGORATING BUSINESSES TO BETTER SERVE CUSTOMERS.

by Jodean Robbins

Four years ago, the wholesale merchants of Philadelphia brought to fruition a decade-long gamble and moved into an improved wholesale market facility — the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM). Despite challenges along the way, the market is growing and increasing each year.

Currently, the world's largest fully enclosed, fully refrigerated wholesale produce terminal has 23 produce firms operating, and many expanded to fill available space. "Since the PWPM moved into our new facility we definitely saw increased business," says Dan Kane, PWPM general manager. "Several of our merchants expanded their operations, not only in terms of space, but through increased services including custom repacking, ripening technology and transportation."

Calculated risk-taking and a desire to meet the needs of future customers drives the Philadelphia market. "Success doesn't come without risk," shares Joe Procacci, chairman and chief executive of Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation. "To be successful you must always evaluate your next move and stay current with customer needs. From Dock Street to our current home, our business has always been about serving our customers and giving them what they need."

The modern facility distinguishes itself from other markets in the country bringing new benefits to buyers and merchants. "Our market is state-of-the-art in every aspect," explains Mark Levin, chief executive of M. Levin & Company, Inc. "It is bright, clean and



customer friendly. It is completely refrigerated, thus extending the shelf life of our items tremendously."

Merchants credit the new market for elevating business to new levels. "Our customers are delighted with the extended shelf life of products no longer exposed to temperature changes associated with typical terminal markets," reports Tom Kovacevich, general manager with T.M. Kovacevich (TMK). "For our company, the growth enabled by this market has been just awesome; we continually are adding new product lines and delivering new customers."

Though PWPM's facility increased operating costs, companies say efficiency offsets the increases. "We found ways to operate profitably with the easier operation of the state-of-the-art features including temperature control and in having adequate space for storage and operations," states John DiFeliciano, owner of North American Produce Company (NAPCO).

The market layout provides a competitive environment for buyers. "Now customers shop

five or six different merchants for price before they buy," says Fadi Abi-Khattar, president of Klinghoffer Brothers, Inc. "At the old market, customers didn't want to be outside, cross the street or walk too far, so there wasn't as much competitive shopping. This facility makes it easier for customers to visit all the merchants. Our customers benefitted greatly from this market with more competitive prices, better product, better handling and more items."

EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS

Philadelphia's wholesale businesses evolved to meet customer demands even before the move to the new facility. Pinto Brothers Inc. has always been a vegetable house, but in recent decades expanded item offerings to meet the needs of specific demographics. "One major shift for us is focusing more on products for customers from India," explains Todd Penza, salesman at Pinto Brothers. "We handle more greens, cilantro, cauliflower and Indian eggplant."

Full-line house B.R.S. Produce Co. handles a wide variety, but increased its tropicals line.



Rick Milavsky and John Miklosey – B.R.S. Produce Co.



Dan Kane – Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market



John Collotti – Collotti & Sons



Brian Collotti – Collotti & Sons



Dan Vena and John Vena – John Vena, Inc



Tracie Levin and Mark Levin – M. Levin & Co



John Durante – Nardella, Inc



(L-R) Frank Galindo, Lou Struble, Mike Maxwell, Joe Procacci, Frank Paone, Rick Feighery and Rita Neczypor – Procacci Brothers Sales Corp.



Martin Roth – Coosemans Philadelphia



Filindo Colace – Ryeco, LLC



Mickey Crawford – Ryeco, LLC



(L-R) Natalie Prusich, John DiFelicianantonio, Gina DiFelicianantonio – North American Produce

“From day one, we always carried a full line of products,” reports Rick Milavsky, B.R.S. president. “However, we expanded our tropicals to meet new demands. We better serve our customers with greater variety.”

Collotti & Sons is adding special products into its broad mix. “We are catering to the health trend with salad mixes such as Dole Power-Ups,” says Jack Collotti, owner. Collotti also serves customers with unique items such as its multi-colored carrot shred. “Carrying such items attracts interest among customers,” adds John Collotti, manager.

Even long-standing companies made famous by a single focus evolved to a broader business. M. Levin grew from selling only bananas in 1906 to a diversified full-line of fresh fruits and vegetables, including retail items such as drinks, crackers, cheese, eggs, frozen meats and fish, as well as paper and plastic bags. “Over time, the company increased its product offerings with a much more visible

tropical line to keep up with changing demographics in Philadelphia,” says Mark Levin.

Procacci Brothers started on the old Dock Street market in 1948 specializing in tomatoes. The company now has seven buildings, three units on the PWPM, growing operations in multiple states and handles a wide variety


“Years ago the business was about fulfilling one particular commodity. Now, you must be diversified. We’re bringing in more product from different regions of the world.”

— John Durante, Nardella Inc.

of products including floral. “Our business evolved to what it is today, because of our customer-oriented philosophy,” says Procacci. “The customer is our boss, and we adapt and act to fit their needs.”

John Vena Inc., also rooted on the old Dock Street Market, has come a long way since 1919. “Our business evolved in product line, variety and where we source from,” says John Vena, president. “My father and grandfather were limited as to the distance from where they could bring product. There’s no limit for us now.”

To stay relevant PWPM merchants must expand variety. “Years ago the business was about fulfilling one particular commodity,” explains John Durante, president of Nardella Inc. “Now, you must be diversified. We’re bringing in more product from different regions of the world. Our former staple source areas were Florida, California and Washington. Now we added Guatemala, Mexico, Chile and

A top-down view of a rustic wooden table. In the center is a round, golden-brown baked pie with several slits cut into the top crust, revealing a filling of apples and other ingredients. To the top left is a small white bowl containing three pats of butter. To the right is a white cloth with green leaf patterns and a red stripe. Further right is a wooden rolling pin and a small metal dish with a spoon. In the bottom right corner, several fresh apples in various colors (red, green, and red-green) are scattered. The overall scene is warm and inviting, suggesting a home-cooked meal.

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Richie Routhenstein – Coosemans Philadelphia and Pierre Calmels – Buyer



Nelson Gonzales – Coosemans Philadelphia



Mark Smerjian – Nardella, Inc.



Michael Lorenzo – North American Produce



Frank Banecker and Bobby Ziernicki – Procacci Bros. Sales Corp./Garden State Farms

South Africa.”

Coosemans Philadelphia moved from handling 30 commodities a few decades ago to currently offering close to 100 items. “Over the years we took advantage of opportunities for deals to help us continually adjust to market

demands and conditions,” explains Martin Roth, vice president. “Years ago spring mix was a high-end commodity, now it’s standard. Avocados used to be specialty items sourced only from California. Now a variety of shippers exist — all with warehouses. We evolved by

finding other products to fill various niches.”

Expansion comes in the form of space and personnel as well as new products. In 25 years Ryeco LLC has gone from one unit to seven, growing incrementally every year.

“Over the years, we expanded our product

PHILLY’S COLD CONTROL

The state-of-the-art market takes the frostbite out of inclement winter weather. BY JODEAN ROBBINS

The 2014/2015 winter in the Northeast was a brutal and disruptive one in many areas. According to reports on The Weather Channel, the East suffered through one of the snowiest, and at times, coldest winters on record. “This past winter was brutally cold,” agrees Fadi Abi-Khattar, president of Klinghoffer Brothers, Inc. “Trucking was even more difficult.”

The Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM) wasn’t able to control the weather, but it did control its response to the unfavorable conditions. “We have around-the-clock staff and exceptional equipment to ensure we are accessible for deliveries and customers,” reports Dan Kane, PWPM general manager. “Since we are fully enclosed, once produce reaches us, we are never at a loss to unload — from refrigerated trucks to sealed dock doors to refrigerated units.”

Though cold winters generally affect wholesale market sales, PWPM merchants tell a different tale. “This year, we didn’t really have to close because of cold or snow,” says Todd Penza, salesman with Pinto Brothers Inc. “Certainly, the cold weather doesn’t affect the product here like it does on other open-air markets. It’s better to shop here in the winter, because there’s no chance of the product freezing or being damaged by the cold.”

The new market stands superior to the old open-air format — especially on bad weather days. “At the old market on a wintery day, we were almost better off not opening,” states Mike Reilly, vice president at Ryeco LLC. “Customers shopped out in the cold and produce was displayed in the freezing air. Our new market is better for product and easier and more comfortable for customers to shop in both heat

and cold.”

Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation reported seeing more people shopping the PWPM this winter than ever before. “Since our market is enclosed at 50 degrees, customers and shippers came here because they could work,” states Mike Maxwell, president of Procacci. “The loss of product from freeze damage this winter was incredible in other markets, but our market maintained quality.”

Maintaining optimum product despite weather conditions holds benefit for buyers and sellers. “In either extreme hot or cold, we maintain the right temperature for the product,” states John Collotti, manager at Collotti & Sons. “This benefits both the product as well as buyers who can shop here without dealing with walking around in the frigid cold or sweltering heat.”

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line and added positions to our team in every area: managers, sales and porters,” reports Mike Reilly, vice president of Ryeco. “We changed a good deal to keep up with our growth.”

When Klinghoffer Brothers bought I. Kalish 27 years ago, it was mainly an onion, potato, cabbage and greens house. “We had to diversify the business,” states Abi-Khattar. “Slowly over the years we added items and focused strongly on local produce. And, we continue to seek out new opportunities; I just hired a new person to sell only watermelon.”

TMK began its wholesale business in Philadelphia in 1986. Now, its newest venture serves clients overseas. Brian Nichols, TMK overseas distribution manager, handled the company’s distribution into Puerto Rico and has now expanded into Bermuda. “We are very excited about our opportunities in Bermuda,” relates Kovacevich. “Although Bermuda has a rather small population, their demand for quality marries well with our strengths as a quality focused distributor.”

CHANGING WITH CUSTOMERS

The on-going evolution of PWPM’s customer base is what pushes the merchants to continuously evolve. Currently, one of

“Businesses such as salad restaurants, juice bars, and others are ones we want to align ourselves with either directly or through our customers.”

— Filindo Colace, Ryeco

the biggest differences in PWPM’s most frequent customers is cultural. “As certain ethnic communities evolve, they become bigger customers,” says Vena. “Irish, Italian or Polish neighborhoods are becoming more Hispanic Indian, or Asian and as they grow we see customers more frequently from those areas.”

The population diversity is causing quick changes in the marketplace. “Supermarkets and independents continue adapting strategies and product mix to cater to the changing population,” explains Frank Galindo, floral director for Procacci. “This means new opportunities with diverse customers such as Latino, Asian,

Russian and Eastern European. As a result, our produce programs are now heavier in tropicals and Asian products.”

Customer demographics evolved from principally European-based to a more global scope. “Back in the day, we mainly served Greek, Italian and Irish customers,” reports Roth. “We now serve a greater variety of ethnic customers originating from India to Africa to Central and South America.”

The PWPM customer base also evolved to represent a cross-section of many formats of business models. “Customers from all different ends of the business shop here,” states Ryeco’s Reilly. “We serve all types including chain stores, independents, small mom-and-pop’s, processors, wholesalers and other unique ventures.”

The progression of produce-friendly end-users in the marketplace favors wholesale and market merchants. “We serve wholesalers who serve a growing and diverse base of customers using a lot of produce,” says Filindo Colace, vice president operations for Ryeco. “Businesses such as salad restaurants, juice bars, and others are ones we want to align ourselves with either directly or through our customers. These niche businesses represent




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Louis Penza –
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Rob Cantando –
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Michael Lombardo – Pinto
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(L-R) David Carfagno, Dimitri Dimopoulos & Fred Penza – Pinto Brothers, Inc.

great opportunity.”

The changing marketplace dynamic turned small-format customers into significant buyers. “Juice bars in the city come as cash street buyers and buy as much product as small chain stores,” reports Rick Feighery, vice president of sales for Procacci. “The juice segment of the business is currently exploding with a lot more room for growth.”

Though the market has always been strong with independents, Vena reports increasing interest from larger buyers. “We are experiencing some growth with the larger regional banners,” he states. “On the foodservice side, we’re growing with all the branches of the major foodservice distributors in our area,

mainly because of our ripening program and other specialties.”

Philadelphia merchants are especially accommodating to small buyers and even the public. “We love servicing big supermarket chains and restaurants, but we take special pride in showing mom-and-pop shops and local coop groups how they can save money by shopping here,” says PWPM’s Kane.

Though Levin’s biggest customers include wholesalers and grocery chains along the Eastern seaboard, he values all. “All customers are VIP’s whether they buy one package or thousands of packages,” states Mark Levin. “They all deserve attention and respect. That is how you maintain a business!”

The increasing success of small and medium independents bodes well for the market. “One of the most bullish trends I see is our independents investing money back into the stores,” reports Mike Maxwell, president of Procacci. “As a lot of the boroughs are revitalizing, the little bodegas are buying out empty stores and renewing them. This is great for our future.”

PROVIDING VALUED SERVICE

Though many innovations have been incorporated into PWPM businesses, customer service remains a cornerstone. “Computerization and refrigeration changed the way we do business and how our produce is maintained through the cold chain,” declares Mark

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TRANSPORTATION TRIALS

Continuing issues in transportation present opportunities for Philly market. BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Philadelphia wholesalers are no more immune to the current transportation challenges than any other produce business. “Transportation is one of the biggest expenses and changes,” says John Durante, president of Nardella Inc. “Years ago, if product was good and you could move it, you took it. Now you have a huge investment just in transport, so we are more selective of what we take.”

The Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM) presents some viable advantages in the transportation conundrum. “Trucks find it a lot easier to work out of PWPM and there is less of chance of having trucks held up,” explains Rick

Milavsky, president of B.R.S. Produce. “Shippers or drivers may choose to bring a load here over another market that may be harder to get in and out of. It’s also much easier for customers to pick up here.”

The design of the facility itself is an attraction for truckers. “We have 224 loading doors, and usually a fairly quick turnover since all the doors are equipped with load levelers,” explains John Vena, president of John Vena Inc.

Philly’s location and infrastructure also facilitate movement. “Getting in and out of Philly is easier than many other markets due to our location, less congested traffic and improved facility logistics,” claims

Martin Roth, vice president, Coosemans.

Merchants report a preference for Philly among drivers. “We are fortunate that trucks want to come here, because it’s easier and we pay fast,” says Rick Feighery, vice president of sales for Procacci. “If a carrier has a choice between New York, Boston or Philly, they’ll typically choose Philly.”

Increasing transportation costs may drive customers to take another look at the local wholesale market. “There is less risk and more control for customers shopping here,” advises Durante. “You see the product before you take it, and it’s also perfectly temperature controlled.” **pb**

Levin. “However, focus on customer service has not changed — if we don’t take care of our customers and their needs, someone else will!”

For PWPM merchants, good service

extends to both sides of the chain. “Our philosophy is the same as 20 years ago,” says Durante at Nardella. “Protect the customer and protect the shipper. With the competition out there,

you really have to cater to and take care of your customer and shipper more than ever.”

Maintaining customers and shippers provides stability to the market. “We continue

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to serve our customers and shippers with the same commitment we always have," says Abi-Khattar. "Our relationships are strong, and this makes our business strong."

Philly merchants look to uniquely serve customers by developing specialty areas. "We don't just buy and sell products," says Procacci's Galindo. "We work with suppliers to develop programs for our customers. Our floral program is a one-stop solution serving top-to-bottom programs, and some in difficult scenarios. For Mother's Day, we delivered 1,800 C-stores with a diverse array of products, and we continue to build consistent and seasonal programs with them."

Procacci reports double-digit growth with Hispanic items and organics. "We developed our new tropical label, Feliz, to ensure standardization and uniformity," states Maxwell. "Regardless of our customer, chain or bodega, we want to build programs on quality and consistency."

High-maintenance commodities cater to Procacci's strengths. "Handling those products needing extra attention is what keeps us invaluable," says Feighery. "High-maintenance commodities and uneasy markets enable us to help retail partners when it's truly needed. This is when our service ability shines brightest."

Vena added various services including delivery and repacking to fit customer needs. "Customers demand more now in the area of services," reports Vena. "Innovation for us is about building new developments into our industry. We take ideas or concepts from other industries and find ways we can adapt them to our customer needs. We're not inventing the wheel, but we are customizing it for our customers."

Going beyond what's in stock is crucial to keeping customers. "If a customer asks for a particular item, we do our best to get it for them," says B.R.S.'s Milavsky. "Our goal is to always have what our customers need."

Ryeco claims its hours as a significant service aspect. "We are open pretty much 24/7," says Colace. "We run the company 24 hours a day from 6 a.m. Sunday until 6 p.m. Friday. We also have people working Saturday morning and an emergency crew on standby Saturday night in case a customer needs something."

KEEPING CUSTOMERS AHEAD OF TRENDS

Philly merchants strive to anticipate market needs, develop relevant programs, and keep customers ahead of the curve. "Procacci's floral program began with a need from our retail base and we reacted to that need," reports Maxwell.

"Locally grown produce and organics are other major growth areas where we saw and met a need. We dedicated significant resources to all these programs and have seen success, because we keep our customers ahead of the trend curve."

Helping customers often means being adept at listening to their needs. "In anticipating customer needs, we ask for their input on how we could change to make their produce lives easier," says Mark Levin. "With computers, emails and other technology, it is

easier to communicate whether it involves new trends, new items or increasing their profit margins. We are here to help and to listen."

NAPCO tailors to clientele by understanding product influences and sharing information. "We take into account our customers' feedback when introducing new products," says DiFelicianantonio. "I also give customers accurate information on conditions and availability from the growing areas."

Effective communication is fundamental to building sales. "In our business, communication

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PHILADELPHIA MARKET PROFILE

is paramount, because sales industry is about relationships,” says Colace of Ryeco. “If you can’t communicate with someone, you can’t have a relationship with them. A crucial part of our business is to ask customers what they want and respond. We focus on how we are more accessible to the customer and how we make our product more accessible.”

Philly merchants communicate in various ways with customers. “We have customers who come in and only deal face to face,” reports Colace. “We have some who fax, because they don’t use email. I have some who still only call to place an order, and there are others who only email or text their orders. We use whatever method the customer wants. It’s not service if it’s doing what you want; it’s only service if you’re doing what the customer wants.”

Marketing and merchandising support is an increasingly important add-on offered by Philly wholesalers. “We help retailers merchandise differently to appeal to customers making shopping decisions in different ways,” says Frank Paone, director of marketing for Procacci. “This is added value we provide — we are an extension of our customers’ marketing departments. We are continually researching and monitoring the market and learning what

the current and next generations of shoppers are doing. We’re pitching in-store programs and strategies that we’re confident can satisfy the needs of the marketplace.”

Procacci engages the talent of Nicole Gaffney, chef and Food Network Star alum, for recipe development. “Nicole’s demeanor, intelligence, and creativity connect perfectly to the Millennials and Gen Y we target,” states Paone. “Between recipes and instructional videos we’ve done with her, we’re able to educate these consumers who want to do something new or different with their food. When this value is added to our brands to drive recognition, it opens up a lot of collaborative programs at store level with our customers.”

M. Levin is developing more social media tools. “Our newest innovations are in the social media arena,” says Tracie Levin, general manager. “We’re using Facebook and our website to talk about new items and the start of seasons. We utilize social media as both an educational and promotional tool.”

ADVANCING LOGISTICS

With greater diversity in customers comes the need for delivery and other logistics services, and PWPM merchants are actively working

to accommodate new demands. “We try to accommodate deliveries through brokers,” says PWPM’s Kane. “We have warehousing available as well as ripening rooms and specialized packaging.”

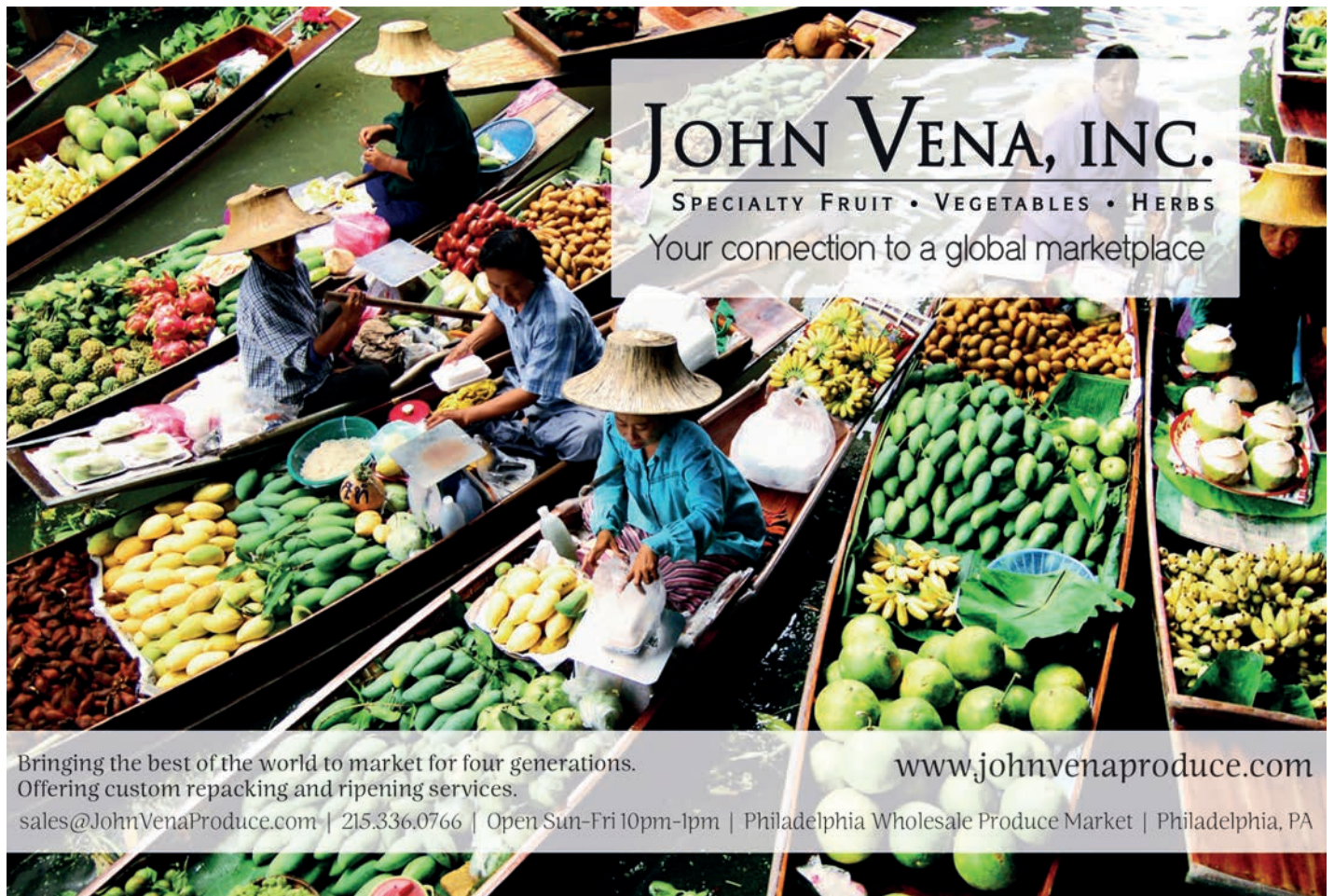
Procacci has delivered direct-to-store for many years through its company, GS Distribution. “We opened a new warehouse last year to service these customers,” says Procacci. “We offer the customer service in variety, consistency and logistics.”

Nardella delivers to its bigger customers, but found a beneficial solution for smaller mom-and-pop deliveries. “I have other customers who deliver to smaller formats, so I recommend them for delivery to those smaller customers,” explains Durante at Nardella.

Collotti & Sons run Rufus Trucking, operated by John Collotti. “Customer service is crucial and we strive to do our best for the customer,” says he says. “Our expertise and service makes us valuable to our customers.”

NAPCO provides transportation for customers using owner operators. “They are fully licensed and insured using the best modern equipment,” describes DiFeliciano.

TMK reports continually adding trucks to its delivery fleet. “This is just a necessity in



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Jim Capuano – night sales
Elaine DiFeliciano – sales

“We put in our ripening rooms about three years ago and have seen growth with our avocados. We added mangos and plantains, which grew nicely during the past six months.”

— John Vena, John Vena, Inc.



(L-R) Keith Reilly, Mike Reilly, Jr., Steve Levchenko, Ken Sanger, Rich Mastero, Brian Beckmann, Sean Storey and Tom Weingard - Ryeco

the wholesale distribution/terminal market business model,” says Kovacevich. “With foot traffic at wholesale markets declining over the years, we are steadily growing the business with deliveries.”

However, local delivery remains problematic. “We are challenged in finding good local truckers to deliver to local customers,” says Vena. “It’s been difficult to find truckers to deliver one or two pallets within 40 to 50 miles of Philadelphia. We’re trying to rebuild this small cottage industry of trucks to deliver locally.”

Pinto Brothers also is pursuing solutions for customer delivery. “One of our biggest challenges is to deliver less than full loads to customers,” explains Penza. “We are working on developing a better logistics system to fulfill frequent, small-quantity orders.”

Preconditioning presents another value opportunity for PWPM service. “We see customers increasingly interested in ripened or preconditioned fruit, especially in handling multiple stages of ripening,” shares Vena.

“Foodservice is the biggest driver right now, but there is increasing interest among retailers.”

Vena reports substantial success with its ripening program. “We put in our ripening rooms about three years ago and have seen growth with our avocados,” reports Vena. “We added mangos and plantains, which grew nicely during the past six months. We also preconditioned honeydews.”

M. Levin, with a long history in ripening bananas, also perceives continuing potential.

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PROFITING FROM GEOGRAPHY

PWPM’s location in a regional industry hub is advantageous. “Philadelphia is the largest port of entry for the Chilean deal,” explains TMK’s Kovacevich. “The Kennett

Square mushroom deal is right here. We’re close to the huge fruit and vegetable farming operations of South Jersey and Pennsylvania — think Jersey tomatoes, peaches and blueberries, Pennsylvania apples — as well as Delaware and Maryland watermelons.”

Access to imports through Philadelphia’s port system remains essential to business. “The Ports in Philly give us a great logistics ability for bringing in container volume,” says Procacci’s Feighery. “If we had to truck in all our loads from Central and South America from ports

further away it would affect our competitiveness. We are now looking at expanding our imports from other areas, such as peppers from The Netherlands.”

During the past four years, merchants began reaching out to a customer base beyond the local area. “Before, we only took care of customers who came to us, but now we can deliver to customers two to three hours away,” states Reilly at Ryeco.

The market continues to expand the area it serves. “The geographic coverage of PWPM now is about a 200 mile radius,” reports DiFelicantonio of NAPCO.

Philly’s proximity to major metropolitan markets and customers in New York and New Jersey continues to garner attention from merchants. “We are only 90 miles from the New York market, and there are a lot of customers between us and there,” says Ryeco’s Colace. “We’re looking at what can we do encourage those customers to come here versus New York.”

While PWPM always drew customers from its northern boundaries, new moves are seen further south. “We have customers coming from as far as Richmond, VA,” reports Cooseman’s Roth.

In addition to just geography, PWPM claims good reasons for customers to make the trip to Philly. “The physical structure itself is important,” advises Colace. “Anyone who has been in the business for any time recognizes shelf life is a direct result of two things: age of product and cold chain. This market protects the cold chain better than any other open-air market. That adds shelf life and thus adds value.”

Key PWPM benefits allow for greater customer reach. “Customers come further from all directions because of the attributes of our facility,” says Penza of Pinto Bros. “This includes the amount of product we can hold and our ability to maintain the product so it can be shipped further.”

Quality control certainly plays a vital role. “The shelf life is unbelievable now on product and we see less spoilage,” states Jack Collotti. “Thus, we are seeing customers coming from almost double the distance as before.”

Though the market’s geographic pull is increasing, there may be a learning curve as potential customers make changes. “Transportation and logistics solutions take time,” advises Vena. “A lot of customers had not focused on our old market as a favorable source, but they are [focused] now with the new facility. However, we’ve only been here four years, and it takes time to change buying habits.” **pb**

In Memoriam

John J. Collotti

December 19, 1933 - March 27, 2015

John J. Collotti was known to everyone in the Philadelphia produce trade as “Strawberry Jack.”

John inherited his produce savvy from his father, Jimmy Collotti, who sold produce to small stores.

John Collotti started his company, like many wholesalers, on the Dock Street neighborhood of Society Hill.

As gentrification pushed produce companies out of Dock Street, Collotti relocated with other wholesale merchants in 1959 to the Philadelphia Regional Produce Market on Packer Avenue in South Philadelphia.

In June of 2011, Collotti and many of the other companies moved to the world’s most state-of-the-art wholesale market facility — the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market.

Located on Essington Avenue, The Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market is the only fully enclosed and fully-refrigerated wholesale market in the world.

“Strawberry Jack” saw the Philadelphia produce industry go from one man with a truck to an actual “wholesale market,” and ultimately, to the world’s most technologically innovative and upscale wholesale market.

His friends and colleagues remember John as being vivacious, always smiling and laughing, and truly loving the produce business.

His sons; Jack, Vincent, and Christopher; his grandsons, John, Brian, and Vincent Collotti carry on the family legacy.



Vedge

THE PHILADELPHIA ‘VEGETABLE RESTAURANT’ GARNERS FAME BY PUTTING FLAVORFUL PRODUCE FRONT AND CENTER AND ENCOURAGES A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD CUISINE.

by Jodean Robbins

The traditional, historic building on a quaint Philadelphia street belies the innovative, cutting-edge restaurant inside. Using absolutely no animal products, Vedge restaurant is a produce industry’s delight with close to 100 percent of its delectable menu derived from vegetables and fruits. “We wanted to offer a high-end, vegetable-focused dining experience — that just happened to be vegan,” says Kate Jacoby, co-owner and co-chef. “Our progressive, bold approach consists of shared small and medium plates, an excellent wine list, and a full beverage program.”

The 75-seat restaurant opened in 2011 by Chef Jacoby and her husband/co-chef Rich Landau with the goal of offering a new type of restaurant: the Vegetable Restaurant. “Rather than limit our audience by calling ourselves a vegetarian or vegan restaurant, we wanted to be more inclusive by focusing on the food and not the lifestyle or diet,” explains Jacoby.

The couple aspires to encourage people to see new possibilities in vegetable cooking. “We put forth a delicious and exciting new cuisine built entirely around vegetables,” says Jacoby. “At minimum, we want people to have a new impression of what vegan and vegetarian meals can be — it is no longer just rabbit food and tree bark. If we turn a few people on to eating a more plant-based diet along the way, then that’s great!”

Chef Landau began his restaurant ventures by opening Horizons Cafe in the Philadelphia



Sticky Toffee Pudding with Figs and Madeira Ice Cream



Chef
Kate Jacoby



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL SPAIN SMITH

suburbs in 1994 with Chef Jacoby (a certified sommelier) joining him in 2001. After a successful run in the burbs, they turned their attention to developing a more innovative city-center venue and opened Vedge. Completely self-taught, they elevated vegetable cooking by raising the bar for vegan cuisine and the vegan dining experience. Both received multiple James Beard nominations, co-authored three cookbooks together, and recently opened their second (also highly acclaimed) restaurant, V Street — a casual vegan bar in the Rittenhouse neighborhood in Philadelphia.

A CRUCIAL PARTNER

Without a doubt, produce is a crucial partner of Vedge and the restaurant spends between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per week on fresh vegetables and fruit. The chefs source from many different purveyors to ensure quality. “Using a variety of sources also helps us get the best prices and the best availability to maintain the most exciting and creative menu,” reports Landau.

The restaurant works closely with many small farms in Lancaster County through Leola, PA-based Lancaster Farm Fresh Coop-

erative; Ringoes, NJ-based Zone 7 distributors; Philadelphia-based Greensgrow Farms; Hawaiian-based growers, Wailea Agricultural Group; and Kennett Square, PA-based supplier, Irwin Brothers Mushrooms. It also buys from Philadelphia-based wholesale distributor, FarmArt Produce and Paul Giordano & Sons on the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market for items it can’t source locally, or for those not available with as much consistency.

“Our wholesalers recognize we have really high standards, so they always send us superior quality product,” says Landau. “And, they can get products with good consistency and good prices, which is hugely important in any food business. You must have a balance between your own creativity and inspiration with the reliability of good ingredients to execute a certain menu.”

With the entire plate focused on vegetables, quality is a key criterion in sourcing. “We always want the best, freshest produce,” states Landau. “With vegetables in the spotlight, we need the broadest range of the best quality seasonal produce we can get. We need to keep things interesting and never disappoint. We’re obsessive about freshness and

“You must have a balance between your own creativity and inspiration with the reliability of good ingredients to execute a certain menu.” — Chef Rich Landau

talk about it all the time in our cookbooks and cooking classes or whenever we’re training new staff. You wouldn’t cook a not-so-fresh fish, so why would you use wilted broccoli or bruised eggplant?”

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Eating at Vedge is a paradoxical experience. The polished, inviting décor, supremely professional waitstaff and stylishly descriptive menu promise a sophisticated culinary experience Philadelphians have come to expect from a trendy restaurant. Vedge delivers this, and yet so much more — taking the often considered mundane vegetable to another level.

The menu is broken down into three sections. The “Vedge Bar” features tantalizing cold small plates including: Chilled Cucumber Soup with tandoor zucchini relish and smoked pumpkin seeds; Stuffed Avocado with pickled cauliflower; Salt Roasted Gold Beets incorporating avocado, smoked tofu and crushed cucumber; and Rutabaga Fondue served with fresh soft pretzel and house-made pickles.

The “Hot Kitchen” list focuses on flavorful hot items and boasts: a Smoked Carrot Kimchee “Rueben” with white bean sauerkraut puree; an Asparagus Crepe incorporating whipped cauliflower, buckwheat and beech mushrooms; a Roasted Maitake Mushroom Celery Root Fritter with a smoked leek remoulade; and Grilled Seitan Smoked Potato Salad with pickled celery and grilled corn peperonata.

The “Dirt List” highlights particular seasonal items with very short availability windows including: Salt Baked Turnip with black garlic tahini and purple cabbage za’atar; Grilled Baby Bok Choy accompanied by grilled Shiitakes and smoked Shiitake dashi; Spring Peas and Beans over crushed cauliflower; Nebrodini Mushrooms as “fazzoletti” with basil and charred tomato; and shaved and grilled Brussels sprouts complemented by smoked mustard.

James Beard Nominated-Pastry Chef Jacoby strives to innovate vegan desserts. Vedge’s dessert menu entices with Saffron Cheesecake accompanied by rhubarb ice cream and black olive-pistachio crumble, Sour Cherry Empanadas paired with watermelon ceviche, and Apricot Chajá with dulce de leche and coconut whipped cream. House-made ice cream in unique seasonal flavors such as blueberry-lavender and Szechuan strawberry provides additional temptation to indulge.



Nebrodini Mushrooms as Fazzoletti



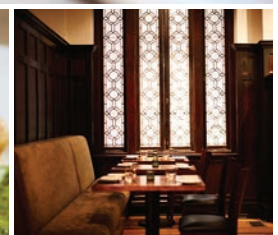
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Eggplant Braciola with Sicilian Salsa Verde



Chef Rich Landau



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 5 p.m. – 11 p.m.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL SPAIN SMITH

CHANGING MENU, CHANGING MINDS

The menu changes frequently at Vedge depending on seasonality and availability of product. “We do huge seasonal shifts about six times a year, and little changes every day,” reports Landau. “Our Dirt List has about six featured seasonal products with really short windows, so this changes all the time. It keeps us on our toes.”

Dishes are conceived to not only deliver flavor but to expand how the patrons think about produce. “We strive for people to think of vegetables in new ways such as Eggplant Braciola, Portobella Carpaccio or Whole Roasted Carrots,” says Landau. “We want to highlight the best textures and flavors we can draw out of our ingredients.”

Even behind the bar, Vedge delivers produce-inspired innovation, touting Grapefruit and Kaffir Lime Shrub with Rhubarb and Pisco; Carrot juice with Scotch Mezcal; and Red Kuri Squash and Szechuan Peppercorn with Gin and Lemon.

Vedge prides itself on being a “foodie” restaurant for omnivores, vegetarians, vegans (and carnivores alike), as well as serves a broad customer base. “We have loyal customers who followed us from our suburban days including Baby Boomers, families, and seniors,” states Jacoby. “We also have a smattering of different city people: young hipsters, wealthy condo-owners, parents on date-nights and business executives. Since we are a destination dining experience, we also have many customers visiting from out of town.”

pb

Di Bruno Bros.

A PHILADELPHIA RETAIL LEGACY CONTINUES TO INNOVATE AND EDUCATE BY EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS.

by Jodean Robbins

For decades, iconic gourmet retailer, Di Bruno Bros., transcended culinary innovation — reinventing its business multiple times to meet the needs of the ever-changing produce shoppers. The 75 year-old retailer's willingness to embrace change allowed it not only to endure but also grow and prosper both locally and nationally.

The business started when brothers Danny and Joe Di Bruno opened the Di Bruno Bros. grocery store in 1939 as a modest Italian neighborhood store. Recent immigrants, they relied on their hard work and inventive spirit. Danny was known for saying, “We didn't have much money, but a smile doesn't cost you anything!”

Throughout the years, Di Bruno transformed its business based on the changing marketplace. After 25 years of serving the neighborhood, the brothers began to realize how the emergence of chain stores could affect their business. During a vacation to Switzerland, Danny sampled some of world's best cheeses and was inspired to reinvent Di Bruno Bros. into a gourmet cheese shop; so was born Di Bruno Bros. “House of Cheese.”

During the next three decades, the Di Bruno's expertise in “old-world” specialties and the store's collage of delicious products made it a destination of choice for culinary enthusiasts. The brothers continued to incorporate more specialty products and culinary discoveries in the store, building an authentic, specialty retail business.

The third-generation of the family kept



the innovation growing by creating DiBruno.com and expanding the company into more Philadelphia locations. “Today, the business boasts five locations in the Philadelphia area,” states Matthew Blasko, senior retail operations manager. Still owned and operated by the family, it employs more than 350 team members and has catering, import and e-commerce divisions.

CULINARY PIONEERS

The company is considered a specialty pioneer and prides itself on great food, great service and enthusiastic people. “Our mission is to provide extraordinary food experiences inspired by our legacy,” says Blasko. “For 75 years, we offered nothing but the highest quality products made with integrity (often in-house) and infused with the story of the people who made them.”

Di Bruno's Rittenhouse location encompasses 6,000 square feet of beautifully displayed culinary treats (not including its upstairs café

or corporate offices). The view through the front window of hanging sausages, hams and bananas, promises old-fashioned quality and knowledge of days gone by. Inside does not disappoint, showcasing gleaming deli and bakery counters overflowing with unimaginable variety and manned by experts both in product and service.

In the back, beyond all these tempting delicacies, beckons Di Bruno's claim to fame — the cheese shop. Housing its own signature cheeses along with a myriad of eminent cheeses from around the world, the cheese shop banks on its “Cheese Masters” to purvey product and build relationships with customers.

For Di Bruno's, it's all about meeting customer needs. “We are focused on what is most convenient for our customers,” states Blasko. “This holds true whether customers are making something themselves and need a few key ingredients or creating a meal from our prepared-food offerings.”

Di Bruno's customer demographics vary

with each store and the needs of each neighborhood. “We create our offering based on our customers when we first open a store and build it over time with customer feedback and trends,” reports Blasko.

A key customer need at the Rittenhouse store, located in the heart of commercial and residential Center City District in Philadelphia, is produce. “Many of the local residents come to us for every meal, because they know our quality is undisputed,” says Blasko. “Though we may operate as a fairly niche retailer, our approach is full-on customer service, so adding a produce department for this area was a no-brainer. Also, local restaurants with a formidable presence in the upscale dining scene use us as a convenient place to grab essential items. Produce is a must, and we are always striving to make it better.”

PRODUCE PRIDE

Di Bruno’s commitment to quality is reflected in its produce, though produce is currently its smallest department. “Produce is only available at two of our five locations,” says Blasko. “However, as a company constantly promoting culinary pioneering and exceeding customer expectations by offering suggestions, recipes, ideas, and inspiration, produce is a crucial piece in what we do. We can tell you how to make the best risotto in the world and hand you the proper rice, cheese, spices, and accouterments. But if we recommend a squeeze of lemon as a finishing touch, and fail to provide a fresh, ripe, juicy lemon, then we failed our customer.”

Customer experience counts as a key focal point in every department including produce. “Our challenge is always to be the best at what we do, so the in-store experience is the most pleasant, the best-tasting, and memorable in

the most positive way,” explains Blasko. “We want to save our shoppers the extra trip to a specialty produce store or a local fruit cart. The difference between a good experience and a great one is sometimes just a single, ripe banana away.”

The Rittenhouse store’s produce department occupies roughly 500 square feet located right inside the front door. The department is anchored by a 20-foot refrigerated case of impeccable produce items. Three free-standing racks merchandise seasonal and value-added items. Though small, the space pushes produce sales. “Produce comprises roughly 11 percent of our total store sales,” reports Blasko.

The layout of the department basically remains the same though seasonal displays may change. Secondary displays throughout the store allow for greater exposure for produce and cross-merchandising opportunity. “We incorporate many free-standing display areas both in the department itself and cross-merchandised into other areas of the shop,” says Blasko. “We still feel a fair amount of autonomy with what we feature, while providing our customers with a familiar setup in the department.”

The store variety combines must-have items with seasonal changes. “We maintain a selection of staple products our customers count on year-round but we keep up with seasonal trends by offering different fruits and vegetables on a seasonal and local basis,” says Blasko. “This summer’s harvest of New Jersey blueberries was a great success. We usually put out a large, attractive, special display for such items in a high-traffic area, and use signage made in-house to promote.”

As Di Bruno’s incorporated evolving customer trends into produce, it has seen increased success in produce sales. “A few years ago, we realized organic and local trends weren’t

just a passing fancy,” states Blasko. “We jumped happily onboard with a complete department renovation, focusing on our relationships with local farms that are committed to providing sustainable and ethically-produced fruits and vegetables. Since the renovation in April of 2013, we saw an increase in sales in the produce department of about 20 percent.”

Di Bruno’s sources 100 percent of its produce from wholesalers Ephrata, PA-based Four Seasons Produce, Inc. and First Choice Produce on the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market.

A BUSINESS OF EXPERTS

Di Bruno’s emphasizes education and interaction with customers and prides itself on helping customers learn more about how to use the products it sells. “Our marketing department provides a handout called ‘The Culinary Pioneer,’” explains Blasko. “This sometimes recommends the use of seasonal produce in cheese and charcuterie pairings, as well as in recipes. We also promote produce items with in-house signage, often highlighting local produce and organic items.”

Di Bruno considers its staff as the spark truly distinguishing it from other specialty retailers in the business. “In every department, we keep a specialist on staff who knows more about the products in his/her particular area than one could imagine,” explains Blasko.

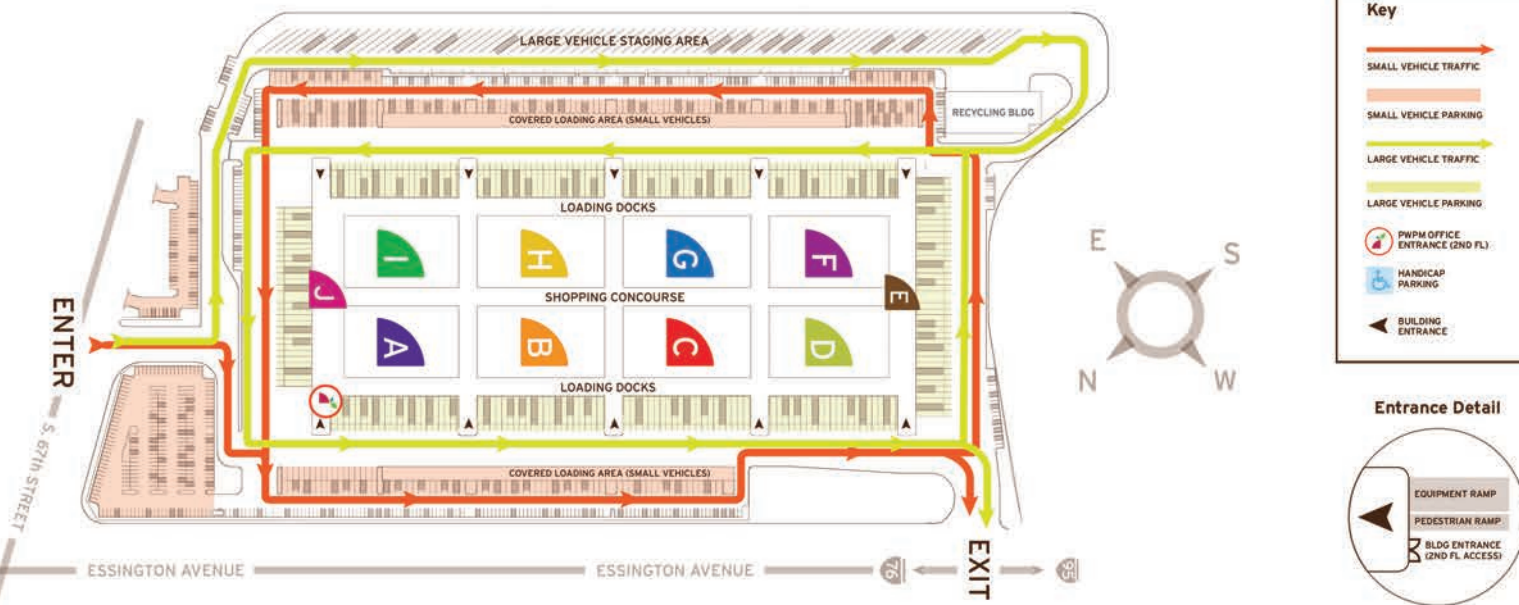
In the city of Philadelphia, the company is widely renown for its in-store sampling. “Anything in the store, with very few if any exceptions, is always available to taste and will often come with a pairing recommendation or a recipe idea,” shares Blasko. “We hold demos throughout the week where vendors are invited in to tell our eager (and hungry) customers firsthand about their amazing product. We know our customers will understand the difference between our products and other commodity products if we allow them to taste for themselves.”

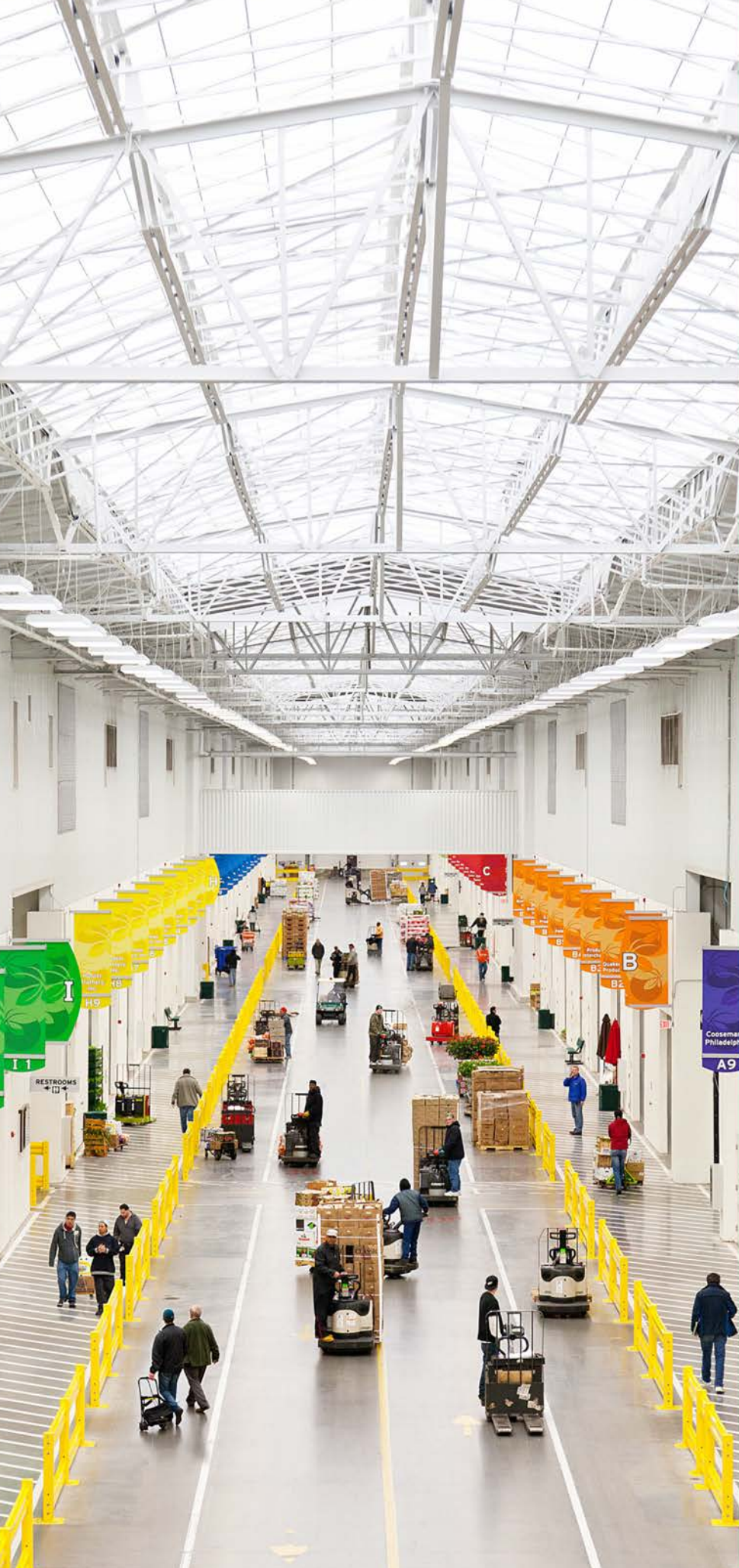
Balancing its legacy with its future poses both challenge and continuing opportunity for the company. “Since we have been such a relevant thread in the fabric of Philly’s food scene for more than 75 years, it’s a constant challenge to walk the line between our family-bred traditional values and the ever-changing moods of the public,” advises Blasko. “We have a merchandising department dedicated to keeping our assortment varied and in accordance with the staple items our customers count on us to carry. With that in mind, we also balance the current food trends and aim to support ‘the next big thing.’”

pb

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A. Vassallo, Inc.	I-3	215-336-1984	215-336-7955
B.R.S. Produce	D-2 to D-4	215-336-5454	215-336-5220
Collotti & Sons	I-7 to I-8	215-389-3335	215-755-9616
Colonial Produce	B7 to B8	215-748-6650	215-336-2134
Coosemans Philadelphia	A-7 to A-9	215-334-3634	215-334-3636
E.W. Kean Co.	G-1 to G-2	215-336-2321	215-336-1596
G & G Produce, Inc.	F-7 to F-8	215-336-9922	215-336-9925
Hunter Bros. Inc.	H-8 to H-9	215-336-4343	215-336-4340
Jesse Pitt Company	I-9	215-336-5325	215-389-1490
John Vena, Inc.	F-1 to F-6	215-336-0766	215-336-2812
Kaleck Brothers, Inc.	B-5	215-336-3027	215-551-1083
Klinghoffer Bros.	C-8 to C-9	215-336-3800	215-336-5234
M. Levin & Company, Inc.	H-2 to H-5	215-336-2900	215-755-6757
Nardella, Inc.	G-4 to G-6	215-336-1558	215-336-5757
Norm & Lou's Cafe	C-1	215-336-4848	215-271-2416
North American Produce Co.	I-1 to I-2	215-525-6444	855-278-5797
Paul Giordano & Sons, Inc.	D-7 to D-9	215-755-7900	215-755-7160
Pinto Brothers, Inc.	G-7 to G-9	215-336-3015	215-336-5422
Procacci Brothers Sales Corp. / Garden State Farms	I-4 to I-6	215-334-1400	215-339-0974
Produce Interchange	B-3	215-389-1782	215-389-0288
Quaker City Produce Co.	B-4	215-467-5000	215-336-4416
Ryeco, LLC	C-3 to C-7, D-5 to D-6	215-551-8883	215-551-9036
T. M. Kovacevich - Philadelphia, Inc.	A-1 to A-6, B-1 to B-2	215-463-0100	267-790-0442
USDA Inspection Service	C-2	215-336-0845	215-336-2051
Wick & Brother, Inc.	G-3	215-336-2252	215-336-2255





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Indy Regional Market Profile

With a thriving farming community and a culture that emphasizes locally grown produce, Indianapolis has become one of the country's most produce-centric cities.

BY LISA WHITE

Indiana's largest city and its capitol, Indianapolis, is the 14th largest city in the country with a population of more than 840,000. Settled in 1820, the city is located in the center of the state on the White River.

"Indianapolis is called the 'Crossroads of America,'" says Michael A. Ray, vice president of sales and operations at Ray & Mascari, a local produce wholesaler. "There are many interstate systems to service the Midwest and East Coast, and it's a great city to operate a business."

In terms of demographics, more than half of the population is Caucasian, with about 30 percent African American and 10 percent Hispanic or Latina, according to a 2010 U.S. Census report. The median age of the city is 34 and the per capita personal income in 2013 was \$24,332.

"Indianapolis is demographically representative of our nation," says Joe Himmelheber, director of retail merchandising for Caito Foods, a produce wholesaler located in the city. "We have great pockets of varied ethnicities, all seeking unique fresh produce items, and we have a significant Millennial population that shows us a reliance on organic produce and semi-prepared meal components."

SELLING PRODUCE IN INDY

The focus on buying local has been a driving force of Indianapolis' produce wholesalers. Wholesaler Ray & Mascari operated in the city since 1938. The business focuses on selling fresh tomatoes to both retail and foodservice accounts. The company experienced solid growth during the past five years, according to Michael A. Ray, vice president of sales and operations.

"There has been some retail consolidation over the years and fewer customers, since many independents can't compete with big box re-



tailers, but with that, there are opportunities that arise," says Ray. "Companies like ours continue to reinvent themselves to find niches in the marketplace, and we are successful at it."

Although the foodservice climate remains strong, it hasn't yet fully recovered since the beginning of The Great Recession in 2006. "Times are still tough for casual dining restaurants; but overall, our foodservice business has been steady," says Ray.

Servicing foodservice clients is Piazza Produce, Inc.'s sole business, which has grown due to the rise of the city's independent restaurants. "There are more of these operations now than I've seen in my entire career," says Pete Piazza, president of the company. He attributes the increase to new chefs venturing out on their own and the proliferation of brew pubs.

The company, which was established in 1970, also services universities, schools, prisons and businesses in the state, and added specialty products such as cheese and olive oil, to diversify its produce offerings.

"The biggest trend now is buying local, and we have the advantage of growing a lot of fruits and vegetables, although the season is short," says Piazza.

Indiana-grown produce is available in limited quantities in June, with the bulk of fruits and vegetables offered in July and August. The first frost signals the end of the state's

growing season.

As a result, when sourcing products, Piazza Produce runs two to three parallel programs to take care of its customers in different markets. "For example, in the off months, we'll get produce from other states and overseas, such as cantaloupe from Guatemala and strawberries from California," says Piazza. "[In the off season], these items aren't as affordable, but are always available."

SUSTAINABILITY IS A PRIORITY

In 2006, the company began taking major steps to operate more sustainably. Scott Lutocka, facilities and sustainability manager, noticed Piazza Produce's waste costs increasing monthly and began investigating to see if these expenses could be better controlled.

"I spoke with our controller, who informed me that the company worked with a waste consultant in 2003, but little came of this other than to install a cardboard bailer," says Lutocka. "I then met with the consultant, who shared a report that identified half of our waste was in corrugated cardboard."

The solution was to bail and sell the cardboard, which not only saved money, but produced additional revenue. Lutocka then went a step further to find creative incentives and ways to change the company's operational pro-

Continued on page 133

Along with being independent-friendly on the retail side, Indianapolis has a burgeoning restaurant scene that includes a growing number of locally-owned restaurants. And produce has become more front and center on these eateries' menus.

Chef Tyler Herald sources produce from 15 Indiana farmers for his four restaurants, which include Café Patachou, Napolese Pizzeria, Petite Chou Bistro and Public Greens Suburban Kitchen.

Public Green's menu is seasonally driven, includes only Indiana-grown produce and changes every Friday.

"We also have a micro farm on the property that we use for sourcing vegetables, such as kale, chard, onions, tomato, scallions, basil, carrots, cucumbers, squash, cherry tomatoes, leeks, okra and celery," says Herald.

Napolese Pizzeria, a brick oven pizza concept with three locations, also has a seasonal menu that changes three times a year. In the summer, the restaurant goes through about 500 pounds of heirloom tomatoes per week.

Petite Chou's menu changes biannually and includes as much local produce as possible, while Café Patachou, opened 25 years ago with five locations, has a static menu that doesn't include as much local produce.

"When I moved here 10 years ago from Portland, it was the first time I experienced crediting a farm for ingredients on a menu," says Herald. "Not only is there a trend toward local sourcing and farming, but also becoming more educated on where food comes from and relating to farmers."

Herald has taken the time to work the city's farmers market and, in the process, build personal relationships with local farmers.

"I probably get 4,000 texts a month in the summer to stay in contact with farmers, but it's important," says Herald.

Being in the Midwest, the biggest advantage to sourcing local produce is the accessibility of fruits and vegetables.

Particularly in the summer months, there is a bounty of produce available from local farmers.

"We can grow almost anything here, and it's unique that we can do so much," says Herald. "I try to get in as much produce every day as possible."

Another restaurant, Nourish, also takes its use of local produce to the next level.

Led by Executive Chef Eli Laidlaw, this brand new farm-to-table concept has a menu that centers around fruits and vegetables with

Eggplant Cheesecake with Sriracha Romesco by Chef Eli Laidlaw of Nourish



PHOTO COURTESY OF NOURISH



(L-R) PHOTOGRAPHY BY STACY NEWGENT



(L-R) Napolese dish: Summer Green Bean Salad with cherry tomatoes and peach gastrique; Napolese manager, Emily Nicoson, pictured with Chef Tyler Herald.

“Not only is there a trend toward local sourcing and farming, but also becoming more educated on where food comes from and relating to farmers.”

— Chef Tyler Herald

dishes that include Hoosier Bucco, sweet corn and peach braised beef shank with hominy polent horseradish gremolata; Scallion Pancake; and Eggplant Cheesecake, with sun-dried tomatoes and sriracha romesco.

"Our concept is as local as possible, and includes the best produce from the best local suppliers," says Laidlaw. "I get messages from farmers at least three times a week about what produce they have to offer us."

Laidlaw also frequently purchases produce from the local farmers market during the week.

Popular ingredients recently have included summer squash, zucchini, green tomatoes and all varieties of mushrooms.

"We're a very community-driven city, and everyone knows each other, especially chefs," says Laidlaw. "We feed off each other, but it's a friendly competition."

Nourish's goal is to change people's perceptions of how produce is used.

"It's about more than just roasting or grilling," says Laidlaw. "Our dishes make customers think about the food they're eating." **pb**

Continued from page 131

cedures, culture and attitude toward recycling.

As time progressed, other materials, including plastic, slip sheets, pallets and corner boards, were incorporated into the recycling program.

By mid-2010, Piazza Produce broke even on its waste costs for the first time in the company's history. It then achieved zero waste in 2012 and, in the past five years, produced a surplus, proving there's cash in new trash.

"By reducing waste expenditures and in-

creasing revenues by selling recyclables, we offset our waste costs, achieving \$1 million in operational savings since 2006," says Lutocka. "We're diverting 97.5 percent of our waste from landfills. Composting was the last hurdle, which we were able to get to 85 percent."

retail Small, Local And Organic Fills Niche

Georgetown Market capitalized on the diversity of Indianapolis. The single-store independent's 10,000-square-foot location is positioned as a health food store, with grocery, produce and deli departments. It is situated in a lower-income neighborhood, and the majority of its customers are minorities.

Produce comprises a little less than 10 percent of sales and is sold from two coolers and one center-aisle display. Only organic fruits and vegetables were available for the past 17 of Georgetown Markets' 43 years in business.

"When we moved to this location in 1997, we built our first produce department," says Andrew Montieth, grocery manager. "The store owner Rick Montieth recognized the changing landscape in the industry and that offering primarily supplements wouldn't be favorable."

Now Georgetown Markets concentrates on providing fruits and vegetables from local vendors. However, it doesn't require Indiana-based farms to be certified organic.

"Offering solely organic produce was not the best business decision, but has been important for our store's image," says Montieth. "For this reason, we attract people from outside our immediate area."

Many of Georgetown Markets' customers travel 30 to 45 minutes for its bananas, avocados and apples, which are the biggest sellers. Although the store has prepackaged salads, the majority of its produce is sold in bulk.

The store recently began creating a line of fresh-pressed raw juices, which are sold out of its produce department, and has an extension of this program in the deli juice bar.

As far as specials and floor displays, the store doesn't do much in the way of promotions and cross promotions. Produce is displayed in the cooler or in rectangular baskets. Quality, as opposed to price, is the focus.

"Produce has become very competitive in the Indy area, so we don't try to beat others on price, but instead try to maintain as high a quality as possible," says Montieth. "Consumer education and service is the focus."

With area farmers markets reaching out to



With area farmers markets reaching out to local retailers, the produce business in Indiana has become bigger and more competitive.

local retailers, the produce business in Indiana has become bigger and more competitive.

"With one of our main farms, we'll be spending more than \$100,000 in one year," says Montieth. "It's great being a part of their

success, and we're always trying to do more." Georgetown Market created a unique niche to better compete with the "big guys" in the area, which include Kroger, Marsh Supermarkets and Safeway. **pb**

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The Zero Waste International Alliance, which is an international organization dedicated to helping companies implement waste strategies, defines Zero Waste as a conversion of 90 percent (or greater) of waste being removed from landfills or incineration. Piazza Produce met these requirements and also won the Indiana Mayor's 2012 Sustainability Award in the Reduce, Reuse and Recycle category. In May, 2014, the company also was the first business in the state to be certified at the Gold Level by the U.S. Zero Waste Business Council (a Corona Del Mar, CA-based organization that educates, informs and documents the performance of Zero-Waste businesses and communities become more healthy and sustainable).

"Sustainability is about meeting the needs of present and future generations," says Lutocka. "We need to use resources wisely and recover them whenever possible."

In addition to sustainability initiatives, keeping on top of local and industry trends has been key to the success of Indiana's produce wholesalers. For example, Caito Foods recently completed an expansion/remodel of its Fresh Line facility in an effort to develop its value-added product line. An additional expansion is planned for 2016.

The family-owned fresh produce distributor (founded by brothers Phil Caito and Joe Caito in the mid-1960s) was the first company to offer full service fresh produce distribution to retailers throughout Indianapolis and central Indiana.

Today, the company has three fresh produce distribution centers in Indianapolis, Newcomerstown, OH, and Lakeland, FL, including its Fresh Line operation. It supplies fresh conventional and organic fruits and vegetables, floral items, complementary items and value-added fruits and vegetables.

Caito Foods' subsidiary company, Blue Ribbon Transport, provides logistics solutions to a range of businesses, with cross-country, LTL and intermodal capabilities.

"While it could be argued there are less independent supermarkets in any metro marketplace, there are more consumers — and with Millennials' renewed emphasis on eating fresh and at-home meal preparation — the fresh produce business continues to grow exponentially," says Himmelheber. "That growth is led by consistent double-digit organics growth and significant gains in the value-added fruit and vegetable categories."

In the U.S., the era of retailers visiting wholesale markets has given way to full service,

full program distributors.

"This allows the retailer to place emphasis on selling rather than buying and transporting, both of which would deplete an already skimpy workforce at retail," says Himmelheber. "Also, in an era that finds fuel and transportation costs occasionally exceeding the actual product FOB (freight on board), the ability to reduce fuel consumption and over-the-road time creates significant competitive advantages."

Consequently, this state, like many others, is focused on costs, price and value. Similar to most areas of the country, Indiana is contending with increased competition for the consumer's dollar. As a result, rather than stores focusing on higher-priced high-end produce, retailers are more price conscious and want to have the ability to pass on savings to consumers.

"This impacted our product mix, as it's necessary to provide a different niche in the marketplace either from a product or service perspective, while also remaining price competitive," says Greg Corsaro, president of wholesaler Indianapolis Fruit Co. Inc.

The company concentrated its focus on providing the newest products before its competition — most recently looking at different apple varieties.

Like other wholesalers, Indianapolis Fruit moved more toward packaged and convenience produce items with its Garden-Cut program and Fresh Pack division.

Also, with the growing interest in organic fruits and vegetables, the company is looking to expand its offerings in this category.

"Organic seems to grow as a percentage of overall purchases, and, in the past couple years, there has also been an emphasis on buying locally-produced items," says Corsaro. "Our plans are to attack these growth areas by establishing better, stronger and more relationships with our growers both locally and across the country. The closer we can bring our customer in contact with the grower, the better they can market products and send messages to end consumers."

With retail chains having an increasing presence in the city and state and new chains continuously moving in, there has been a decrease in the presence of independents.

Still, with Indianapolis' diverse demographic, there are many advantages for produce wholesalers. "Indianapolis is a small, big city, with both high and low income shoppers," says Corsaro. "It's nice to do business with different varieties of products and approaches, plus we have a nice labor pool from which to draw employees, which is a big plus." **pb**

How To Sell More Pistachios Year-Round



PHOTO COURTESY OF SETTON PISTACHIO GROWERS

Pistachios are no longer relegated to special occasions with these merchandising tips.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

Although pistachios are only harvested during a five-week period in September and October, they are available to produce departments year-round. It's probably no surprise that sales of the little green nuts will begin to escalate around the same time. But with a few tactics, stores can keep positive momentum on pistachio sales every month.

The main reason pistachios are seeing a resurgence is their many health benefits. They are naturally high in monounsaturated fat, fiber, copper, vitamin B6 and phosphorous, according to American Pistachio Growers. One ounce equals about 49 nuts, which is more per serving than any other snack nut.

Eating shelled pistachios is also fun, says Beth Sequeira, who does sales and marketing for Keenan Farms in Avenal, CA. The family-owned and -operated company is one of

the oldest pistachio processors in the state. "People enjoy pulling them out of their shells before eating them. Like peanuts or sunflowers, eating pistachios gives a legitimate excuse to play with food."

In addition, "the act of cracking pistachio shells gives snackers a visual indication of how many nuts they consumed, which is helpful for those watching calorie intake," says Sequeira.

California produces 99 percent of the pistachios grown in the United States. Arizona and New Mexico make up the remaining 1 percent. "The blend of hot summers, cold winters, soil and water make these areas the perfect place to grow pistachios," says Richard Matoian, executive director of American Pistachio Growers, which is based in Fresno, CA. The three states grew slightly more than 519 million pounds in 2014.

Pistachios harvested in the U.S. will always have shells that are their natural color. Nuts with red shells are imported. "Iran was the primary supplier of pistachios to the U.S. market in the 1970s," explains Matoian. "Their product had a number of defects on the shell (dark staining or spotting), so as a way to hide these imperfections, they dyed their pistachios red. The U.S. industry was able to grow pistachios in a manner that eliminated these defects, so there was no need to dye the shells."

CAPITALIZE ON HOLIDAYS AND SPORTING EVENTS

"Whenever football season starts, that really kicks off the pistachio selling time," says Keith Cox, produce category manager at Food City/K-VA-T Food Stores in Abingdon, VA. The company has 94 Food City stores and 10 Super Dollar outlets. "It's a good item during the holidays. It's also a good item during the Super Bowl and March Madness."

"Around the world, fall and winter are key selling times," says Judy Hirigoyen, vice president of global marketing for American Pistachio Growers. "During most holidays, including Hanukkah and Diwali (the national Hindu holiday), pistachios are a popular gift. Chinese New Year is a tremendous gift-giving occasion. The stores in China sell pistachios in elaborate gift boxes."

Stores in ethnically diverse neighborhoods should consider creating themed promotions during this time. For people who aren't as familiar with these holidays but would still like to give pistachios to friends, Hirigoyen suggests visiting the American Pistachio Growers' Pinterest page. It has pictures of various ways to present pistachios in gift boxes and other packages.

Baking nuts also do well around traditional American holidays such as Thanksgiving and

dried fruits & nuts ► pistachios

Christmas, Cox says. People put them in cookies, puddings, bread and stuffing.

And don't forget about Halloween. Jay Schneider, produce sales lead with Acme Markets, a 107-store chain based in Malvern, PA, says they do a decent trade in pistachios around this time. Small packages make great alternatives to candy for parents hoping to encourage children to eat less sugar.

"Sales are really big in January because of New Year's resolutions," says Rudy Placencia, vice president of marketing and sales at Nichols Farms. The company, which is headquartered in Hanford, CA, is owned by a third generation of family members. Including pistachios in display with other healthy snack foods can help boost sales.

"In the U.S., the Super Bowl remains the No. 1 single selling time," says Hirigoyen. Pistachios pair well with beer, which also means they pair well with sporting events.

"The key is to always have a secondary display," says Cox. "Put pistachios on a shelf in produce, then do cross-promotions with beer, soda, potato chips and other things people are likely to buy before big sporting events.

"Once the Super Bowl is history, continue to push pistachios into the spring," says

Cox. "The NHL and NBA seasons will be in full swing. PGA tournament games will take place sporadically. Until 'One Shining Moment' plays at the end of the NCAA basketball tournament, pistachios will continue to perform well."

"We utilize our in-house merchandising team to supply retailers with high graphic POS, freshness bins, balloons, tuck cards and more that are timed to our key consumption occasions such as Super Bowl, football season, March Madness, baseball season and soccer season," says Adam Cooper, vice president for marketing for Los Angeles-based Wonderful Citrus and Wonderful Pistachios and Almonds. "The in-store displays reflect each of these sporting events and are constantly changed."

MERCHANDISE BY CONCEPT

That being said, don't take pistachios off the shelves in April. "Pistachios really evolved into a 365 day a year necessity," says Sequeira with Keenan Farms. "Consumers realize the tremendous health benefits of including pistachios in a daily diet and thus, we've seen the seasonality of pistachio purchases move from Christmas and Super Bowl season to an everyday item

they include on their shopping list."

Keenan Farms is among the many pistachio distributors that provide pre-printed shippers and display bins. "They draw the attention of shoppers, provide basic pistachio health facts, and create a home for pistachios in produce," says Sequeira.

Schneider is among the produce managers who are big fans of these display options. "The graphic bin is the way to go," he says. "It draws attention. Pistachios are an impulse purchase for the most part, so they have to be visible. We use the bins to create foyer displays that people will see when they walk in."

Cox notes some of the pre-printed display bins have pistachio nutritional information printed right on them. That can make displays more streamlined and easier for produce managers to put together. American Pistachio Growers makes fliers with health benefit information available for retailers.

Another great way to sell more pistachios is to do the occasional promotion. "There's undeniable proof that when pistachios are on promotion, they sell," says Placencia.

Schneider likes to offer pistachios for \$5 a bag when he needs to sell more. The nuts will sell better in some stores than others, so

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pay attention to where the retail numbers are highest and target those stores with themed promotions. Acme Markets sells the most pistachios at their stores on the shore, presumably because people like to eat them while walking on the beach. They can tweak their marketing plan to encourage people to create a link between casual ocean strolls and the soothing rhythm of cracking pistachios open.

SIZE THEM UP

“People are becoming progressively aware of the health benefits of pistachios, but not everyone sees the value in their nutrition,” says Joseph Setton, vice president of domestic sales at Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella, Inc. The company, headquartered in Terra Bella, CA, is a family-owned and -operated business that opened in the mid-1980s. “Highlighting the nutritional aspects (large serving size, non-GMO, naturally gluten free, high in protein and potassium among other nutrients, etc.) and offering a variety of SKU’s is sure to increase sales.”

“It’s lucrative to offer more than just one size of package,” says Cox. Food City managers are encouraged to offer a 1-ounce trial size bag that’s ideal for people who never tried pistachios before.

They also sell 8-ounce, 16-ounce and 24-ounce bags.

“Once you get people hooked on them, an 8-ounce bag doesn’t last very long, so they graduate up to a 16- or 24-ounce bag,” he says. “That gives you a larger ticket ring at the register.”

“I like a 12-ounce bag versus an 8-ounce or 10-ounce,” says Schneider. “The bag looks pretty comparable to a 16-ounce, and you hit a better price point for consumers. Anything under that looks like a cheater pack.”

Wonderful Pistachios offers a variety of packaging (from 8-ounce to 16-ounce products) in more than five flavors, which cater to consumers’ needs.

“In terms of merchandising, we are unique in that we work directly with retailers to create the perfect displays and provide merchandising support,” says Cooper. “Also, our freshness bins have been an important innovation for Wonderful Brands. The bins not only solve shelving issues for retailers for stand-up and gusseted items, but they also provide efficient use of floor space.”

SAMPLING PISTACHIOS IN STORE

Stores that want to let consumers try the

nuts have plenty of interesting options. If sampling in-shell pistachios doesn’t sound appealing, use unshelled nuts or incorporate them into cooked dishes. Placencia of Nichols Farms says a pistachio crust on fish or meat is fantastic. They’re also great in ice cream, pastries, cannolis and, of course, baklava. Dozens of recipes are available on the American Pistachio Growers website.

“If you’re doing some kind of wine tasting event, marketing pistachios at that is not a bad idea,” says Placencia. “Wines, specifically reds, react in a favorable way to foods with fat in them. That’s why you typically have cheese pairings at a wine tasting. If you eat cheese then drink wine, it changes the flavor profile, because the wine and fat interact. Nuts, because they also have fat in them, interact in very much the same way. It pulls out a flavor profile that would otherwise not have been detected.”

Pistachios are also making their way into value-added products. Setton Pistachio sells five different types of naturally flavored pistachios, nuts covered in dark chocolate and Pistachio Chewy Bites. “Offering a variety of different types of pistachios gives the consumer new and innovative ways to enjoy healthy snacking,” says Setton. **pb**



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Social Versus Moral Responsibility

BY DON HARRIS

In many conversations during retail discussions there is always time spent reviewing the best way to utilize and promote the company's mission. Management often considers social responsibility as a good approach for proving concern for the welfare of an individual customer as well as the entire community. Social responsibility is looked upon as an excellent way to promote the company, and initiatives are designed to market the concerns of the customers and enhance the company's mission. Once again, "they just don't get it!"

It is not to say that the actual effort involved in developing socially responsible policies is not well intentioned, but many times these initiatives are developed to capture consumer interest and gain a marketing advantage. In many cases, management looks upon the use of social responsibility programs to highlight their operations and "say the right thing." This effort is not without merit, as it requires management to consider social issues before making important decisions. However, the fact remains that social responsibility addresses the most popular issues of the time, and this premise misses the biggest issue entirely.

The biggest issue and responsibility of our industry lies in the fact we are engaged in producing food for all consumers. This act of utilizing nature's gifts to generate a bounty of fresh produce provides us with a means to support ourselves and our families — all while providing nutritious food to a global community. Along with these benefits comes an imperative responsibility to mankind as a whole in terms of providing a basic human need. That basic need, or right, is to have enough food to live without fear.

Because we have the opportunity to work with nature and grow food, we also have the moral responsibility to feed those who cannot feed themselves. This moral responsibility to utilize the advantages we enjoy by feeding those who do not have the same advantages or access to nutritious food is inherently fair, just and equitable. Given the fact that people all over the world suffer from hunger, and do not know if they will have enough to eat this day, illustrates the scope of this moral responsibility of the produce industry.

Why is providing this basic human right a moral responsibility for the produce industry? The answer lies in the fact that our industry

proved over the years the ability to create an abundant supply of healthy and nutritious food. Our growers show the propensity to meet any challenge and overcome obstacles to provide a constant flow of fresh fruits and vegetables to consumers. This ability to harvest and utilize that production to sustain our families and ourselves endows us with the responsibility of ensuring this abundance is available to everyone. In fact, the abundance we produce for market is only a part of the overall abundance produced by our growers.

A substantial volume of product is never harvested due to market conditions or perhaps cosmetic- and weather-related defects that do not allow items to enter the marketable stream. It has been calculated by food-donation organizations that more than 45 million people in U.S. are food insecure. Food insecurity is defined as the inability to provide or secure one or more meals per day. Given this enormous need, we as an industry can utilize the abundant supply of produce that is available to help fill these gaps. There are many ways in which we can do this, and they should all be examined by our industry as a method to fulfill our moral responsibility.

This effort should be shared by all parts of our industry — including retailers, growers, shippers, restaurateurs and distributors. Together, as a united industry, we actually have the power and the means to virtually eliminate the problem of hunger in the United States and make substantial progress in other areas of the world. This overriding moral responsibility also has benefits in terms of social

responsibility by: better use of nature's abundance, eliminating waste, and promoting healthy eating to fill a basic human need. **pb**

Because we have the opportunity to work with nature and grow food, we also have the moral responsibility to feed those who cannot feed themselves.

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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Receivers: Try Cutting Expenses To Add Thousands To Bottomline

BY ALAN SIGER

At times, running a small to midsized business can feel like running an emergency room in a hospital. The business owner can have so many balls in the air at once that it is necessary for them to triage issues in perceived order of importance. Triage issues creates a focus on the big things, including customer development and satisfaction, sales growth, and major variable expenses (such as payroll, transportation, and insurance).

Leaders of small companies are often directly responsible for supervising so many different areas that they regularly neglect items perceived as insignificant, particularly on the expense side. Even larger organizations that may have a chief financial officer or someone else whose job it is to keep an eye on expenses can still miss things that affect the bottomline.

Wholesale produce companies have traditionally operated on razor-thin margins; a 1 to 2 percent net profit is considered the norm. Most entrepreneurs in trading organizations focus on growing the top line, with increasing sales the Holy Grail. Let's take Company X with \$25,000,000 in sales last year. If Company X increases its sales 10 percent this year, that's a \$2,500,000 increase in sales, but only a \$50,000 increase to the bottomline using an optimistic 2 percent net figure.

Now let's look at the other side of the ledger, where Company X's operating expenses were \$4,000,000. Any savings falls right to the bottomline, so eliminating \$50,000 of operating expenses has the same affect on the bottomline as does a \$2,500,000 growth in sales. In this case, to Company X, a little more than a 1 percent cut to operating expenses has the same affect on the bottomline as a 10 percent increase in sales.

Now that we established the money saved by cutting expenses drops right to the bottomline, here comes the hard part: How does a business owner cut expenses without affecting productivity and customer service? Where can one find additional savings after having addressed workforce size, transportation, and other major line items?

The items that often fly below the radar are the smaller repetitive charges that show on product invoices, rather than billed separately. In this case, let's consider temperature recorder charges. The current prevailing rate seems to be around \$23.50 per recorder, certainly not an amount most would notice. However, how many recorders does a given company pay for in a year? Years ago, most shippers only put temperature recorders on long-distance shipments. Today many corporate food safety policies require recorders on all shipments, regardless of the time between shipment and delivery. A truck with multiple pickups from different suppliers may arrive with several

recorders.

Company X probably receives somewhere around 3,000 shipments a year, including partial loads. If one figures that on average, two out of three trucks received have a recorder, that's \$47,000 in charges for that year in temperature recorder costs alone. So how does Company X eliminate or significantly reduce its temperature recorder costs? They simply tell their suppliers the company is no longer going to pay for the recorder if one is put on the truck.

I'm not against temperature recorders on a truck; in fact, if I were a shipper, I would never ship a load without one. The first words out of shippers' mouths when a receiver reports a condition problem on arrival are, "What are the temperatures on the recorder tape?" If there is the slightest variation in temperatures, some shippers will place blame on the carriers; the recorder tape then becomes a key piece of evidence in the shippers' claims against carriers.

A temperature recorder can often cloud the issue of whether a condition problem is the shipper's or carrier's responsibility. If there is no recorder on the truck and the load arrives with a condition problem, it's quite simple to discern whether the carrier or the shipper is at fault. If the arrival pulp temperatures on the USDA Inspection are within the acceptable range, then the claim would be directed toward the shipper. If the pulp temperatures are high, then the claim is to the carrier.

Now consider the situation when a load arrives with good pulp temperatures, but the recorder shows some high temperatures during the trip. My experience in this situation is the shipper will try to blame the trucker, the trucker will say the arrival temperatures are good, thus the problem is the shipper's, and the receiver is stuck in the middle with the damages. So why in the world would a receiver pay for a temperature recorder that in fact may hurt its ability to be made whole?

Temperature recorder fees are a nice profit center for shippers; some recorders cost shippers less than \$10. Every recorder put on a paying customer's truck is a few dollars into the shipper's pocket. Many of the mega buyers in the industry don't pay for recorders, so why should you? Without a doubt, eliminating or decreasing your annual recorder costs will have a nice effect on your bottomline. **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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Is CSR A Statement Of Intent To Articulate A New Vision Or Just Another Tick In The Box?

BY JOHN GILES, DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR, PROMAR INTERNATIONAL

What started out as a “nice to have” attribute a few years ago in EU markets has steadily become a virtually mainstream requirement. Moves to establish and report on corporate social responsibility (CSR) are driven by a combination of pressure from NGOs (non-governmental organisations) around the world, as well as support and encouragement, and at times, insistence from leading buyers in retail markets.

Both NGOs and retailers claim to be articulating a concern from consumers about the reality of modern day fruit and vegetable production, which there still appears to be a good deal of misunderstanding as to what really happens and why.

As a result, fresh produce suppliers are now required to have a battery of policies in place to deal with issues such as labour utilisation and terms, as well as conditions of employment, water management, pesticide usage, carbon foot printing, and use of power and energy. Investment in social and environmental projects is now being seen as an important part of the overall mix of factors that suppliers are judged against.

In Europe, these sorts of requirements have now become mainstream in nature. We have seen examples of this all around the world. It is no longer the sole preserve of “concerned consumers” in Western Europe and North America. Similar sentiments are being expressed by consumers in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

But what is the driver of establishing CSR for these companies, and how is it being categorised? Companies are no longer competing on a national scale. It is now truly a global market and necessary for fresh produce companies to demonstrate how they are finding solutions to international problems (e.g. food security, resource intensive production, and a growing global population).

For the horticultural and wider agri-food sector, we see investment by companies in ISO (International Standards Organisation) 26000 — Social Responsibility and specifically for the fresh produce sector, schemes such as EUREPGAP and then GLOBALGAP.

The criterion built around these policies tends to reflect on the factors set out in the table to the right.

In the past 12 months, we saw the implementation of such projects gather momentum. Just saying one has a good environmental and/or CSR policy is not good enough. Produce suppliers around the world have to be able to demonstrably prove it.

Future Challenges For CSR

CSR as an issue will not stand still, and we see the future presenting yet more challenges and opportunities for “switched on suppliers” as follows:

Scrutiny and Impact Assessment — are “grand” statements, and it will be critical to show policies are actually being implemented. But, who is asking the difficult questions, and are these bold statements being achieved? To challenge the status quo and articulate a

Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecosystems and biodiversity • Natural resource use and management • Man-made inputs • Energy use and greenhouse gas emissions • Waste management • Production practices
Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational health and safety • Employment terms and conditions • Human rights • Employee health and welfare
Local Economy/Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic viability • Sharing economic benefits with works and local economy • Social and economic rights • Business ethics • Education, ‘open days’, peer to peer support
Sustainable Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traceability • Hygienic production and handling • Quality of inputs • Quality management systems

sustainable future is an easy thing to say, but much harder to achieve in practice. With so many policies and different schemes, showing where is the independence to test CSR plans is an essential point.

Recognition and Clarity Between Schemes — with limited consistency between the vast range of policies and standards. ISO offers a formal route, but many small producers would not gain the financial returns that this investment would cost.

Cost of Implementation — in tandem with the point above, perhaps support within supply chains is necessary to reduce the cost of CSR policy development and ensure any encouragement to develop policies is tailored to the supply chain, and not generically prescribed in a “one-size-fits all” approach

CSR now offers a vehicle to engage business in wider societal issues. Increasingly, but not exclusively, companies are embedding standards and codes to promote their approach to sustainable development. At the last Internet search, well in excess of 100 policies, initiatives, codes, standards and procedures could be invested in to assist in CSR strategy. **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.

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Definitive Action & Long-Term Commitment Needed For Honeybees

BY ERIC SORENSEN

Over the past decade, I read an avalanche of lay and research articles regarding the plight of our honeybees. I applaud the interest, the concern, the theories and the efforts described, but enough of the strategies, the blunted generalized finger-pointing, assumptions, task-forces, etc. They are all good and well intentioned and moving in a positive direction, but far too slowly.

The solution(s) to solve the honeybee's demise requires strong, disciplined and accountable action. We need to rapidly implement meaningful *accountable* tactics.

When our country's economy was primarily agrarian, our honeybee was truly valued as a national treasure. Now, our honeybee is consciously and irresponsibly degraded to a "plug-in-and-leave crop pollinator" or "cash-cow" that is often put in the custody of poorly trained sub-contractors/workers who have little or no comprehension of the dynamics of the honeybee. Many honeybee "handlers" merely transport, park, unload and leave the bees with barely a thought for a water source, shade, foraging materials, or wind protection. Few tiny-tiny valuable animals — in our commercially oriented society — are so coarsely taken for granted and terribly mistreated for their profit potential.

I personally witnessed commercial flat-bedded honeybee hives parked in direct broiling sun, transported overnight near a dusty construction site, and unloaded by a busy highway — where numbers of honeybees were unnecessarily mortally reduced by passing speeding vehicles.

In short, our once national treasure has been irresponsibly degraded to a use-and-dispose commodity. In addition, hardly a shred is mentioned of tracheal mites. Those microscopic parasitic mites that decimate honeybee populations are seen in many of the current articles about honeybees.

The management, care, nourishment and profit of our national treasure should be permanently removed from any person or company that mistreats or abuses them. Honeybees are far too vulnerable, small, and profoundly defenseless to ever be placed in the care of any person who does not possess a license to manage them and their welfare. A license imparts responsibility, and responsibility generally imparts a growing understanding and comprehension for one's accountability. Each person involved in or charged with the

care of honeybees should be required to attend numerous classes on honeybees and to pass numerous tests regarding these instructional classes. Anyone who learns how honeybees work/produce is guaranteed a front-row seat into a life-changing comprehension of one of God's most miraculous creatures.

Honeybees are so vulnerable yet immensely strong. Their current decimated condition cries out for us to intensify our focus and act more responsibly. Save this miraculous creature. Licensing for all honeybee handlers — sound too strong? Then, look no further than the abusive devastation of what no licensing and no regulation caused.

What other of God's creatures can produce such a valuable product — honey — which, among other stunning physical characteristics, requires no refrigeration, and has a nearly infinite shelf-life.

The solution is mandatory education about our national treasure, and we will readily recognize a dramatic reversal of welfare from its shamefully embarrassing current state.

In summary, the continuing demise of our over-worked and irresponsibly neglected honeybee is caused by a long list of reasons. At the top of that list is abuse. There are numerous industries that should be held accountable for our honeybee's demise.

Entirely much more strict and enforced regulation must be re-instated to protect our national treasure before it is too late. Without our miraculous honeybee, there will be a lot less food and a lower quality of food available. The goals for

improving our honeybee population are: make efforts highly organized, instill country-wide discipline, collaborate, and take action.**pb**

Eric Sorensen is passionately consumed with agriculture, specifically, all facets of fresh produce — from plant research to the consumer's dinner table. A graduate of the University of Arizona, College of Agriculture, Sorensen majored in agronomic production sciences and plant physiology. With more than 30 years in crop production, plant research, and wholesale produce distribution, he takes action on challenges to manage cold chains, reduce produce shrink, train sales and operations teams, as well as improve handling and distribution systems. He is recently retired from FreshPoint/Sysco and now consults for the produce industry.

The management, care, nourishment and profit of our national treasure should be permanently removed from any person or company that mistreats or abuses them.

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Advance Customs Brokers & Consulting	97	786-476-0700	www.advancecustomsbrokers.com	New York Produce Show And Conference	19	561-994-1118	www.nyproduceshow.com
Agri-Packing Distributors, Inc.	104	520-761-3816	www.agripacking.net	North American Produce Company	121	215-525-6444	www.northamericanproduceco.com
Alpine Fresh	96	800-292-8777	www.alpinefresh.com	Pavero Cold Storage Corp.	77	800-435-2994	www.pavercoldstorage.com
Altar Produce LLC	96	760-357-6762	www.altarproduce.com	PDG Produce	107	520-281-2605	www.pdgproduce.com
Americas Food & Beverage Show	137	305-871-7910	www.americasfoodandbeverage.com	Pear Bureau Northwest	81	503-652-9720	www.usapears.org/conditioning
Apache Produce Co./ Plain Jane produce	103	520-281-2282	www.plainjaneproduce.com	Peri & Sons Farms	57	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
Apio, Inc.	11	800-454-1355	www.apioinc.com	The Perishable Specialist, Inc.	97	305-477-9906	www.theperishablespecialist.com
Appeeling Fruit	60	585-353-9331	www.appeelingfruit.com	Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association	97	817-793-3133	
Associated Potato Growers, Inc.	86	800-437-4685	www.apgpspud.com	Philabundance	123	215-339-0900	www.philabundance.org
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	97	201-807-9292	www.auerpak.com	Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market	130	215-336-3003	www.pwpm.net
Avocados From Mexico	51	517-641-2152	www.avocadosfrommexico.com	Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market	129	215-336-3003	www.pwpm.net
Ayco Farms, Inc.	96	954-788-6800	www.aycofarms.com	Piazza Produce	134	800-772-7255	www.piazzaproduce.com
B&J Produce Co.	122	956-765-0878		Pinto Brothers, Inc.	122	800-523-4047	www.pintobrothers.com
B.R.S. Produce Co.	122	956-765-0878		Pom Wonderful	9	800-380-4656	www.pomwonderful.com
Baero North America, Inc.	Floral-9	314-692-2270	www.baerousa.com	Pom Wonderful	23	800-380-4656	www.pomwonderful.com
Blue Book Services	143	630-668-3500	www.producebluebook.com	Port Everglades	69		www.porteverglades.net
Brooks Tropicals	52	800-327-4833	www.brookstropicals.com	Primavera Marketing, Inc.	77	209-931-9420	www.primaveramarketing.com
Jack Brown Produce, Inc.	74	616-887-9568	www.jackbrownproduce.com	Prime Time	32	760-399-4166	www.primetimeproduce.com
Bushwick Commission Co., Inc.	87	800-645-9470	www.bushwickpotato.com	Procacci	Floral-7	800-523-4616	www.procaccibrothers.com
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	34	515-981-5111	www.capitalcityfruit.com	Procacci Bros. Sales Corp.	117	800-523-4616	www.procaccibrothers.com
CarbAmericas	96	954-786-0000	www.carbamericas.com	Produce for Better Health Foundation	21	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Center for Produce Safety	139	530-757-5777	www.cps.ucdavis.edu	Produce Marketing Assoc.	Floral-16	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
Coast To Coast Produce Co.	25	877-836-6295	www.ctcproduce.com	Produce Marketing Association	13	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
Collotti & Sons, Inc.	124	215-389-3335		Produce Marketing Association	141	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
Collotti & Sons, Inc.	118	215-389-3335		Produce Pro Software	72	630-395-9600	www.producepro.com
Columbia Marketing International	83	509-663-1955	www.cmiapples.com	Progressive Marketing Group	97	323-890-8100	www.pmgstrategic.net
The Cranberry Network LLC	62	715-422-0410	www.thecranberrynetwork.com	ProSource Produce	87	208-926-6929	www.prosourceproduce.com
Crystal Valley Foods	96	800-359-5631	www.crystalvalleyfoods.com	Ray and Mascari, Inc.	133	317-637-0234	www.rayandmascari.com
Customized Brokers	97	305-471-8989	www.customizedbrokers.net	Rice Fruit Company	77	800-627-3359	www.ricefruit.com
Del Monte Fresh Produce	148	800-950-3683	www.freshdelmonte.com	Riveridge Produce Marketing, Inc.	75	800-968-8833	www.riveridgeproduce.com
Des Moines Truck Brokers, Inc.	72	515-981-5115	www.dmtb.com	Riveridge Produce Marketing, Inc.	77	800-968-8833	www.riveridgeproduce.com
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	818-879-6600	www.dole.com	Ryeco, Incorporated	119	215-551-8883	www.ryeco.com
dProduce Man Software	98	888-PRODMAN	www.dproduceman.com	Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella, Inc.	136	559-535-6050	www.settonfarms.com
Dulcinea Farms	27	800-495-1561	www.pacifictrellisfruit.com	Shuman Produce, Inc.	55	912-557-4477	www.realsweet.com
EarthFresh Foods	98	416-251-2271	www.earthfreshfoods.com	Sierra Seed Co.	104	520-2281-2621	www.sierraseedco.com
Fierman Produce Exchange	34	718-893-1640		Southern Specialties	97	954-784-6500	www.southernspecialties.com
Floral Business	18	561-994-1118	www.floralbusinessmagazine.com	Spice World, Inc.	48	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Florida Elite Produce	65	813-707-0075		Sun Pacific	43	213-612-9957	www.sunpacific.com
Fresh Origins, LLC	30	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com	Sun Valley Group	Floral-11	800-747-0396	www.thesunvalleygroup.com
Fresh Taste Produce Limited Canada	115	416-255-2361	www.freshtasteusa.com	Sun-Glo of Idaho	90	208-356-7346	www.sungloidaho.com
Frieda's, Inc.	29	800-421-9477	www.friedas.com	Sunlight International Sales, Inc.	41	661-792-6360	www.dulcich.com
Genpro Transportation Services, Inc.	71	800-243-6770	www.genproinc.com	Symms Fruit Ranch, Inc.	77	208-459-8064	www.symmsfruit.com
Giorgio Fresh Co.	116	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofresh.com	Ta-De Distributing Co.	107	520-281-1932	www.ta-de.com
Gourmet Trading Co.	96	310-216-7575	www.gourmettrading.net	Tambo Sur	97	954-943-1572	www.tambosur.com
Grower Alliance, LLC	106	520-761-1921	www.groweralliance.com	Target Interstate Systems, Inc.	67	800-338-2743	www.targetinterstate.com
Harris Consulting Solutions	137	269-903-7481		Tricar Sales, Inc.	105	520-281-5777	www.tricarsales.com
Hass Avocado Board	147	949-341-3250	www.hassavocadoboard.com	Triple J Produce, Inc.	92	252-205-2936	www.triplejproduce.com
Healthy Trends Produce	108	520-987-0104	www.healthytrendsproduce.com	Uesugi Farms, Inc.	65	408-842-1294	www.uesugifarms.com
Hess Brothers Fruit Co.	76	717-656-2631	www.hessbros.com	United Fresh Produce Association	44	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
Holtzinger Fruit Co., Inc.	76	509-457-5115	www.holtzingerfruit.com	United Fresh Produce Association	82	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
Indianapolis Fruit Co.	134	317-546-2425	www.indyfruit.com	The USA Bouquet Co.	Floral-3	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Interrupcion Fair Trade	31	718-417-4076	www.interrupcion.net	USA Pears	81	503-652-9720	www.usapears.org/conditioning
J & C Tropicals	5	305-255-5100	www.jctropicals.us	John Vena, Inc.	120	215-336-0766	www.johnvena.com
J-C Distributing, Inc.	109	520-281-2967		Vision Company	101	201-968-1190	www.visionproduceco.com
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	32	661-854-3156	www.kernridge.com	Vision Import Group	101	201-968-1190	www.visionproduceco.com
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	77	717-597-2112	www.keystonefruit.com	Wada Farms Marketing Group	85	208-542-2898	www.wadafarms.com
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	97	717-597-2112	www.keystonefruit.com	Western Fresh Marketing	136	559-662-0301	www.westernfreshmarketing.com
T.M. Kovacevich - Philadelphia, Inc.	113	215-336-3160	www.tmkproduce.com	Wonderful Company	7		www.helosfun.com
Lakeside Organic Gardens	33	831-761-8797	www.lakesideorganics.com	Yakima Fresh LLC	79	800-541-0394	www.yakimafresh.com
M. Levin & Co., Inc.	116	800-523-1986	www.mlevinco.com				
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	15	800-884-6266	www.veggiesmadeeasy.com				
Michigan Apple Committee	74	800-456-2753	www.michiganapples.com				
MIXTEC Group	60	626-440-7077	www.mixtec.net				
Nardella, Inc.	118	215-336-1558	www.nardellainc.com				
Naturipe Farms	45	239-591-1164	www.naturipefarms.com				
New York Apple Association, Inc.	59	585-924-2171	www.nyapplecountry.com				
New York Apple Sales, Inc.	61	518-477-7200	www.newyorkapplesales.com				



GROWN IN IDAHO

In the book, *Aristocrat in Burlap: A History of the Potato in Idaho*, authors James W. Davis and Nikki Balch Stilwell explain the early branding strategies devised by growers to showcase Idaho potatoes.

Because the state's growing season is comprised of warm days and cool nights, mountain-fed irrigation and volcanic soil, Idaho potatoes became known for their unique texture, taste and dependable performance.

At first, Idaho cornered the market for Russet Burbank potatoes, but by the 1950s, production began in Maine, Colorado, Michigan, Wisconsin, Washington and Oregon. At the time, product was being shipped in 100-pound burlap bags. During the journey to a retailer's bulk display, Idaho merchandise was repacked in small containers or mixed with other Russet Burbanks outside of Idaho inventory. By the time the potatoes got to the sales floor of a retailer, consumers had no way of telling if they were getting the Idaho potato they wanted.

In 1959, a regulation from the Idaho Advertising Commission

was directed to all companies making bags for Idaho potatoes: "all Idaho® potatoes packaged for human consumption are to be identified with the 'Grown in Idaho' trademark and also 'Packed in Idaho by . . .' was to be imprinted on the bag in appropriate-sized type," according to Davis and Stilwell.

"The prominence of the 'Grown in Idaho' seal and the [sizing] tags showed an early version of 'traceability' for where they came from," says Don Odiorne, vice president foodservice for Boise, ID-based Idaho Potato Commission (IPC). "The War Bonnet U.S. No. 1 potatoes [sack pictured to far left] packed in 100-pound burlap bags were hand-sewn shut, and loaded onto rail cars."

"Now we have 50-pound sacks, and machines with mechanical arms stack these packs of potatoes on pallets for delivery," says Travis Blacker, industry relations director for IPC, regarding the photo from the IPC archives taken in 1960s. "There is still some hand grading [as the picture shows], but a majority of scanning is done by an optical sorter that scans potatoes for blemishes or green coloring and kicks those off to a pile to be processed." **pb**

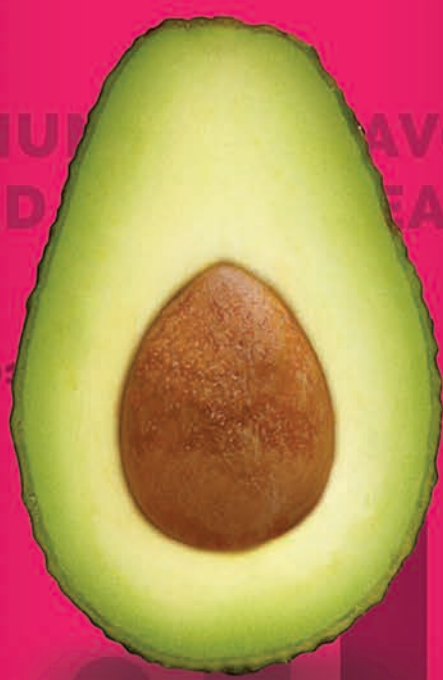
New Research Explores Effects of Moderate Fat Diets That Include Avocado
 Study Examines Avocado's Effects on CVD Risk
 Jan. 8, 2015 – A moderate fat diet that includes one fresh Hass avocado per day compared to an energy-matched diet with a low fat or a low fat diet with avocado, according to new research from the American Heart Association.

cholesterol in the blood. Avocados are a source of cardiovascular health. In the United States, heart disease is the leading cause of death. Levels with a diet that includes avocado. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend limiting saturated fat intake to less than 10 percent of total calories. The study found that the moderate fat diet with avocado significantly improved cholesterol levels, or "bad" cholesterol. The low fat diet with avocado significantly improved cholesterol levels, and the reduction was significantly greater than with the low fat diet. [1] pg. 30. Advertisers found the greatest reduction in LDL cholesterol compared to the low fat diet.

several possible explanations as to why the moderate fat diet with avocado had a greater effect on certain biomarkers than the moderate fat diet with avocado. The combination of vitamins, minerals, fiber, phytochemicals, and



NUMEROUS HEALTH BENEFITS OF AVOCADO



Nutrition Facts
 Serving Size 1/5 medium (30g/1oz)
 Servings Per Container 5

Amount Per Serving	
Calories	50
Total Fat	7g
Saturated Fat	3g
Trans Fat	0g
Potassium	4%
Total Carbohydrate	1g
Dietary Fiber	8g
Sugars	0g
Protein	0g
Vitamin A	0%
Calcium	0%
Vitamin C	4%
Iron	2%

LOVED BY THE PRESS, CONSUMERS, & ESPECIALLY YOUR BOTTOM LINE.

Fresh Hass Avocados deserve all the attention. They're already a hit with consumers, and support will only grow the category. The Hass Avocado Board is dedicated to understanding avocados' health benefits and industry trends, so we can better market to an increasingly nutrition-focused audience. Learn more about the Love One Today initiative at hassavocado.com/LOTtrade.



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