SEPTEMBER 2025 | VOL. 41 | NO. 9 | \$9.90
ANNUAL SUSTAINABILITY ISSUE

Jolunteer

PRODUCE BUSINESS

COVER STORY

Conquering food waste in

THE LAST MILE

How distributors, retailers, restaurants and charities are handling excess food one box

at a time.

SUPPLEMENT

IFPA GLOBAL BOOTH REVIEW

TRANSPORTATION

How produce is navigating new technology and sea change

PROCUREMENT

Michigan Apples New York Apples Peruvian Onions Wisconsin Potatoes

MERCHANDISING

Kiwifruit Potatoes

ORGANIC MARKETING

Bananas

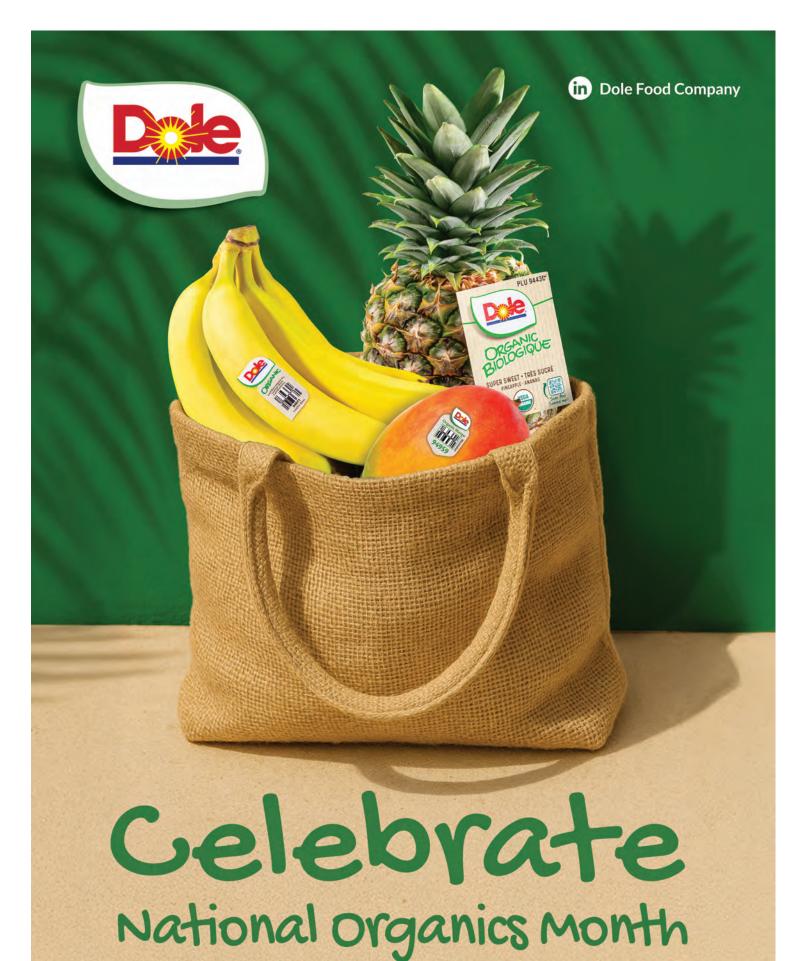
REGIONAL PROFILE

Philadelphia

RISING RETAILER

Grocery Outlet







COVER STORY

22 Conquering Food Waste in the Last Mile
It's a win for people, the planet and profits.



IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 PB QUIZ
- 6 PRODUCE WATCH
- 8 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE
 Why Essential School Supplies Should Include Fresh Produce
- **85** INFORMATION SHOWCASE
- **86 BLAST FROM THE PAST** G&R Farms Celebrates 80 Years

SPECIAL FEATURES

- 9 WHERE PASSION BECOMES ACTION Everyone in the produce industry has a story to tell a story of beginnings, or detours, or family, or growth.
- 11 IFPA GLOBAL PRODUCE & FLORAL SHOW BOOTH REVIEWS

RISING RETAILER

19 UNIVERSITY CITY GROCERY OUTLET

A pair of West Coast-trained operators bring boldness and deals to Philadelphia retail.

35 REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE: PHILADELPHIA

Young Consumers, Leaders Shaping the Future



FEATURES

29 TRANSPORTATION'S ROADMAP FOR 2026

Trucking and logistics companies lean heavily into tech to offset tariffs, labor and tight margins.

32 THE PRODUCE PACKAGING CONUNDRUM: SUSTAINABILITY VS. CONVENIENCE

Alternatives to plastic must enhance visibility, shelf life and reduce shrink.

DEPARTMENTS

MERCHANDISING

47 SIX WAYS TO GROW POTATO SALES

Retailers can boost sales with variety, displays and smart promotions.

57 SEVEN SMART STRATEGIES TO SELL MORE KIWIFRUIT

The fruit finds its sweet spot with consumers as sales climb.

PROCUREMENT

53 DON'T OVERLOOK WISCONSIN: A POTATO POWERHOUSE

The state boasts soil, water and climate ideal for production and provides easy access to US partners.

61 MOVING MICHIGAN APPLES Highlighting the varieties, flavor and diverse use boost consumer purchases.

65 NEW YORK APPLES TAKE CENTER STAGE

The Empire State apple season promises a strong harvest and sales excitement.

73 PERUVIAN ONIONS BOLSTER US MARKET

Production climbs, giving retailers access to steady, high-quality supply, and consumers the mild, sweet flavor they crave year-round.

ORGANIC MARKETING

76 MAXIMIZING ORGANIC BANANA SALES

Once a niche item, organic bananas are now a produce aisle powerhouse.

DRIED FRUITS & NUTS

80 PISTACHIOS RIDING CREST OF HEALTHY EATING WAVE

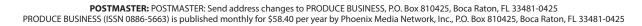
The major driver of demand globally is increasing awareness of health benefits.



COMMENTARY/LAST WORD

- **82 WHOLESALE MARKET:** How to Control Costs Without Cutting Corners
- **EUROPEAN MARKET:** Food Waste: Not Just an Environmental Issue
- **PRODUCE ON THE MENU:** Produce Needs Flavor-First Strategy





THIS MONTH'S WINNER

JENNIFER FOSTER Washington Importing Owner/Chief Financial Officer Washington, PA

Built on the slogan, "Every Ingredient Counts," Washington Imports in Washington, PA, started as a family-run business in 1932, supplying Italian specialties to Pittsburgh-area restaurants. The business continues to supply restaurants with Italian, Asian, Mexican and Indian imports, remaining a family-run business.

Jennifer Foster is proud to be part of the fourth generation to run her family's business. In 2020, the company expanded to fresh beef, chicken and produce.

When asked what a typical day looks like for her as owner and chief financial officer, she says, you can "compare it to mini fires needing to be put out. I love the demands of trying to solve problems and fulfill the needs of our customers. This is especially fulfilling because our customer base is all small, local independents."

She says her favorite thing about her career is that every day is a new adventure and challenge.

Before joining Washington Imports, Foster was an Army finance officer, accountant, and an administrator of ortho practices and surgical centers.

When she isn't working at Washington Imports, you may find her running, as she describes herself as an avid runner. She also raises chickens.

When asked what she likes most about PRODUCE BUSINESS, she says, "I love the way the magazine brings solutions to business, while making it enjoyable to read and is a great resource for connections."

As this month's winner, she will receive a \$200 Amazon gift card.

How To Win! To win the Produce Business Quiz, the first thing you must do is read through the articles and advertisements in the print or digital issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, scan and send your answers to the address listed on the coupon. If you wish to fill out the questions online, please go to: www.producebusiness.com/quiz. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our November 2025 issue of Produce Business.

WIN A \$200 AMAZON GIFT CARD

Is there anyone in the industry who wouldn't want \$200 to buy something fun on Amazon? Or better yet... pass the card on to someone in need and make the world a better place!



•	R THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE will be showcasing "New York Flavo	or at IFPA"
2) "Bite Into A Hea	althier You" is the headline for which	company's ad
3) Which company	is "Introducing The New Taste of T	ropical Indulgence"
	e e	?
4) What is the web		
,	_	?
5) Which company		VIPs at IFPA's Global Produce & Floral
		re suggested to Sell More Kiwi
o) In our merenanc	isonig review, now many otrategree as	e suggested to sentitore rawi
This is a	Developed to me	
	e was: Personally addressed to me	on
)II
City	State	Zip
	Email	
	Photocopies or scans of this form	
	wers to one of the following: (1) e	email: editor@producebusiness.com

Answer and submit your entry online at www.producebusiness.com/quiz



PRODUCE BUSINESS

Celebrating 40 Years

SEPTEMBER 2025 • VOL. 41 • NO. 9 • \$9.90

P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton • FL 33481-0425 Phone: 561-994-1118 • Fax: 561-994-1610 info@producebusiness.com

CHIEF EXECUTIVE / PUBLISHER
Ken Whitacre
KWhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

MANAGING EDITOR
Aimee Tenzek
ATenzek@phoenixmedianet.com

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
Chris Burt
CBurt@phoenixmedianet.com

EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATOR
Lori Schlossberg
LSchlossberg@phoenixmedianet.com

VICE PRESIDENT OF DIGITAL STRATEGY
James Elmer
JElmer@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION LEADER
Jackie Tucker

Jackie Tucker JTucker@phoenixmedianet.com

Contributing Writers
Carol M. Bareuther, Susan Crowell, Mike Duff,
Bob Johnson, Dorothy Noble, Sarah Klose, K. O. Morgan,
Jodean Robbins, Steven Maxwell,
Jill Netzel, Lisa White

Advertising Sales Staff
Angelica Gayon
AGayon@phoenixmedianet.com

Steve Jacobs SJacobs@phoenixmedianet.com

Joelle Stephens jstephens@phoenixmedianet.com

Zachary Kugel ZKugel@phoenixmedianet.com

New York Produce Show Management Jessie Gunn JGunn@phoenixmedianet.com

John Toner JToner@phoenixmedianet.com

Send insertion orders, payments, press releases, photos, letters to the editor, etc., to PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. BOX 810425
BOCA RATON, FL 33481-0425
PH: 561.994.1118 FAX: 561.994.1610
PRODUCE BUSINESS is published by Phoenix Media Network, Inc Ken Whitacre/CEO
P.O. BOX 810425, BOCA RATON, FL 33481-0425.

Entire contents © Copyright 2025 Phoenix Media Network, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A. Publication Agreement No. 40047928





fruitsandveggies.org

It's time for the produce industry to rally together to drive demand for fruits and veggies.

Don't miss out!











PB PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

Pear Bureau Northwest

USA Pears, Milwaukie, OR, has named Barbara Ruhs, MS, RDN, as director of nutrition affairs and communications, effective immediately.



Ruhs is a registered dietitian nutritionist and leader in retail health promotion. A successful nutrition communications consultant, she is the former nutrition marketing dietitian for Avocados From Mexico and launched a conference for retail dietitians. A trusted nutrition expert, she knows how to blend science and storytelling to build influence with dietitians, media and consumers.

FiveStar Gourmet Foods

FiveStar Gourmet Foods, Rancho Cucamonga, CA, home of Simply Fresh, appointed Liz Atlee as general counsel and chief compliance officer.

Atlee brings a background in legal affairs, ethics and compliance, most recently serving as SVP and chief ethics and compliance officer at CBRE. where she led a global program operating in over 100 countries.

In her role with FiveStar, Atlee will serve as corporate secretary to FiveStar's board of directors and reinforce its commitment to governance, regulatory excellence, and purposedriven leadership.

Other key leadership hires include Paul Harrison as senior vice president of operations, Michael Cheung as vice president of supply chain, and Danny Gutierrez as director of operations.

Harrison brings more than two decades of leadership experience in the fresh food industry. He previously held positions at Calavo Growers and Renaissance Food Group.

Cheung joins FiveStar from Bonduelle Fresh Amer-

icas. With expertise in procurement, logistics, and ERP implementation, Cheung will oversee the company's end-to-end supply chain strategy.

Gutierrez also joins from Bonduelle Fresh Americas, where he held multiple leadership positions overseeing high-volume manufacturing.

Potandon Produce

Potandon Produce LLC, Idaho Falls, ID has appointed Mike Behrendt as regional director of product procurement, based in Pendleton, IN.



In his new role at Potandon, Behrendt will lead regional procurement strategies and strengthen grower partnerships.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wakefern Food Corp. to Purchase Morton Williams



Wakefern Food Corp., Keasbey, NJ, announced it has entered into an agreement to purchase Morton Williams stores in the New York metro area. New Jersey-based Wakefern will retain the Morton Williams name.

A wholly owned subsidiary of Wakefern will operate the 17 stores in the tradition New Yorkers have come to expect, with emphasis on fresh prepared foods, produce and Wakefern's award-winning private label brands.

Morton Williams offers online shopping and operates 15 stores in Manhattan, a store in the Bronx and another in Jersey City.



Liz Atlee

Michael Cheung

Danny Gutierrez

SL Produce Puts Focus on Sustainability

SL Produce, Los Mochis, Mexico, has committed to making ongoing, substantial investments in an ambitious sustainability strategy, which it hopes will help alleviate challenging growing conditions.



With SL's home state of Sinaloa facing an unprecedented drought, the company is placing an even greater emphasis on sustainability, including new cultivation methods, and soil and varietal regeneration.

SL, which grows and markets green beans, bell peppers, American slicer cucumbers, zucchini, sweetcorn, yellow squash and gray squash under its Tenderland label, has long been an innovator in sustainability, but 2025 has seen the company further broaden its focus. This includes the expansion of a dedicated department for soil regeneration.

The company has also put in place detailed strategic plans that cover everything from the start of production through to the signing of contracts with customers, particularly in key markets such as the U.S.



Minnesota Grocers Association Recognize 2025 Award Winners

The Minnesota Grocers Association (MGA), St. Paul, MN, announced that Andrea Teal of Teal's Management in Cold Spring, MN, is the recipient of the 2025 Outstanding Grocer Award.

The MGA presented the 2025 Outstanding Vendor Award to Tom Hall, group vice president, central region, KEMPS.

The MGA also inducted Jim Almsted, owner of Almsted's Market in Crystal, MN, into the MGA Hall of Fame. This prestigious recognition celebrates Almsted's decades of outstanding service, leadership, and lasting contributions to Minnesota's food industry.

The MGA is the only state trade association that represents the food industry of Minnesota from farm to fork. It has over 300 retail, manufacturing, and wholesale members supporting nearly 1,300 locations statewide.



Akorn announces Brazil expansion

Akorn Technology, Berkeley, CA, will be expanding its presence in Brazil, enabling more Brazilian producers to take advantage of growing demand for chemical-free shelf life extension solutions for both export and domestic markets.

The application of Akorn's all-natural solutions will give more Brazilian exporters the opportunity to provide high quality, long-lasting products, free of black spots caused by mango anthracnose, as well as other common plant diseases.

The extended shelf life provided by Akorn coatings will help Brazilian producers of highly perishable crops access markets where long shipping distances have previously been a barrier. Akorn solutions have also been found to reduce food waste by over 35%.

Todd Greiner Farms Gears Up for Fall with Pumpkins and Winter Squash

Todd Greiner Farms Packing, LLC. (TGF), Hart, MI, will start its fall shipping season, offering a

full lineup of pumpkins and winter squash, starting the week of Labor Day.

Known for premium asparagus and summer sweet corn, TGF is quickly becoming a go-to source for seasonal Michigan-grown vegetables. This fall, the



company will be shipping traditional orange pump kins, white pumpkins and heirloom varieties, as well as winter squash, including acorn, spaghetti and butternut.

Bolthouse Helps Retailers Capitalize on Peak Carrot Demand This Fall

Bolthouse Fresh Foods, Bakersfield, CA, is helping retailers prepare for one of the busiest carrot consumption periods of the year,



offering a full portfolio of fresh carrot solutions to meet the seasonal surge in demand from backto-school snacking through new year wellness eating.

Bolthouse Fresh's expanded product lineup, featuring items like Game Day Snackers, Soup n' Stewin' Carrots, Party Stick Carrots, Carrot Shakers, and Side Dish Sizzlers, gives retailers new ways to engage shoppers during high-traffic

B&W Quality Growers Teams Up with Chef Salvatore Ferro

B&W Quality Growers, Fellsmere, FL, is redefining what leafy greens can do in professional kitchens with Power 4, a nutrient-rich blend of



watercress, baby spinach, baby arugula and baby green kale.

To showcase the potential of this blend, B&W collaborated with Chef Salvatore Ferro of Clyde's Restaurant Group to create a performance-forward Caesar salad recipe, featuring shaved zucchini, heirloom cherry tomatoes, anchovy conserva, Grana Padano and Power 4 as the centerpiece.

Nonna Life and Del Fresco Pure Join Forces to Celebrate **Tomato Season**

Nonna Life, a lifestyle brand that celebrates Italian Canadian culture, and Del Fresco Pure. Toronto, Ontario, a family-owned and -operated company located in the



heart of Canada's greenhouse industry, joined forces on their second brand collaboration: Hot Nonna Summer.

This campaign follows their first collaboration: an Aperitivo style event hosted by Nonna Life

during the CPMA Convention in Montreal last April.

Nonna Life and Del Fresco Pure are celebrating the recent success of their campaign, which has gained traction worldwide when its "Starter Pack" meme went viral. Launched on the first day of summer, the campaign featured limited edition "wheeled shopping carts" that were outfitted with custom patches, buttons and traditional "cornicello" filled with items featured in the starter pack, including Del Fresco Pure tomatoes, a dish towel, a wooden spoon, Pastina, ginger ale, strawberry hard candies, a visor, recipe cards and a summer playlist featuring top Italo-disco hits.

Thirty "granny carts" were hand delivered by the "Hot Nonna Summer Delivery Service," an electric VW Bus, to influencers in the food and cultural spaces, reaching over a million combined followers and over 100k interactions.

One Banana **Opens North** Carolina Distribution Center

One Banana.



Coral Gables, FL, has opened a new 19,800-squarefoot ripening and distribution center 12 miles from the Port of Wilmington, NC, to speed fresh produce to East Coast and Mid-Atlantic markets for their current banana clients as well as other distributors of fresh produce in the mid Atlantic.

The state-of-the-art facility includes seven 42-pallet ripening rooms, over 580 pallet cold storage capacity with container plug-ins, and services such as drayage, cross-docking, re-palletization, and inspections — all designed to cut dwell time, protect quality, and improve supply chain efficiency for bananas, avocados, mangos, tomatoes, pears and other fresh produce.

Melissa's Introduces **Baby Elefante Green Gold Pineapple**

Melissa's Produce, Los Angeles, CA, announces the arrival of the Baby Elefante Green Gold Pineapple, a Melissa's exclusive variety grown in Ghana. Unlike traditional pineapples, this white-fleshed, compact fruit offers a unique shape and vibrant green-gold skin.

With its naturally high Brix level, the Baby Elefante Green Gold delivers tropical sweetness without the acidity found in most pineapples. The variety features a sweet, edible core, ensuring no fruit goes to waste, and its size makes it ideal for smaller households, single servings, or gourmet presentations.

Melissa's exclusive sourcing guarantees year-round availability, making it easy for chefs, retailers, and consumers to keep this tropical treat on menus and tables without worrying about peak seasons.

California Giant Berry Farms Raises Nearly \$50,000 for Local Nonprofits

California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, raised \$49,800 at its 19th annual Skirt Steak BBQ. The event, which brought together over 1,200

community members, benefits local organiza-



The annual barbecue has grown from a small lunch for the sales team into one of California Giant Berry Farms' largest fundraising events. California Giant staff handle every detail - from pre-planning and soliciting sponsorships to cooking and serving. Every dollar raised is matched by California Giant Berry Farms' founder,

This year's event holds special significance, as it follows California Giant Berry Farms being honored as the 2024 Food Donor of the Year by Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County. The Food Bank recognized California Giant for its support since 2016, which includes a donation of over 120,000 pounds of fresh strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries last year alone.

Proceeds from this event will be distributed at the end of the year to a variety of nonprofit organizations, including CASA of Santa Cruz County, CASA of Monterey County, CASA of San Benito County, Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services, Kinship Center, Teen Kitchen Project, Pajaro Valley Loaves and Fishes, Partnership for Children, Monarch Services, and Pajaro Valley Shelter Services.

NEW PRODUCTS

Misionero Unveils **Crispy Harvest Blends**

Misionero, Gonzales, CA, introduced Crispy Harvest Blends. Available in organic or conventional, and in green or red-and-green formats, Crispy Harvest Blends are sweet,



crunchy, and packed with flavor - a standout for both foodservice and retail.

Designed for more than just salads, Crispy Harvest delivers serious crunch and unbeatable plate coverage, whether layered in sandwiches, paired with proteins, or featured as the star of an

Crispy Harvest offers what greenhouse-grown products often promise - texture, freshness and plate appeal — but does so in a more cost-effective, accessible pack style that's ideal for operators and retailers looking to scale without sacrificing quality.

Sell Anywhere with the **New Famous Software** Sales App



Access to reliable data has never been more important than in today's dynamic environment, especially in the fresh produce

industry. Famous Software's portfolio of apps gives customers reliable data on the go. The new Famous Sales App, now available for purchase, provides access to sales information, wherever users need to be.

Built on a powerful stack of technology with an Oracle database, Famous Software, Fresno, CA, has been a technology provider for fresh produce enterprises for over 50 years. PB

Why Essential School Supplies Should Include Fresh Produce

BY RICK STEIN

ack-to-school season always includes promotions of supplies, like notebooks, backpacks and lunchboxes. When it comes to filling those lunchboxes, parents and caregivers are taking a fresh look — literally — at what to put inside.

Fresh foods are increasingly taking up space in lunchboxes and snack containers taken outside the home, replacing or balancing



foods that don't fall under the better-foryou umbrella. According to *The Power* of *Produce 2025* report from FMI — The Food Industry Association, one-third of consumers say they are highly focused on making healthy and nutritious food choices.

That's an especially important goal for children, as their growing bodies and minds require important nutrients. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that nearly half of

children, 1 to 5, are not eating vegetables daily, and a third are not eating fruit on an everyday basis.

As school and fall activity seasons get underway and harvest season slows down in some parts of the country, shoppers can still find plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables at their local grocery store. Gone are the days when you could only find berries or zucchini in the mid-to-late summer months. Locally sourced produce is always popular, but year-round availability is appreciated by consumers who want to keep eating their favorite fresh foods.

While they browse the produce section for fruit and vegetables that can be packed into school lunches and enjoyed as snacks after sports practices or games, shoppers have a real bounty of choices. Giving them more options is key to boosting sales of fruits and vegetables. FMI's latest *Power of Produce* report confirms that although virtually all households buy fresh produce at least once a year, growth comes from greater spending per trips or on additional trips.

EASY DOES IT

Retailers and their grower partners can tout ready-to-eat offerings, such as pre-cut fruits and vegetables, to help consumers readily pack fresh fruits and vegetables for school or activity.

Some brands and stores even sell smaller packs that can just be tossed into a cooler or lunchbox. We know that such options are popular. According to the *Power of Produce*, 74% of shoppers buy value-added produce items "sometimes" to "always."

PUSH WHAT'S POPULAR

Leverage marketplace trends to promote fruit and vegetable items that seem to be resonating with buyers, especially young



The *Power of Produce* reveals that cucumbers and berries are having a moment. Those foods make for quick, fresh snacks for on-the-go kids (and adults) and are true palate pleasers.

consumers. *The Power of Produce* reveals cucumbers and berries are having a moment. Those foods make for quick, fresh snacks for on-the-go kids (and adults) and are true palate pleasers.

Check in with social media to keep up with other in-demand foods, since 94% of produce shoppers actively use social media. When dragon fruit was trending on social media in 2024, sales per pound spiked 22.4% over the previous year.

MAKE A DAY OF IT

Another way to keep people healthy, while also keeping produce demand healthy, is to suggest fresh produce for consumption across dayparts. The huge interest in avocado toast is proof that the produce section is ripe for breakfast sourcing.

Families can get their daily intake by adding more fruits and vegetables to morning meals, school snacks, lunches, after-school or post-activity snacks and dinner. Don't forget dessert: 38% of consumers surveyed in *The Power of Produce* said that they enjoy fruits with dessert, and 39% eat fruit as an evening snack.

Of course, the benefits of eating more fruits and vegetables aren't just for kids. Adults who are looking to add more of these products to their shopping carts and diets — including those on GLP-1 medications who are changing up their habits — can be enticed with more convenient, trending and versatile choices. Attract their attention with fresh offerings in the produce section and highlight fruits and vegetables available at other parts of the store, like grab-and-go displays near the front end or in the freezer and center sections.

Even as people settle into their autumn routines, it won't be long before the holiday season arrives and, with it, more opportunities to provide customers, including parents, with ideas for incorporating fresh produce into their diets. Inspire shoppers in every season by providing recipes and serving suggestions both in-store and across digital platforms.

Balance the classics with innovative ideas that spark surprise-and-delight moments. Seasons change, and so can the ways to connect with shoppers as they embark on something new.

Rick Stein is vice president of fresh foods at FMI — The Food Industry Association.





Everyone in the produce industry has a story to tell — a story of beginnings, or detours, or family, or growth.

And those stories are filled with passion. Your passion.

Build Next-Gen Leaders

Brian Jenny Business Development Manager B&W Quality Growers, Fellsmere, FL

I realized that the fresh produce industry was definitely going to be my destiny when I was probably in my late 20s, when I started working for Monterey Mushrooms and all the things we were trying to do to add more health and convenience to the mushroom category. About three years into my career, when I started to call on a lot of retailers and foodservice companies, I realized what's great about this industry are two trends that will never stop: eating healthy and convenience. And I think those are two things that have really enhanced our industry.

My current produce industry passion is the development of new items, and mentoring others. I'm really enjoying some new teammates at B&W. At a certain point in your career, when you're hiring people who were born after you graduated from college, being able to pass down some of the things that I've been able to learn in 25 years in this industry is rewarding. It's bringing me a lot of passion, and it's a lot of fun to see some new faces and some new people get into the business and being able to help them and teach them some of the things I've learned.

I want to mirror those who mentored me, like Dwight Ferguson, then president

of Naturipe Farms. I learned a lot from Dwight, not just how to talk to our board members, but how he handled the room with customers, and he was a great leader and has a passion for the business.

And another shout-out goes to Tony Freytag, a founding partner at Crunch Pak. Tony got me involved with United and had me help a little bit on the fresh-cut processor board. Both of these gentlemen really helped me learn a lot, not just with interacting as a leader with my team, but also interacting with customers and, in some cases, sitting in a boardroom with the owners and key stakeholders of some of the companies I've worked for.

Believe in Marketing

Alvaro Luque President and CEO Avocados from Mexico, Irving, TX

I had been a CPG guy for many, many years when I got a call that they were looking for this position at Avocados from Mexico. And at the beginning, I was a little surprised that I was called into produce. I didn't know much about produce, but once I knew about the opportunity and understood how produce works, I've been a lover of the industry ever since. It's been 11 years now, and I'm happy to be here, hopefully, for many, many, many years to come.

When I started at Avocados from Mexico, I didn't know much about the in-

dustry, and I had to deal with two big associations: the APEAM in Mexico, which includes thousands of growers and packers, and the MHAIA in the U.S., which has more than 200 importers. So, I was a little overwhelmed, thinking, "How am I going to deal with so many people?" But they had this joint executive committee of eight people who really were the ones that I reported to, four from Mexico, four from the U.S., and those guys are my mentors. I learned everything about the avocado business and about the produce business, from these eight great guys, some of them still with us on the boards. And it's eight people that I will never forget in my career.

My passion is to make everyone understand how important marketing is for produce. I think that produce is an amazing industry. We do so many things to grow, develop, transport, sell amazing fruits and veggies in the U.S.,

but I don't think that we do much to market them to the consumer. And Avocados from Mexico has been trying to do that, to bring these last pieces of the puzzle, and try to make produce believe that marketing dollars go a long way. And we've been able to create a brand. We've been able to double the Avocados from Mexico industry.

Believe in marketing, and that's my passion for every single day.



Over the past nine months, PRODUCE BUSINESS has shared many stories of Passion in Action.

We have been honored to highlight the voices in the fresh produce industry that ignite passion in others.

May we all continue to listen for those voices and share our own passion stories to build a stronger industry.







OCT. 16-18 | ANAHEIM, CA

WE BUILD THE OPPORTUNITY, YOU BRING THE POSSIBILITY.

You belong here—at the intersection of produce & floral innovation and connection.







UNLOCK AN EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE WITH OUR ALL ACCESS PASS!

The All Access Pass gets you the most out of The Global Show—premium networking, top industry insights, and exclusive events all in one package.



BOOTH REVIEW



Oct. 16-18, 2025 **Anaheim Convention Center** Anaheim, CA

BOOTH #5508

AURORA

Pico Rivera, CA

Aurora is the leading plush supplier for grocery floral, offering high quality, great value and on-trend

designs. While providing over 3,000 SKUs, we also specialize in custom products - all out of Indonesia (lower tariffs). We also have licensed items from Dr. Seuss, Peanuts and more.



BOOTH #1109 BLUE RIVER LEGACY FARMS

Elizabethtown, NC

Blue River Legacy Farms is a grower, packer, and shipper of conventional and organic blueberries for both the fresh and frozen markets. Based in Elizabethtown, NC, our farms span the Southeast with locations in Florida, Georgia and North Carolina



BOOTH #1381

CANADIAN PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION

Ottawa, ON

Stop by and sample some Canadian beers while learning about the benefits of a CPMA membership. CPMA is a not-for-profit organization whose mem-

bers are active in the market-



ing of fresh fruits and vegetables in Canada. We host Canada's largest fresh produce convention and trade show. Join us in Toronto, ON, April 28-30, 2026.

BOOTH #5704 ESSENTIAL COSTA RICA

Doral. FL

Essential Costa Rica will present sustainably grown fruits, flowers, and foliage at The Global Produce & Floral Show 2025. Visit us at Stand #857 Hall D and Booth #5704 North Hall Level 100.





BOOTH #757 AWE SUM ORGANICS Capitola, CA

Awe Sum Organics, a pioneer in the organic produce industry, proudly celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. Since its founding



in 1985, Awe Sum Organics has remained committed to sustainability, global partnerships, and bringing high-quality, certified organic grapes, organic kiwi, and organic pears to markets across North America.

BOOTH #4251 BOLTHOUSE FRESH FOODS

Bakersfield, CA

At Bolthouse Fresh Foods, carrots are our passion — rooted in quality, freshness and flavor. As North America's carrot leader, we're driving category growth through bold innovation and consumer-forward solutions. Visit us to taste what's new, explore fresh formats, and discover how we're elevating the category.



BOOTH #5948 COLOR ORCHIDS

Stevensburg, VA

Founded in 2011, Color Orchids has grown into America's largest orchid supplier, with state-of-theart greenhouses in California, Texas and Virginia.

We specialize in premium Phalaenopsis orchids, delivering beauty and quality nationwide with the reliability of a local



partner. Our promise: exceptional orchids, outstanding service, and lasting customer experiences.

BOOTH #2139 FRESH EXPRESS

Windermere. FL

author, is partnering with Fresh Express to cel-

ebrate their fresh, IFPA show in Booth #2139 to taste their latest crave-worthy creations — and don't be shy, come



BOOTH #834 BABÉ FARMS

Santa Maria, CA

Babé Farms boasts a year-round harvest of colorful baby and specialty vegetables that transform the ordinary produce aisle into a stunning visual

feast. Family-owned and -operated, Babé Farms is the "couture" label top chefs and fine retailers look to for their gourmet vegetable needs.



BOOTH #1960 CALIFORNIA ENDIVE FARMS

Rio Vista, CA

California Endive Farms (Say ON-DEEV!) invites you to our booth at the 2025 GPFS in Anaheim. Established in 1983, CEF is the largest producer of



endives in the Americas. Conventional and organic products are available year-round. Come meet and learn the story behind our versatile vegetable with a complex growing process.

BOOTH #2019 COPELAND

Boise, ID

At Copeland, innovation is more than a strategy — it's our commitment to creating a better future for our customers and the world. By leveraging advanced technologies, we address the challenges that matter most to our customers, industries, and society, delivering solutions that drive progress, sustainability and value.

COPELAND

BOOTH #1417 FRESH INNOVATIONS, LLC/ YO QUIERO! BRANDS

Rhome, TX

¡Yo Quiero! has the products that create the Ultimate Dip Destination. From guacamole, to salsa, bean dips, queso and new sour cream dips, we have the items needed to fill



your shelves with delicious, better-for-you dips that consumers crave. Come taste for yourself at Booth #1417 at IFPA in Anaheim.

Tiffani Thiessen, actor, mom and cookbook

chef-crafted salads. Join Thiessen at the say hi.

OCT. 16-18, 2025 ANAHEIM CONVENTION CENTER, ANAHEIM, CA

IFPA GLOBAL PRODUCE & FLORAL SHOW BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #1632 FRESH SOLUTIONS NETWORK

Newport Beach, CA

Fresh Solutions Network (FSN) Exclusive Suppliers of is the exclusive supplier of Side Delights potatoes and onions. This group of family-owned growers and shippers delivers insights, innovation, and tailored



fresh 🔻

network

assortments to drive category growth. FSN partners include Basin Gold Cooperative, Masser Family of Companies, Mack Farms, Michael Family Farms and NoKota Packers.

BOOTH #2273 GEM-PACK BERRIES, LLC Irvine, CA

Gem-Pack Berries, LLC is a grower-shipper with 130 seasons of berry-farming expertise. Rooted in a rich farming heritage and supported by generations of farming families, we operate in Southern and Central Coast California, Florida and Mexico. We provide a year-round supply of premium

conventional and organic strawberries, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries. Visit us to enjoy our Dubai chocolate-covered strawberries



BOOTH #4085 HITCHCOCK FARMS Salinas, CA

At Hitchcock Farms we are known for quality. For

35 years we have been committed to growing exceptional produce. Our premium quality veggies are harvested at the peak of freshness and flavor, with yearround availability. Stop by our booth to sample our fresh produce.



BOOTH #1071 IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL

Salinas. CA

Ippolito International is a fresh produce destination operating year-round from California and Arizona. A second-generation family-owned business, Ippolito International offers a robust assortment of fresh pack and value-added conventional and organic



Victoria brand. As the largest supplier of fresh Brussels sprouts in North America, Queen Victoria is bringing IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL new concepts to market.

vegetables under the Queen

BOOTH #1481 FRESKA PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL Oxnard, CA

Freska Produce International's tropical-themed booth showcases our vibrant year-round mangos, premium dried mangos and fresh avocados. With a lush island vibe, we highlight consistent quality, flavor, and supply — all year long. Stop by to taste the tropics and experience the freshness firsthand



BOOTH #4229 GLOBALG.A.P. NORTH AMERICA Portland, OR

GLOBALG.A.P. is a brand of smart farm assurance solutions developed by AGRAYA GmbH in Cologne, Germany, with cooperation from producers, retail-

ers, and other stakeholders across the food industry. These solutions include a range of certifications for safe, socially and environmentally responsible farming practices.



BOOTH #1248 HLB SPECIALTIES

Ft. Lauderdale, FL

Sweetening the World Since 1989, with tropical niche exotics like papaya, rambutan, dragon fruit, and now also drinking coconuts! We supply



top retailers and wholesalers in North America and Europe from our locations in Florida, Texas, California, Canada, and our sister company in Germany.

BOOTH #2397 JAC. VANDENBERG Tarrytown, NY

Jac. Vandenberg, a fourth-generation, family-owned fresh produce importer, is celebrating its 120th anniversary with an expansion of the SUNRAYS brand. Attendees will get a first look at

the new SUNRAYS line, enjoy the freshest juice on the floor with the CitroCasa-SUNRAYS juice station, and even walk away with some sustainable treats.



BOOTH #1129 G&R FARMS Glennville, GA

G&R Farms, celebrating 80 years as a family-owned Georgia farm, grows premium Vidalia and Peruvian sweet onions. Grown with passion, served



with pride, we champion sustainability and the next generation of agricultural leaders - cultivating crops and the future of farming. Visit us at Booth #1129.

BOOTH #3939 GREENYARD USA/ SEALD SWEET

Vero Beach, FL

We bring pure plant power to the Global Produce Show. With 115+ years of heritage and a global network, we will be featuring sweet citrus, juicy grapes, vibrant tropicals, delicious avocados, and more. From legacy to innovation, from fork to field

— experience the its freshest. Visit us at Booth #B3939.



BOOTH #1535 HOUSE FOODS HOLDING USA Garden Grove, CA

House Foods Holding USA is dedicated to supplying functional plant-based products worldwide under House Foods, Franklin Farms, El Burrito, Nature's Soy and Superior Natural brands. We're excited to debut our new Super Firm Tofu and Ready Bake Tofu product lines at the 2025 IFPA Show.



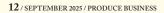
BOOTH #2531 JASA PACKAGING SOLUTIONS

Denver. NC

Discover JASA Packaging Solutions — your partner in innovative, high-speed packaging. From baggers to complete automated lines, we specialize in efficient, hygienic, and sustainable systems for produce. With



decades of experience and a global footprint, JASA delivers smart, future-proof solutions tailored to your needs. Packaging made easy.



SPONSORED CONTENT



CRUNCHTIME APPLE GROWERS SHOWCASES NEW YORK FLAVOR AT IFPA

Experience SnapDragon and RubyFrost at the New York State Ag booth.

ighlighting the exceptional flavor and quality of New York State apples, Crunch Time Apple Growers joins the New York State Department of Agriculture booth (#3247) at the upcoming IFPA Global Produce show.

"Exhibiting in the New York booth is important to us because of our pride in being a New York-based company," says Jessica Wells, executive director of Crunch Time Apple Growers in Newark, NY. "We're big believers in the power of agriculture in New York. There are so many growers who put their heart and soul into offering a wide range of products, so giving IFPA attendees just a little glimpse of what that looks like is important."

The company looks to introduce new markets to SnapDragon and RubyFrost apples, helping expand the reach into states and regions where these apples are not yet available.

"New York has an incredible climate for growing apples," says Wells. "It's really ideal. And, the research and extension support provided by Cornell University are unmatched — not too many states can say that their land-grant university is also an lvy League school. Interestingly, our headquarters county, Wayne, is the fifth largest apple-producing county in the entire U.S."

During the show, attendees can sample both apples at the Crunch Time booth. "Also, you never know what other goodies we'll offer up," says Wells. "There's sure to be some Buffalo Bills-related items since the Bills are a New York institution and SnapDragon is the Official Apple of the Buffalo Bills."

Additionally, sales partners who work directly with Crunch Time to distribute apples will be at the show to chat with retailers about getting SnapDragon and RubyFrost apples in store. "They will have examples of packaging, store displays and other tools," says Wells. "These include Fowler Farms (#3367), New York Apple Sales (#969), Hess Brothers Fruit Company (#3092), Rice Fruit Company (#2993), and Riveridge Produce Marketing (#4156).

"For New York-based shoppers, since both of our apple varieties (SnapDragon and RubyFrost) have significant production by New York growers, purchasing these apples means supporting local business," says Wells. "For shoppers outside New York state, they are assured that their apples come from a legacy of excellent, high-quality grown apples by family farmers."

As far as taste goes, Wells explains SnapDragon has a crunch and juiciness unmatched by anything else on the market right now — best reflected by sales, which were up more than 20% last season. "The crunch is so good, we call it a Monster Crunch," she says. "And it tends to be a smaller apple, so it's just right for a snack. We invite everyone at the show to visit our booth to sample these amazing apples."



OCT. 16-18, 2025 ANAHEIM CONVENTION CENTER, ANAHEIM, CA

IFPA GLOBAL PRODUCE & FLORAL SHOW BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #2883 LGS SPECIALTY **SALES**

New Rochelle, NY

LGS is celebrating 35 years of specialty solutions. We started by asking questions. We



grew by understanding your challenges. Over three decades later, we're known for having the answers. Our expertise is your edge. Celebrate 35 years of innovation, partnership, and success with us at Booth #2883.

BOOTH #1075 MISIONERO VEGETABLES

Gonzales, CA

Misionero Vegetables has grown fresh, premium produce since 1973. From crisp, washed leafy greens to flavorful organic blends, our products offer convenience, consistency, and outstanding taste. Trusted by retailers, chefs, and foodservice operators, we're committed to quality.



BOOTH #1927 NORTHERN GREENS Veile, Denmark

Northern Greens: We love herbs. Therefore. we made them liquid, so you always have organic herbs with a fresh taste Northern at hand. We chop our herbs and mix them with organic vinegar and sea



salt, providing you with the taste of fresh herbs. It is vegan, lactose- and gluten-free, with no allergens to consider.

BOOTH #1486 PINNACLE FRESH Kingsburg, CA

Sink your teeth into Dracula Citrus at the IFPA show.

Grown in Australia's top citrus regions, our wickedly healthy fruit is the most premium, bold, and flavorful available. Visit Pinnacle Fresh's booth (#1486) to discover how this eye-catching brand energizes displays and drives sales in your citrus category.



BOOTH #2861 LIPMAN FAMILY FARMS Immokalee, FI

Lipman Family Farms is North America's largest integrated network of local growers, fresh-cut processors and distributors. For more than 75



years, we've delivered delicious, safe, high-quality produce to our customers and consumers. We pride ourselves on being good stewards of fresh produce and people, and we're inspired to create growth that nourishes everyone.

BOOTH #4269 MISSION PRODUCE

Oxnard, CA

Mission Produce is a global leader delivering the World's Finest Avocados and World's Finest Mangos to 25+ countries year-round. With custom ripe programs and a full product portfolio, we are the

mango category leader. And in 2026, the World's Finest Avocados get even finer. Get a first look at Booth #4269.



BOOTH #6034 NORTHLAND FLORAL

Lincoln, Ontario

We deliver memories. We serve you with exceptional product, personalized service and dedicated delivery. We are proud producers and distributors of exceptional floral products: potted blooming, fresh cuts and bouquets, tropical foliage, and holiday

greens. Northland Floral is dedicated to providing all customers with unsurpassed service and quality.



BOOTH #2337 PRODUCE BUSINESS

Boca Raton, FL

Celebrating 40 years, Produce Business is where retail and foodservice buyers turn for information and insights on marketing, merchandising, management and procurement. Its engagement with industry leaders worldwide is extended

through sister publication, PerishableNews. com, as well as through its world-class event, The New York Produce Show & Conference.



BOOTH #2715 MATTHEWS MARKING SYSTEMS Cranberry Township, PA

We've been rooted in innovation since 1850, we help brands blossom with traceability and compliance without losing apples or dropping avocados. Our solutions are pear-fectly clean, grape-fully efficient and berry reliable. Visit Booth #2715 to dig into new products.



BOOTH #2187 NATURIPE FARMS

Estero, FL

Naturipe Farms is bringing bold flavor and innovation to this year's IFPA show! Visit our booth to explore our premium ber-



ries, an all-new interactive Innovation Center highlighting berry breeding and genetics, and meet our experienced team

BOOTH #1165 THE NUNES COMPANY, INC. Salinas, CA

The Nunes Company, Inc., will be highlighting a selection of organic and conventional fresh vegetables under the Foxy and Foxy Organic brands

along with recently integrated Fresh Leaf Farms value-added items (Arcadian Harvest. Better Burger Leaf, Simply Singles, etc.).



BOOTH #4496 PROFILE PRODUCTS Buffalo Grove. IL

Profile Products is changing the world of hydroponic growing for food production. With revolution-



ary lightweight, compressed engineered fibers, Profile has introduced a more economical, environmentally friendly alternative to Rockwool and other hydroponic growing systems. Our slabs are highly compressed to reduce shipping costs and maximize storage.

Oct. 16-18, 2025 Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA

BOOTH #3936 PROPHET

Westlake Village, CA

Prophet ERP delivers voice-enabled WMS, true MRP, mobile QA, live dimensional accounting, no-code customization, AI-powered BI, modern EDI, third-party integrations, driver app, and unified load handling with real-time costs. One system. Zero gaps. Built for fresh produce. Nothing

holds you back — with performance, precision, and power driving you forward.



BOOTH #3091 PURE FLAVOR Leamington, ON

Pure Flavor is growing something good. For over 20 years, we've grown fresh, greenhouse vegetables with great flavor, consistent quality and purpose.



Now we're unveiling a bold evolution — refreshed branding, innovative packaging, and a stronger focus on what the consumer craves. See the full reveal at Booth #3091.

BOOTH #4522 RYP LABS

Bothell, WA

Ryp Labs develops biomimicry-based postharvest solutions that extend the shelf life of fresh produce. Our flagship product, StixFresh, is a food-safe sticker coated with a food-safe proprietary formulation that slows down spoilage by reducing microbial growth and oxidation, capable of extending the shelf life of fresh produce by up to two times.

i'yp labs

BOOTH #3133 SL PRODUCE

Chandler, AZ

At SL Produce, we grow, pack, and export premium bell peppers, cucumbers, green beans, soft squash

and sweet corn. With full vertical integration and year-round availability, we deliver from our Mexican fields to U.S. tables with a focus on freshness, food safety, and service — every box handled with care and consistency.



BOOTH #2097 SUNKIST CALI MANDARINS Valencia, CA

Grown exclusively in California, Sunkist CALI Mandarins are a seasonal star designed to brighten aisles and boost sales. Our program highlights category-driving retail solutions, playful merchandising, and the Seasonal Star campaign built to engage families and spark discovery. Visitors to the

booth can also take home a little citrus joy with a mini Sunkist CALI Mandarins plush.

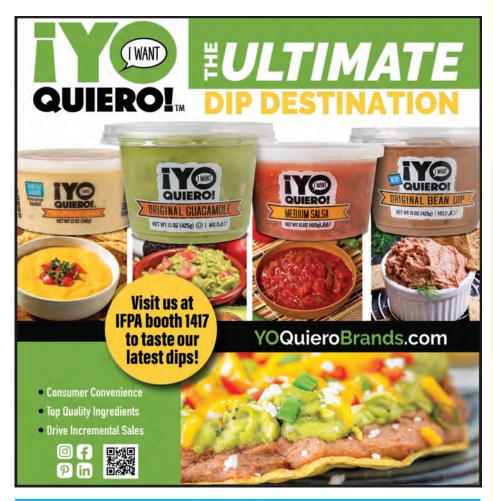


BOOTH #3039 SUNKIST Valencia, CA

Sunkist Growers represents more than 1,000 multi-generational family farms, united in celebrating California citrus season with shopper insights, the Power with The Pink Orange NBCF partnership, and merchandising solutions. Discover how grower-led programs and fresh citrus tastings inspire shoppers—and

strengthen the citrus category.







Oct. 16-18, 2025 Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA

BOOTH #4013

TIVE

Boston, MA

Tive is the global leader in supply chain and logistics visibility technology. More than 1,000 global shippers, logistics service providers, and retailers use Tive to monitor shipment location and condition in real time. Tive's cloud platform, patented sensor technology, and 24/7 live monitoring services reduce excursions and delays, minimize rejected loads, and decrease theft, damage and spoilage.

BOOTH #3033 **VOLM**

Antigo, WI

Be sure to visit Booth #3033 to see how Volm is transforming the way fresh produce is brought from the packing facility to store shelves. Volm is a leading manufacturer and distributor of fresh

produce packaging, packing equipment, and comprehensive packing facility integration, design, and engineering services.



BOOTH #6043 VYN INC

Ancaster, ON

Vyn Inc crafts premium, farm-grown dried flowers, accents and bouquets. Our expertly arranged botanicals feature natural textures

and muted tones, perfect for timeless home décor or unique gifting. With a focus on quality, Vyn offers on-trend, readymade pieces that celebrate the enduring beauty of dried floral design.



BOOTH #2529 ZGROUP

Miami Beach, FL

Revolutionize Your Postharvest Process with ZGROUP — we deliver modular cold storage, mobile forced-air cooling equipment and ripening rooms designed for efficiency and speed. Scalable, flexible, and ready to use in hours

— our containerized solutions help you preserve quality, reduce waste, and move faster from harvest to market.





Produce Section VIPs

Our crave-worthy carrot creations and fresh thinking are redefining the aisle, backed by expertise in quality and service — and our newest innovations are ready for their debut.

Come meet them at the Global Produce & Floral Show - Booth #4251.

BOLTHOUSEFRESH.COM *ĭ* (661) 616-4900

FAST ©MPANY



GLC CERRITOS INSPIRES GREATER AVOCADO SUSTAINABILITY

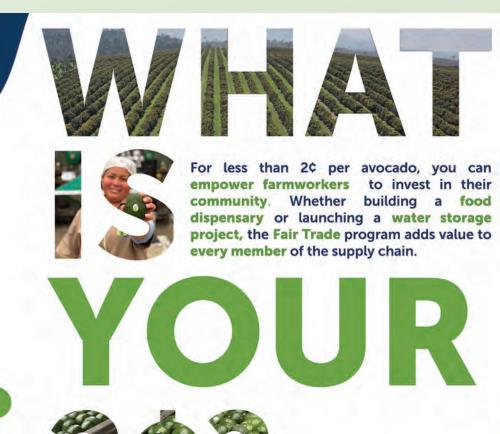


GLC Cerritos has the largest Fair Trade program in the Mexican avocado category. "We're especially enthusiastic about our '2 Cents' Campaign," says Cavaletto. "Fair Trade has a tremendous impact for very little cost to the end consumer. At the end of the day, the Fair Trade premium adds less than two cents per avocado for the final consumer, but two cents is hugely impactful at farm level. Last year, it empowered farm-

workers to evaluate multiple projects and work democratically to choose development projects with a direct positive impact where they lived, including a food dispensary for farmworkers and a water storage project."

The company also recently enrolled all of its operations with the Ethical Charter Implementation Program (ECIP). "We enrolled our farming and packing operations with the ECIP at the request of a few key U.S. retailers," says Cavaletto. "This program builds on the social responsibility commitment that we began with SMETA, SEDEX, and Fair Trade."

Productivity is another important aspect of sustainability. "Productivity gains are a win for the environment," says Cavaletto. "In the future, we will have to produce more avocados per unit of input, be it efficiencies in land, water, fertilizer or labor. For example, although we developed our fertigation program primarily to maximize production, as a result, we have been able to lower the gallons of water required to grow a pound of avocados. Our culture of continuous improvement drives efficiencies, which in turn improves sustainability. Our mission is to inspire the agribusiness sector that these projects are attainable. By doing so, we are helping to build reliable avocado sourcing for future generations."



the packing facility, and over the last year, we have added organic certification."







Jaelyn Deas, owner/operator, University City Grocery Outlet, moved to Philadelphia and started the store just over a year ago, along with her younger sister Jaida. "We wanted to create an inviting grocery store in this neighborhood."

PHOTOS COURTESY LUCAS DUARTE

University City Grocery Outlet

A pair of West Coast-trained operators bring boldness and deals to Philadelphia retail.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

he independently-owned University City Grocery Outlet in Philadelphia, PA, embraces its commitment to serve its neighborhood through great deals on quality products. "We consider ourselves to be a T.J. Maxx of sorts," says Jaelyn Deas, owner/operator. "You never know what you will find in the store. We change our opportunistic items weekly, but we carry standard need-based items. Our goals are to offer a treasure hunt experience for our customers and save them up to 70%."

Deas, along with her younger sister Jaida, moved to Philadelphia from Long Beach, CA, and started the store just over a year ago after she came to Philly for a quick project with Grocery Outlet. "We wanted to create an inviting grocery store in this neighborhood."

The 11,000 square-foot store dedicates around 1,900 square feet to produce, and produce is the first thing shoppers see when walking through the door. "We wanted an open and full department that was fresh," says Deas. "We know finding a consistent produce department in this area is tough."

BOLD MOVES

Creating high standards in produce was a priority from Day One for the store. "We know if you don't have safe, quality produce, people will not want to shop," says Deas. "We have seen our produce department grow by over 30% this year alone."

Deas credits the operation for being courageous and making changes. "We are very bold and daring in our produce department,



Seasonality, freshness, and flexibility guide the store's merchandising approach, with displays shifting based on shopping patterns.

meaning we are unafraid to try new things. We want customers to enjoy the experience and get excited, and that doesn't happen by keeping things the same. It requires some movement and a lot of planning, and we enjoy what we do."

The produce department, on average, accounts for about 15% of store sales and carries close to 300 different items on a consistent basis. "We have changed our mix based on our customers' needs and wants," says Deas. "We want to be a store that our customers shop first and always, so we take requests seriously."



The University City Grocery Outlet added eight ALCO tables to its initial set to increase variety and offer a more spread-out department. The tables focus on produce that is in season and sale items on the tables.

PHOTO COURTESY LUCAS DUARTE

The store typically brings in around 800 cases per week in produce, depending on the time of month and season. "We are a franchise model, so we do not actually do the sourcing, but we do control the distribution. Paying attention to time of year, what is coming in, and the quality of it is our focus."

FLEXIBLE MERCHANDISING

The store merchandising philosophy revolves around not being confined by square footage. "We move things around based on shopping patterns and where it makes sense for our customers to pick it up," says Deas. "Our merchandising plan is driven by season, sales turns and creating freshness. We want the department to feel cohesive and flow, but we also want to gently nudge our customers to feel compelled to walk through it."

The store added eight ALCO tables to its initial set to increase variety and offer a more spread-out department. On the tables, the focus is what produce is in season and what is offered through a promotion, says Deas. "This gives us some merchandising room without overflowing the regular space. It also gives us the opportunity to turn product faster. A great deal only matters to us once it goes through the register."

The department uses as much space as possible in its salad case and wet rack and focuses on keeping like items together. At the front of the store, a spot box highlights primarily berries or grapes. Plants and flowers are merchandised on tables and racks throughout the store.

The wet rack holds close to 100 SKUs of product. "Our wet rack is



The 11,000 square-foot Grocery Outlet store dedicates around 1,900 square feet to produce, and produce is the first thing shoppers see when walking through the door.

PHOTO COURTESY LUCAS DUARTE

the first thing shoppers see when they come into the store, so eye appeal is everything," says Deas.

"We work hard to create a department that feels full without hurting our business model and bottom line," she adds. "Produce deteriorates very quickly, so once we see any item has lost its freshness, we would rather pull it off the floor than create an unclean department."

SERVING COMMUNITY

The store caters to a unique demographic of Next-Gen and academics in University City, as well as a resilient community in West

Philadelphia. "The college students and young professionals we serve may come and go with the school year and season, but our community in West Philadelphia does not change," says Deas. "These are people who have lived here for many years, so we make a huge effort to include them as well as the younger consumers."

Though the store promotes via social media, its main strategy is community involvement. "Our



Mon - Sun: 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Hours:

model is deeply rooted in community engagement, so we lead with

Health and wellness is fundamental for the store. "We carry a huge assortment of organic, specialty, and healthy items, even outside of produce," says Deas. "It's great for business. It produces stronger margins for us, and it really moves our creativity."

Deas and her team create endcaps and displays so shoppers can grab three things and head to produce and/or meat to complete a full meal.

"We do meal picks of the week where we highlight products across the store that end up in our pantries," she says. "And I shop my own business, so I get excited working with my team to put together fun ideas we think our shoppers will want."

Serving the community also means having knowledgeable employees. "It's a blessing to have strong managers in the store," says Deas. "They have all been with me for over a year and have seen the store change. They not only can tell you where something is, they are knowledgeable about our day-to-day processes."

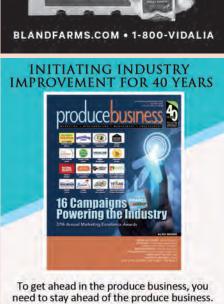
showcase onions











For subscription information, please visit www.producebusiness.com or call 561-994-1118



For three generations, integrity and humility shape our mission to serve, sustain, innovate & give back

(9) (a) (b) (b) (b) (b) (c) (c) (c) (c) (d) (d) (e) (e)



Giant Food is one of several major U.S. retailers nationwide that work with Divert, Inc., Concord, MA. The company leverages data to prevent waste, facilitates edible food recovery, and transforms unsold food products into renewable energy to power communities.

PHOTO COURTESY DIVERT

Conquering Food Waste in THE LAST MILE

Retailers turn produce shrink into a win for people, the planet and profits.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

hoppers who walk into the produce departments at Tops Friendly Markets, a 152-store chain headquartered in Williamsville, NY, will see staff culling fruit and vegetable displays to ensure the freshest produce is for sale. It's a scene that plays out in supermarkets nationwide.

But Tops customers who look closely will see that produce staff have three boxes at the bottom of their carts. One is a "donate" box for removed items, like blemished apples, which may not have eye appeal, but are perfectly good for use by organizations like food banks. Two is the "recovery" box, where items, like stalks of celery with a few bad ribs, are trimmed, cleaned, and sold in-store as fresh-cut.

Third is the box for unsellable, un-donatable, and unrecoverable produce. Everything in this category, from whole items to trimmings, gets placed in a covered refrigerated bin in the back, ready for regular pickups by the compost company.

This spring, Jeff Cady, vice president of produce and floral at Northeast Grocery Inc., the Schenectady, NY-headquartered parent company of Tops, as well as Market 32 and Price Chopper banners, which collectively operate nearly 300 supermarkets across the Northeast, bought the compost and sold it for \$5 a bag at retail locations with garden centers.

"Food waste is an important factor and is something we try to minimize," says Cady. "I would venture to say that by minimizing shrink, we're helping to reduce food waste. Shrink is a huge focus at the store level. It's something we look at from a financial perspective because it impacts profitability. If we're buying something and throwing it out, we're throwing out profitability."

Produce represents the largest food category that is wasted, everything from never being harvested to spoiling in homes, according to the 2025 ReFED U.S. Food Waste Report, published by Chicago, IL-headquartered ReFED, an online hub for data and solutions to reduce food waste in the U.S.

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING:

"Food waste, even though we donate, still counts as shrink, which for us averages 5.5% in produce. But it's not thrown out. It doesn't end up in a landfill. That's important to us and to some customers."

Jeff Cady, Northeast Grocery, Inc., Schenectady, NY

"There is a growing awareness of normalizing the consumption of produce that doesn't meet conventional cosmetic standards."

> Tamara Muruetagoiena, International Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C.



Produce represents the largest food category that is wasted, everything from never being harvested to spoiling in homes, according to the 2025 ReFED U.S. Food Waste Report, published by Chicago, IL-headquartered ReFED.

PHOTO COURTESY LEANPATH

The largest percentage of food waste in the field-to-fork supply chain is residential, totaling 35.2%. Next is farm level at 23.8%, followed by manufacturing (17.8%), foodservice (17.2%) and retail (6%).

SIX WAYS TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE AT RETAIL

Successfully minimizing produce food waste at retail requires a comprehensive soup-to-nuts approach.

"We follow the EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy to ensure we minimize all food waste," says Diane Hicks, senior vice president of operations for Giant Food, a 165-store chain based in Landover, MD. "We focus on sales first and continually check and rotate products to ensure they stay fresh. When a product does not meet our sales floor standards, but is wholesome, we donate it to our local food bank/recovery partners. If an item is inedible, we divert it through anaerobic digestion, and that is converted into renewable gas fueling homes within the grid."

1. TRAIN & INCENTIVIZE EMPLOYEES

Training retail produce employees to reduce waste encompasses everything from teaching the basics of handling fresh fruits and vegetables to understanding the reasons behind in-store practices related to food recovery and rescue.

"We provide a comprehensive training program for our employees that covers both theoretical and practical aspects of product freshness, display management and handling best practices," says Martha Hilton, vice president of produce and floral merchandising for Wegmans Food Markets, a 114-store chain headquartered in



Philabundance partners with hundreds of retail grocery locations around Philadelphia, PA, to rescue produce.

PHOTO COURTESY PHILABUNDANCE

Rochester, NY. "This ensures that the importance of freshness is consistently reinforced throughout our company."

Team members are more invested in food rescue and recycling efforts when they understand the "why," according to Natasha Tofil, environmental compliance manager with Sprouts Farmers Market, a 464-store chain based in Phoenix, AZ.

"It's not just about sorting food; it's about helping a local farmer feed their animals or restoring nutrients to the soil. When you connect the dots for them, they're fired up to do the right thing. Education is the most powerful incentive."

Preventing food waste is part of a retail culture driven from the top down.







"A key factor in our success is the investment in strong produce department leadership who actively mentor and train their teams, ensuring that members are informed and engaged in our robust suite of waste reduction and diversion initiatives," says Yvette Waters, MS, RDN, senior manager of nutrition and sustainability at the West Sacramento, CA-based The Raley's Companies.

Raley's operates 237 locations under the Raley's, Bel Air, Nob Hill Foods, Raley's O-N-E Market, Bashas', Food City, AJ's Full Circle, Farm Fresh to You and Fieldera banners.

"To support this, we have developed comprehensive onboarding and learning programs, including computer-based training (CBT) modules, to provide ongoing education for our teams."

2. DIAL-IN ORDERING & DELIVERY

Overordering is one of the most significant causes of food waste at retail, says Andrew Harig, vice president of tax, trade, sustainabil-

ity, and policy development at FMI, The Food Industry Association (FMI), in Arlington, VA.

"The challenge is that our research shows shoppers respond well to a full display rather than one half full of picked-over product," Harig notes. "At the same time, retailers must be prepared for demand spikes around holidays or events, as well as declines when customers go on vacation and shop less. It's important to strike a balance."

Data analytics are improving significantly, thanks to AI learning that helps recognize patterns, Harig adds. "While there's a certain amount of art in ordering, the analytic aspect is becoming more important."

Advanced forecasting tools are one of several food waste prevention systems implemented by the Albertsons Companies. "These optimize ordering and production," says Melissa Kral, Albertsons director of sustainability.

The Boise, ID-based retailer operates 2,270 stores under over 20

Three Ways to Reduce Produce Waste in Foodservice

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Sustainability and local sourcing ranked No. 1 in the National Restaurant Association's (NRA) *What's Hot Culinary Forecast for 2025*, reflecting consumers' big-picture priorities.

The average foodservice kitchen wastes 5 to 15% of its food purchases, according to Sam Smith, senior director of marketing for Leanpath, a Beaverton, OR-based company that offers food waste prevention technology for the foodservice industry.

1. REDUCE OVER-PREPARATION

One of the most common reasons for fresh produce food waste in foodservice is over-preparation, says Jeffrey Clark, expert exchange director of food safety and quality assurance, nutrition, and sustainability for the Washington, D.C.-headquartered NRA.

Strategies for reducing overproduction, Smith says, "include ensuring production sheets are in place and updated to address the overproduction identified and having an A, B, and C plan for every ingredient. A is the intended use for the ingredient, B is a secondary use, and C is preserving the ingredient."

2. TRIM TRIM

Training new and existing back-ofhouse employees on how to cut and peel produce to maximize yields properly takes time, thus hourly wages, says Deena Ensworth, senior content manager for the Markon Cooperative Inc., based in Salinas,



The average foodservice kitchen wastes 5 to 15% of its food purchases. Leanpath, a Beaverton, OR-based company, offers food waste prevention technology for the foodservice industry.

PHOTO COURTESY LEANPATH

CA. "This also often results in much of the commodity product being wasted and ending up in the garbage instead of being used. By skipping this step with Ready-Set-Serve items, especially for core commodities like onions, celery, and lettuces, operators can take ingredients from the bag to the pan or plate."

3. REPURPOSE WITH PURPOSE

Repurposing means turning overproduced food, like food scraps and leftovers, into new, appealing dishes, using typically wasted edible parts.

This practice was the subject of the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) Menus of Change University Research Collaborative's (MCURC) Repurpose with a Purpose project, a 12-week research sprint among 40 MCURC member institutions. Results showed that in one month, nearly \$20,000

in food costs, 21,000 gallons of water, and 545,000 tons of carbon emissions were reduced, while staff morale improved.

"Repurpose with a Purpose research uncovered a myriad of opportunities for operations of various types and sizes to incorporate repurposing in ways that best fit their needs," says Abby Fammartino, MSFS, MBA, director of health and sustainability programs and research at the CIA, in Hyde Park, NY, and co-chair for the MCURC.

"The hope is for organizations to gain inspiration and practical ways of repurposing in their kitchens," says Matthew Ward, a Culinary Institute of America graduate and executive chef of residential dining at the University of North Texas, in Denton, TX. "Minimizing waste isn't just a sustainability effort; it's a critical part of running a financially sound and creatively driven kitchen."

banners, including Albertsons, Safeway, Jewel-Osco, Randalls, United Supermarkets, Haggen, Kings Food Markets and Acme.

Some of the largest retailers in the U.S. and globally are looking upstream for solutions, recognizing that better forecasting, communication, and handling at the wholesale level can improve shrink in-store, says Stevie Shandler, director of growth and sustainability at Shapiro-Gilman-Shandler Co., in Los Angeles, CA.

"From a wholesale perspective, we help address this by sharing real-time quality updates and photos so buyers can align orders with current product conditions; offering flexible pack sizes or mixed pallets to reduce overstock; communicating clearly about product shelf life, ripeness and regional preferences; supporting ad planning with data on peak freshness and anticipated transitions; and understanding our customers' consumer base and overall needs."

Once ordered, delivery to stores can swell the potential for shrink.

"We place significant emphasis on maintaining product freshness by efficiently coordinating daily shipments to stores from our three dedicated distribution facilities," says Wegmans Food Markets' Hilton.

3. BUILD BIG, LOW-SHRINK DISPLAYS

Planning is the first key in building a profitable and sustainable display, according to Brian Dey, retail and merchandising innovation manager for Four Seasons Produce, in Ephrata, PA.

Dey says first, define what you want to promote. Is it highly perishable like berries or stone fruit? Relatively lower risk items include melons or apples, as well as commodities like mangos, avocados and bananas, which ripen while on display when exposed to warmth and ethylene.

Second, determine display size by considering product availability, price, value, quality and seasonality. Is it an ad item, a promotional opportunity, or maybe giving a new item a bit more exposure?

The easiest way to give products more presence and mass on displays, with shrink control in mind, is to utilize a false bottom or lift. In other words, "dummying up," says Dey. "Of course, it is always super important to cull and rotate for freshness, or you will most certainly incur shrink."

4. USE FRESH PRODUCE IN-HOUSE AS AN INGREDIENT

Some retailers allow their in-store chefs to shop for ingredients from the produce department.

"It sounds obvious, but many retailers

have a separate ordering system for fruits and vegetables used in their prepared foods," says FMI's Harig. "There needs to be a level of flexibility in adjusting the recipes with this, too. For example, one day there might be a little more celery in the deli chicken salad."

Ideal for this cross-department use is "imperfect" or "ugly" produce.

Retailers can merchandise these items creatively or incorporate them into value-added products, like pre-cut or blended items," says Tamara Muruetagoiena, vice president of sustainability for the Interna-

tional Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), in Washington, DC. "At the same time, chefs can use them in dishes where appearance is less critical, such as soups, sauces, smoothies and purees."

5. DONATE, DONATE

Food donation is a huge part of how supermarket retailers prevent edible food from going to waste in landfills. Wasted food is responsible for 58% of landfill methane emissions to the atmosphere, according to the October 2023-released report, Quantifying Methane Emissions from



Landfilled Food Waste, by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C.

"Through our Good Together food donation program, associates gather perishable food that is no longer saleable but still safe for consumption and donate those items to Feeding America partner food banks and other non-profit organizations," says Hannah Herring, media relations manager for Publix Super Markets, a 1,377-store chain headquartered in Lakeland, FL.

She says these items include bakery and dairy products, meat, deli and prepared foods, as well as produce. "Since 2009, we've donated more than 1 billion pounds of food through this initiative, and we continue to expand the program to ensure we are donating all the food we can safely and responsibly."

Sprouts Farmers Market has an exceptionally robust food rescue program.

"We partner with over 600 food banks and nonprofits nationwide and donated more than 35 million pounds of food last year alone," says Tofil. "Thanks to our produce team members nationwide, 50% of all Sprouts food donations are produce."

Albertsons' banners empower stores to partner with local food recovery organizations. A good example of this is the partnership between Acme Markets, a 159-store chain in Malvern, PA, and Philabundance, the largest food bank in the Philadelphia and Delaware Valley regions of Pennsylvania.

"We partner with hundreds of retail grocery locations in our service territory to rescue produce, along with several other categories, to get the food to our community partners the same day it is rescued from the store," says Lauren Webb, chief food sourcing officer for the Philadelphia, PA-based non-profit.

For produce, at least 80% of the product must be usable. If the store has a clamshell of strawberries or a 5-pound bag of apples with 20% or less of unusable product, they can donate it.

In fiscal years 2024 and 2025, the food bank rescued more than 34 million pounds of food from retail grocery locations, with almost 30% of that as produce. In addition to Acme Markets, Giant, BJ's Wholesale Club, Wegman's, Aldi, ShopRite, Target, and Walmart stores in the region also partner with Philabundance.

6. DIVERT FROM LANDFILLS

Raley's has maintained a dedicated food waste diversion program for many years. "This initiative enables us to redirect unsold produce through partnerships with food recovery organizations, anaerobic digester facilities," says Waters.

Giant Food is one of several major U.S. retailers nationwide that work with Divert, Inc. This Concord, MA-headquartered company leverages data to prevent waste, facilitate edible food recovery, and transform unsold food products into renewable energy to power communities.

"Divert bins are staged at our D.C. and transported to stores," explains Hicks. "Food that can't be sold or donated is placed in a bin to be diverted. The divert bin is meant to be the last resort. When the bins are full, they are backhauled to our D.C. and consolidated for pickup."

Divert works closely with its retail customers and their stores to implement custom prevention, diversion, and donation strategies, according to Ben Kuethe Oaks, vice president and general manager of retail.

Oaks offers an example of Divert's work with Fred Meyer Stores, a 132-store Portland, OR-based subsidiary of The Kroger Co. In 2024, the program prevented more than 5.4 million pounds of unsold food products from reaching the landfill.

Five Ways the Produce Industry Can Help Retailers Reduce Waste

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

1. Prioritize Responsible Sourcing & **Maintain Stringent Quality Assurance** Standards. "Ensuring that produce consistently meets high-quality expectations at the outset minimizes the likelihood of rejection at the retail or consumer level, thereby reducing waste before it reaches the store," says Yvette Waters, MS, RDN, senior manager of nutrition and sustainability at the West Sacramento, CA-based The Raley's Companies, which operates 237 locations under several well-known brands.

2. Offer Flexible Digitalized Ordering. Ninety percent of the fresh produce industry is offline, says Christine Moseley, founder and chief executive officer of Full Harvest, a San Francisco, CA-based B2B produce marketplace that connects commercial produce buyers, such as retailers, directly to farms nationwide to purchase all grades of produce, including surplus and imperfect produce.

"Instead of sending out quote requests

for 30 items to a dozen companies, retailers can go online and find availability from 12,000-plus suppliers. If it's direct from the farm, not sitting in a warehouse for extra days, it's fresher, and that prevents waste in-store. Food waste prevention is all about a business's efficiency and its bottom line."

3. Consider Greater Contract **Procurement.** It's all about matching supply and demand, says Jeff Cady, vice president of produce and floral at Northeast Grocery Inc., the Schenectady, NY-headquartered parent company of nearly 300 Market 32, Price Chopper, and Tops Friendly Markets.

"If you're contracting with a supplier, which means you are committing to a quantity and sharing your demand information with them. I believe if we continue to improve our information sharing, it will help farmers and the entire supply chain minimize food waste."

Contracting can also help take the highs and lows out of the business, which can also minimize waste, Cady adds.

4. Rethink Packaging. "Reducing or eliminating wax-coated cardboard — an industry standard that's hard to recycle — is essential if we're serious about achieving zero waste," says Natasha Tofil, environmental compliance manager with Sprouts Farmers Market, a 464-store chain based in Phoenix, AZ.

5. Open Supplier-Chef Conversations. When produce partners maintain open lines of communication and actively collaborate with chefs, there's significant potential to improve how shelf life and storage best practices are understood and applied, according to Matthew Ward, a Culinary Institute of America graduate and executive chef of residential dining at the University of North Texas, Denton, TX.

"This partnership can lead to fresher, longer-lasting produce at the point of service. Equally important is creating opportunities for chefs and frontline team members to visit farms and production facilities."



As the produce transportation market steadies, carriers navigate shifting rates, evolving technology, and economic uncertainty to keep fresh produce moving efficiently.

Transportation's Roadmap for 2026

Trucking and logistics companies lean heavily into tech to offset tariffs, labor and tight margins.

BY MIKE DUFF

roduce transportation has been available and at pretty good rates this summer, but what has been a soft market for drivers shows signs of an uptick.

Evidence doesn't suggest a surge in demand and rates, but at least some transportation professionals have seen a little more cost creep into the market. At the same time, outside forces are making decisions that may cause minor difficulties in produce transportation.

ROLLING STEADY

According to the American Trucking Associations' advanced seasonally adjusted For-Hire Truck Tonnage Index, general trucking activity across the United States slipped in June, as the freight market eroded during the second quarter's last two months. Truck freight tonnage decreased 0.4% after falling 0.1% in May. Year-todate, tonnage was up 0.1%, compared with 2024.

Fred Plotsky, president of Cool Runnings, Kenosha, WI, says there is an equilibrium between trucks and loads in regards to produce, subject to some seasonal variation when a growing area gets hot. Overall business for truckers has declined since the COVID-19 pandemic peak, however he says that may be changing.

"It seems like rates are coming up and equipment is about even with loads," Plotsky notes. "A lot of people turned in equipment because of lack of demand. Now it's starting to find a level, and we'll see what happens. In my opinion, I see it on the verge of picking up."

Todd Bernitt, vice president of managed solutions of Robinson Fresh, a division of C.H. Robinson, Eden Prairie, MN, says current ca-

pacity supply "is meeting demand outside of a few 'hot spots' related to traditional peak times off the West Coast row crop, grapes, etc., for this time of the year."

He adds the company's network of temperature controlled containers "ensures coverage and provides the ability for produce companies to pick and choose the best quality product, no matter the origin growing area."

Bernitt says rates remain fairly stable on committed or contract freight, with transactional rating higher toward weekends, "but outside of that, we've got capacity to fill the current demand. Unknown economic environment and unknown tariff impacts are keeping any new capacity on the sidelines for now."

Colby Varley, vice president, sales/principal, Advanced Transportation Services, Visalia, CA, says business seems to be flat. "We went through Memorial Day, Mother's Day, Easter and the Fourth of July with no major disruption in the supply chain. There is still downward pressure on the freight rates as we move into Q3. The industry seems to have less orders with more than enough capacity in the market currently."

Evan Kazan of Target Interstate, Bronx, NY, agrees, observing that there is no shortage of drivers and trucks right now, and no particular operational issue that can be disruptive and quickly drive up rates.

Still, changes in the marketplace generate changes in transportation.

"We continue to see capacity migrate to the refrigerated space, and more importantly, the produce hot spots, which is a slight offset to the surge we see during domestic produce seasons, keeping our demand and supply in relative balance," notes Bernitt. "All of that said, demand outweighs supply in surge seasons, and C.H. Robinson's vast network of produce centric carriers allows for us to outperform regardless."

BIG PICTURE

Transportation companies always keep an eye on macroeconomic developments.



After a post-pandemic slump, trucking rates are inching up as equipment and loads find balance. "Unknown economic environment and unknown tariff impacts are keeping any new capacity on the sidelines for now," says Todd Bernitt, vice president of managed solutions of Robinson Fresh, a division of C.H. Robinson, Eden Prairie, MN.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

"Produce is a global commodity and there are changes in where some items are coming from, which can shift volumes to import locations when grown in Central and South America," says Bernitt. "Produce carriers are migratory in nature and build these fluctuations into their model, as does C.H. Robinson."

On the foodservice side of the transportation sector, demand is relatively low, while, on the retail side, it's flat. Some capacity has been leaving the market, and that could have an impact when peak conditions arise, Bernitt points out, but processes and automation lately put into place can help under those circumstances.

"Carriers have shown they enjoy the ability to pick and choose the freight they haul through digital procurement," he says. "This behavior change has allowed for increased automation in the carrier's load selection process.

"Technology is something C.H. Robinson has invested significantly in. As a result of the rise in digital procurement, we have been able to widen the net of refrigerated and produce capable carriers we can engage with both digitally and through traditional means."

THE TECH ANGLE

Over the past five years, technology has been at the forefront of produce transportation, says Advanced Transportation Services' Varley. "The list is endless, but some key standouts are temperature monitoring, automated location updates, sending and receiving orders via Electronic Data Interchange and score cards."

Plotsky says Al is going to have an impact on transportation as companies use it to improve efficiency initially. However, it's a huge investment and it will take time to see comprehensive effects as companies weigh the investment against the savings. "But it's out there," he says. "People are interested."

"I still think when you have a three-pick produce load in California, you need a driver who knows how to pinwheel and knows how to take a pulp temperature and make a phone call if there's a problem," Plotsky adds. "Al will take off, but will it be worth investment?"

Kazan says that AI can only do so much, although it will be helpful in the transportation sector. "I think using it to make people better, smarter, more efficient is going to help." Some AI applications haven't yet been tuned to the realities of trucking, so a trucker who has worked for a single company for years who goes to a driver board may be poorly rated, not because the driver is bad, but because the number of companies that have hired the driver is part of the evaluation algorithm.

In some cases, contacting the companies that run Al-driven systems is difficult when problems come up with a load, and there is the fear that Al will help fraudsters get even better at gaming loads

On the flip side, as developers work bugs out of the system and people realize what is best handled by AI and what's best handled by people, results will continually improve.

Bernitt says that C.H. Robinson continues to automate tasks, such as track and trace, appointment setting, load building, and price quoting. "Years ago, a customer would send an email and wait for hours to get their freight price quotes back. Using digital tools, we're able to provide pricing to them in mere minutes."

He says they are able to leverage technology to fill the gaps

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- "Companies are on the brink of bankruptcy. Operational costs to run a trucking company are more than current market rates. Many companies are one mistake away from being out of business."
 - Colby Varley, Advanced Transportation Services, Visalia, CA
- "When you have a three-pick produce load in California, you need a driver who knows how to pinwheel and knows how to take a pulp temperature and make a phone call if there's a problem. Al will take off, but will it be worth investment?"

Fred Plotsky, Cool Runnings, Kenosha, WI

whenever there is a need for intervention. "This advancement, along with the human element, has improved our service delivery and ability to create an even stronger customer and carrier experience."

YEAR'S END

The second half of 2025 will come with some challenges, but also some opportunities.

"If fuel remains flat, and the economy starts to heat up, and interest rates are lowered, we'll see demand beginning to increase and then capacity will need to return to the market quickly, or they'll be a significant supply and demand imbalance, especially on produce freight as there will be more desirable freight for drivers and carriers to choose from," says Bernitt.

He says service will continue to be the focus. During the height of COVID, customers were happy with a truck covering their loads. Today, customers are looking for a competitively priced truck that is efficient.

"Consumers buy differently today than in decades past, which has changed certain aspects of the supply chain. Integrating tech and AI capabilities into the supply chain, while providing the customer an industry leading experience, will be our biggest advantage," says Bernitt.

Current economic uncertainties, however, come with a weight of concerns.

"I think it's too early to tell what additional challenges lie ahead in regards to Canada and Mexico," says Varley. "The current challenge is the rules of the game seem to change with abrupt notice. Yes, companies are on the brink of bankruptcy. Operational costs to run a trucking company are more than current market rates. Many companies are one mistake away from being out of business."

Varley says the challenge becomes trying to "keep our carrier partners in business through these tough times in the market. We believe the advantage is our attention to detail and providing our customer with the absolute best value possible at a competitive price point. We are also always looking to improve no matter how small. Our customers expect results."

Plotsky says as summer rolled in, he had experienced no significant impact on his business from the changing tariff impositions and negotiations.

"So far it's been a lot of talk," he says, adding a modest tariff probably wouldn't have a big effect on Cool Runnings.

LABOR AND LANGUAGE

The enhanced rules about drivers

needing to speak English has had an effect, although it's spotty. Some companies have pulled drivers from their trucks, requiring them to get English language instruction to get on the road again.

Then, enforcement hasn't been consistent. "It depends where you're at," says Plotsky who adds Wyoming is one state that is enforcing the rule. "I have heard from multiple drivers, if you can't speak English, they're putting you out of service. I don't know what the net effect of that is. I don't think it's quantifiable on my end yet."

Plotsky adds that labor is the biggest challenge produce transportation confronts in the long term because it's harder to find drivers and other workers who will put in the extra effort required to learn and perform their jobs well. With the average age of a long-haul trucker creeping up, he wonders if a new generation of drivers is out there.

"Our driver fleet, three years ago, it was 56, so it's got to be approaching 60 years old. So, pretty soon, they're going to be retiring. I don't really see the driver coming behind that," he says.





High-volume buyers of produce and floral are constantly in search of items that will differentiate their stores and restaurants from the competition. But what is truly innovative and what will disrupt consumer buying behavior?

We invite all produce and floral suppliers to send us their most innovative products of 2025. Let us know why you think this product is innovative in less than 500 words.

Our editorial team will select the Top 10 items

for recognition in our **November 2025 Cover of PRODUCE BUSINESS**.

Once the Top 10 items are announced, the produce industry at large will decide which item is the MOST INNOVATIVE PRODUCE ITEM OF 2025.

The final winner will be announced at this year's **New York Produce Show and Conference** and will be featured in our January 2026 issue of **PRODUCE BUSINESS.**

Contact for more information:

KWhitacre@ProduceBusiness.com Phone: 561-994-1118, ext 101



Fox Packaging & Fox Solutions, Pharr, TX, says limes and other citrus work best in a mesh bag that lets air flow through and helps prevent too much moisture from building up.

PHOTO COURTESY FOX PACKAGING

The Produce Packaging Conundrum: Sustainability vs. Convenience

Alternatives to plastic must enhance visibility, shelf life and reduce shrink.

BY STEVEN MAXWELL

ffective fruit and vegetable packaging is a vital component in the supply chain. From harvesting to reaching supermarket shelves, packaging is needed not just to protect produce from damage, but also to limit moisture loss, extend shelf life, and enhance product visibility and marketing information.

However, consumer and retailer pressure for more sustainable produce packaging is driving change and innovation.

According to the OECD's *Global Plastics Outlook*, published in 2022, packaging accounts for 40% of the world's plastic waste, equivalent to an estimated 353 million tons. Concern about the plastic waste problem, combined with increasing consumer awareness of the importance of sustainability, is inspiring suppliers to develop ways to house fruits and vegetables that don't compromise quality.

For Brianna Shales, marketing director at Wenatchee, WA-head-quartered apple, pear and cherry producer-shipper Stemilt Growers, good packaging needs to be able to navigate the supply chain effectively, while maintaining quality and freshness.

At the same time, Shales says consumer-friendly visibility and functionality must be factored in, along with easy adaptability for automation to ensure packing efficiency.

Sustainability concerns about packaging requires what Shales calls a "balancing act" because of the many ways packaging impacts the environment.

"Plastic offers high visibility into our fruit, which is important for consumer purchase," she says. "However, we can look at many elements of plastic packaging to improve it from an environmental standpoint. We also want to develop alternatives to plastic, and have launched a line of paper packages for apples and pears that sell on four counts instead of a fixed weight or by the pound."

Shales says the paper packages have been especially helpful for retailers to distinguish and earn the premium ring on organic apples. "Overall, we keep a close eye on what retailers are looking at from a sustainability perspective and also continue to look and test different packaging options."

DELIVERING INNOVATIONS

Located in Pharr, TX, Fox Packaging & Fox Solutions specializes in responsible packaging solutions that help extend shelf life, reduce product loss, and enhance product visibility, according to the company's digital marketing coordinator, Aileen Hernandez.

These solutions — which include mesh and durable Leno bags, ranging from 5 pounds to oversized 50 pounds — are designed "to

allow produce to breathe naturally, maintaining freshness from the field to the store," Hernandez says. They also integrate seamlessly with automatic wicketed baggers and packing equipment.

"We design our packaging to meet the specific needs of fresh produce throughout the supply chain, from preventing bruising and blemishes to extending shelf life and enhancing shelf appeal," says Hernandez. "For example, our stand-up bags and mesh combinations are engineered to hold products securely and distribute weight evenly, reducing damage during handling and transport."

Fox also offers Combo Ultra Shield, packaging designed for light-sensitive products like potatoes, which cuts light exposure by over 70% compared to standard poly bags. Fox's packaging also offers space for QR codes and tracking information.

Based in Worthington, MI, Bedford Industries manufactures produce ties and tags, as well as tag tying machinery, for a range of commodities. Recently, the company has begun offering new sizes of its ElastiTag brand, which closely mirror the size, functionality and price point of common rubber band tags.

Bedford's marketing group manager, Belinda Heidebrink, says the new sizes are designed for smaller produce bunches, such as green onions, cilantro, parsley, dill, and other herb bunches. "The newer sizes address produce growers' increased demand for U.S.-made products."

Another newer tagging option is Bedford's Tag Ties, which include two spools of material, comprising a twist tie and grower's custom-printed tag.

According to Heidebrink, Bedford's solutions help growers meet retailer requirements for traceability and barcode scanning, while "enhancing the appeal" of their produce and brand with high-quality graphics "that stay looking fresh throughout application, shipping, handling and merchandising."

'DIFFERENT BY DESIGN'

Another company combining sustainability and technology with innovation is Bradenton, FL-based 4HM Solutions. Head of sales and marketing, Chip Manuel, describes the firm as "different by design."

"We don't just follow trends, we address real gaps in the packaging and automation space. Every partnership is intentional," he says. "We work only with clients, manufacturers, and retailers who are serious about sustainability."

According to Manuel, 4HM addresses the unique needs of the fresh produce industry through a mix of both packaging and equipment solutions. In the former case, he says the company's packaging is focused on providing protection from crushing and blemishes, while at the same time helping extend product shelf life. 4HM, Manuel adds, also incorporates technology into its materials to provide improved tracking and transparency.

On the equipment side, he says the company offers automation solutions tailored to each client. This range of equipment will be expanded in the first quarter of 2026 with the launch of 4HM's new FlexMesh lines, which Manuel calls "cutting-edge Al-driven sorting technology that fills a major gap in the jumbo category for small fruit market."

CUTTING BACK ON PLASTICS

While ensuring extended shelf life and product visibility are key concerns, many packaging manufacturers have been just as active in their efforts to cut back on plastic.

According to Heidebrink, Bedford's products use less plastic than many traditional packaging items, such as overwrap and clamshells. Citing a weight comparison, Heidebrink says the company's PushTag offers a 76% plastic reduction when compared to cabbage



4HM addresses the unique needs of the fresh produce industry through a mix of both packaging and equipment solutions. It focuses on providing protection from crushing and blemishes, while at the same time helping extend product shelf life, and providing improved tracking and transparency.

PHOTO COURTESY 4HM SOLUTIONS

overwrap, while its ElastiTag reduces plastic by 68% compared to vegetables wrapped in plastic.

Bedford also operates a program that turns its tags and ties into what Heidebrink describes as "beautiful recycled plastic lumber." "Growers and consumers return our ties and tags to us by placing them in one of 250+ drop box locations or in the mail."

Bedford sorts returns for reuse, turning viable materials into PolyScape recycled plastic lumber — a sustainable alternative to wood and steel. Other usable materials may be sold to recyclers, while the rest are efficiently disposed of, Heidebrink explains. "To date, we've collected more than 226,000 pounds of returns."

Hernandez at Fox says sustainability is now just as much a focus for produce packagers as it is for the rest of the industry, adding that the company has taken steps to eliminate harmful materials from its packaging and is actively working to reduce plastic use through downgauging and material optimization.

"We've removed PFAS, also known as 'forever chemicals,' from 100% of our produce packaging," she explains. "These substances were commonly used to make packaging resistant to water, oil, and heat, but growing research shows they can leach onto food and pose health risks. By eliminating them, we're providing safer, PFAS-Free packaging that meets evolving regulations and supports both consumer safety and environmental responsibility."

"The focus is on reducing plastic without sacrificing product protection," Hernandez adds. "For fresh produce, that means using only what's necessary to keep the product safe and fresh, no excess. Across the industry, there's a growing emphasis on improving recyclability, exploring new materials, and finding solutions that make sense for each commodity."

That said, sustainable packaging must also be functional, and Hernandez says Fox invests in research to look for alternatives to paper or compostable options, where susceptibility to moisture can often make them impractical for many fresh produce items.

"The produce industry needs solutions that reduce environmental impact but still protect the product," adds Fox's sustainability manager, Iliana Csanyi. "If packaging fails and food goes to waste, we're not solving the bigger problem."

However, while the goal of cutting back on plastic is undoubtedly laudable, Shales at Stemilt says it also presents a challenge because plastic brings visibility to produce, as well as being more cost effective and efficient than many other packaging materials.

"We try to look at small changes when it comes to plastic, and all packaging," she says. "Narrowing a box or bag can reduce materials, looking at different films that may have increased ability to recycle, and understanding the recycling capabilities throughout the country are all important."

SUSTAINABILITY VERSUS CONVENIENCE

Sustainability isn't the only trend influencing the direction of the produce packaging industry, and it's easy to imagine clashes taking place with another major trend — convenience.

"People want packaging that's easy to carry, store and use, while also expecting businesses to make responsible material decisions," says Hernandez. At the same time, not all packaging works for every type of produce, she says, with different fruits and vegetables requiring different solutions to stay fresh.

An example Hernandez cites is apples, which typically work well in a poly bag that retains their moisture. On the other hand, she says limes work best in a mesh bag that lets air flow through and helps prevent too much moisture from building up.

Hernandez believes there is little doubt sustainability is driving change in fresh produce packaging, with retailers pushing for more recyclable, lower-impact packaging. "Shippers need solutions that work with their equipment, maintain product quality, and help them stay efficient," Hernandez adds. "The reality is even the most sustainable option has to function in day-to-day operations."

According to Manuel at 4HM, many of the barriers to improving sustainability — from cost and labor to automation and reliability — have finally been addressed, with pricing now more competitive, and automation more streamlined.

The result, he says, is that packaging can now offer improved fruit exposure, while at the same time including additional space for branding and messaging.

"There's now a solution available that directly addresses many

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

 "The produce industry needs solutions that reduce environmental impact but still protect the product. If packaging fails and food goes to waste, we're not solving the bigger problem."

Iliana Csanyi, Fox Packaging & Fox Solutions, Pharr, TX

"We don't just follow trends, we address real gaps in the packaging and automation space."

Chip Manuel, 4HM Solutions, Bradenton, FL



Bedford Industries, Worthington, MI, operates a program that turns its tags and ties into recycled plastic lumber. Growers and consumers return the ties and tags by placing them in one of 250+ drop box locations or in the mail. PHOTO COURTESY BEDFORD INDUSTRIES

of the longstanding concerns with sustainable packaging — cost, efficiency, automation and product visibility," Manuel says. In partnership with Italian equipment manufacturer Frutmac, 4HM has been able to implement forward-thinking packing facilities, which are gaining meaningful results.

ADDING AUTOMATION

But while sustainability and reducing plastic has taken much of the media attention, an equally important packaging trend has developed, largely away from the limelight, in the form of automation.

From a grower point of view, Shales says packaging automation is now crucial for Stemilt. "We have automation in bagging apples and pears and an automated distribution center," she says. "We are planning for more automation to come in the packing process in the future, and really don't develop a new package or box without future automation in mind."

Heidebrink at Bedford says the need for reliable automation continues to grow. For its part, Bedford has developed an automated solution for applying produce identification to fresh produce bunches in fields or packing houses.

The company's Tag Tyer, she explains, automatically applies Tag-Ties to leek and green onion bundles. Bedford is working on adding additional commodities in the future.

Hernandez at Fox describes automation as more important than ever. "Through Fox Solutions, we help packing operations improve efficiency with equipment like our FSPB2 Pouch Bagger, which we've continuously developed since 2017," she says. "This equipment reduces downtime during changeovers, meaning fewer people are needed to manage line changes, and production stays consistent, even with smaller crews.

"At the end of the day, automation isn't just about replacing workers, it's about making existing crews more productive and keeping operations running smoothly, even when staffing is tight," says Hernandez.

Philadelphia Market Profile

Young Consumers, Leaders Shaping the Future











INSIDE:

Next-Gen Impacts Philadelphia's Food Scene	page 36
Wholesalers Deliver by Understanding Consumers	page 38
Produce For All: Two successful programs providing produce	
to underserved communities	page 42
CO-OP Restaurant & Bar: This college-area restaurant presents	
an elevated dining experience	22 mag a 43

Next-Gen Impacts Philly's Food Scene

From produce to plates, younger consumers are reshaping the food world.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

he Gen Z population, born 1997 to 2012, represents a significant influence in the Philadelphia food scene. "They are the up-and-comers retailers are looking at," says Richard "R.J." Durante, co-owner of Nardella in Philadelphia, PA. "This demographic is definitely one to keep our eyes on. At the end of the day, we're influenced by the consumer, and the consumer market is moving toward the Gen Z trends."

According to U.S. Census data, Philadelphia is growing as a Gen Z city, with a net migration of 22,405 Gen Z residents in 2022.

University City Grocery Outlet: A pair of West **Coast-trained operators** bring boldness and deals to Philadelphia retail See page 19

Known as the tech-savvy generation, Gen Z is reshaping the food world through their adventurous palates, reliance on social media for food discovery. and desire for both familiar favorites and new flavors, according to a report in Supply Side Food & Beverage Journal.

"Gen Z has an influence on everything

these days," says Tracie Levin, controller at M. Levin and Company in Philadelphia, PA.

DRIVEN BY FUNCTION

Gen Z is conscious of food choices that bolster physical and mental health, with a focus on digestive and gut health, according to an online article by Toast POS. "The Gen Z population values sustainability, wellness and functional food, with interest in plant-forward diets and organic," says Durante.

These next-gen trends drive supply options. "Gen Z is seeking out fresh, traceable and plant-based items," says Phil Bartocci, general manager at Coosemans Philadelphia. "That's pushing us and our customers to prioritize local and nutrient-dense options. They also care about the story behind the product, so we make sure we share the 'why' along with the 'what."

There's a lot more conversation around functional produce, explains Casey Spencer, senior marketing coordinator at John Vena Inc. in Philadelphia, PA. "All produce is healthy, but there's been a shift toward varieties with specific health-enhancing qualities."

The younger generations follow food and health trends on social media, adds Rick Feighery, president at Procacci Brothers in Philadelphia, PA. "The 'food is medicine' trend is definitely a phenomenon that's not going to slow down."

HEALTHY RETAIL

Philly is home to a variety of urban-oriented supermarkets. The college areas include Giant Heirloom Market, Grocery Outlet, Acme, Old Nelson Food, Fresh Grocer, and a handful of smaller stores.

Grocery Outlet in the heart of University City serves young college students, working professionals, and new families among its shoppers. "During the school year, college students affect the business heavily," says Jaelyn Deas, owner/operator. "We drive the business by creating easy meals and staples in the store. As a young professional, you want easy, affordable and consistent."



According to U.S. Census data, Philadelphia is growing as a Gen Z city with a recorded net migration of 22,405 Gen Z residents in 2022. The growing Gen Z population represents a significant influence in the Philadelphia food scene. PHOTO COURTESY LUCAS DUARTE

Retail trends in Gen Z revolve around technology, as well as health. "Next-gens follow a lot of health and nutrition on social media," says Todd Penza, sales at Pinto Brothers in Philadelphia, PA. "We see different commodities gaining popularity in stores, and other commodities losing popularity as demographics change."

MORE THAN FAST FOOD

Philly's foodservice establishments cater to next-gen values, focusing on sustainability, health and freshness. The area boasts a wide variety of concepts from sophisticated restaurants, such as CO-OP, Louie Louie, La Scala, and Sabrina's Café, to trending international options, including Dim Sum House by Jane G's (Chinese), Hadramount (Yemini), Manakeesh Cafe (Lebanese), Terakawa Ramen (Japanese) and Don Barriga (Mexican).

Philadelphia also boasts high-quality, award-winning restaurants, including Vedge, White Dog Café, and Distrito.

"I've always seen our concept as timeless," says Chef Rich Landau, owner of Vedge in Philadelphia and Ground Provisions in West Chester, PA. "Our concepts are based on taking vegetables right from the garden and bringing them into the kitchen. It's not a fad, diet or a trend."

Next-gen eating habits bode well for the produce industry. "Restaurants must adjust menus to include more healthy choices," says Filindo Colace, vice president at Ryeco in Philadelphia, PA. "They'll have more healthy alternatives, and whenever you offer healthy alternatives, that helps our industry."

NEXT-GEN AT PWPM

Following the age trends in the marketplace, Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM) businesses see integration of the next generation in leadership and ownership. "We've been intentional about trying to bring in younger talent, especially in areas such as sales, marketing, and customer support," says Coosemans' Bartocci. "Produce continues to become more diverse, and we want to make sure we are a part of that forward change."

Pinto Brothers is a strong next-gen family business. "We've got Millennial and Gen Z cousins involved," says Penza. "We have multiple generations, with the third starting to take over leadership."



Wholesalers Deliver by Understanding Consumers

Philly produce suppliers carve a niche through quality and service.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

o best serve their customers, Philadelphia's regional produce suppliers ultimately look to the consumer.

"We recognize every pallet we deliver ultimately ends up on someone's plate," says Richard "RJ" Durante, co-owner of Nardella. "We take time to understand consumer preferences. In the end, it's what the consumer wants that drives what we do and helps us help our retail and foodservice customers stock what sells."

Knowing the customer's end user is when it gets fun, according to Tom Kovacevich, president of TMK Produce. "For example, we often come across new items or packaging we know our customer's end user will jump on, creating extra sales for everyone," he says. "In these cases, knowing our customer's customer gives us the confidence to bring in products outside the normal lineup, such as clamshell cherries, bagged apricots, clamshell candy grapes, and black diamond watermelons."

From a business standpoint, it's crucial to understand who the end consumer is. "Understanding the buyer and what type of organization they're purchasing for helps us determine what items will be of interest for their businesses," says Tracie Levin, controller at M. Levin and Company.

Various packages and programs at Procacci Brothers came out of listening to the buyer side, according to Rick Feighery, president. "We're in the service business, and it's all about listening to and servicing the customer."

Understanding the end consumer allows wholesalers to anticipate demand and trends, says Phil Bartocci, general manager at Coosemans Philadelphia. "This, in turn, helps our customers stock the right items at the right time."

"Whether it's health-conscious shoppers, adventurous home cooks, or restaurant diners expecting a premium experience, knowing what drives their choices allows us to guide our customers toward selections that sell and satisfy."

COLLABORATING FOR VARIETY

Following the product through consumption influences offering. "The business doesn't end at the customer, it ends when the consumer buys," says Rory Liberta, vice president of Wick & Brother. "Consumer demand affects what we carry."

Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM) offers retailers and foodservice operators an enormous assortment of products. "We act as a super wholesale store with an estimated combined inventory turn of tens of thousands of pallets a week," says Kovacevich. "That is our secret sauce to success."

One of PWPM's hallmarks is its belief that cooperation goes hand-in-hand with competition. "Our market is a classic example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts," says Mark Smith, general manager of the PWPM. "We respect each other, trade among ourselves, deliver each other's products to shared customers, and live up to our motto that 'fresh is our life's work."

Collaboration ensures availability. "If we don't have a product, we'll find it from one of our other great partners here in the market,"



Pictured (L-R): Greg Mirabelli, John Dohanicz, Joe Rossi, Stephen Levchenco, Brandon Dohanicz, Brian Beckmann and Tim Reilly of Ryeco.

PHOTO COURTESY LUCAS DUARTE

says Todd Penza, salesman with Pinto Brothers. "This allows us to fill all requests with the best product we can."

Though Ryeco carries pretty much everything, there are still items it doesn't. "There are merchants on this market who specialize in some of those unique products," says Filindo Colace, vice president of operations. "We have relationships with them so we can cover our customers' orders."

PWPM wholesalers use knowledge of consumer demand to add unique items to their mix. Coosemans works closely with foodservice operators to source unique, chef-driven items in pack sizes and freshness levels they need.

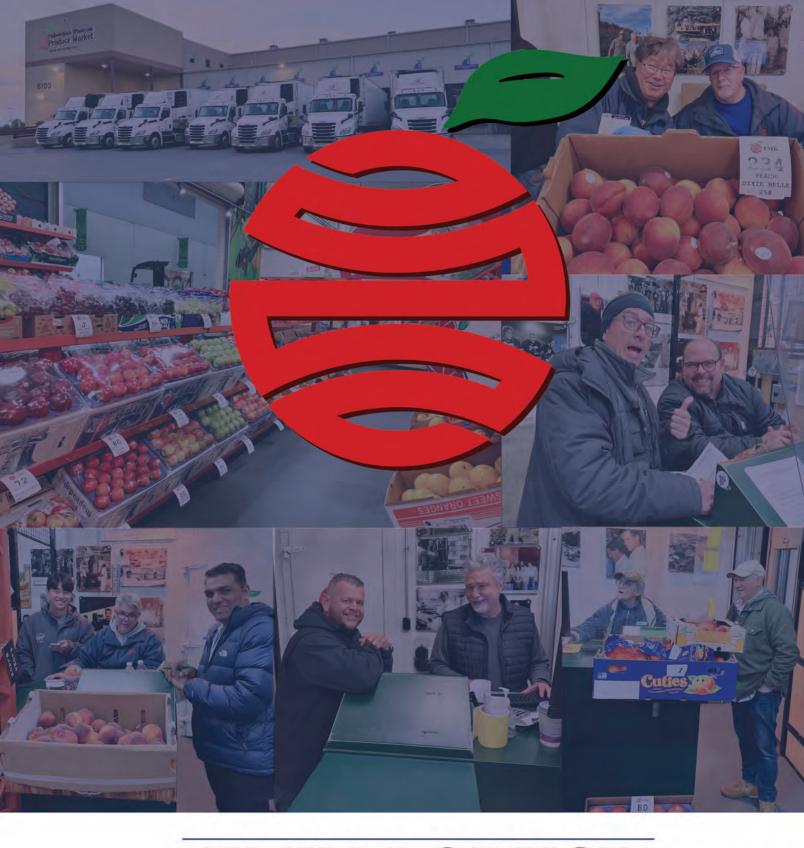
"Our team often works directly with chefs on seasonal planning or last-minute requests, which helps them stay creative and competitive," says Bartocci. "We specialize in sourcing the rare and hard-to-find, from edible flowers and microgreens to baby vegetables, tropicals, and ethnic specialty. Offering something unexpected helps our customers stand out and keeps their own audiences engaged."

Casey Spencer, senior marketing coordinator at John Vena Inc. (JVI), notes that specialty is JVI's specialty. "We have long-standing relationships with vendors who specialize in importing unique items. Some of these varieties, such as lychee and dragon fruit, are becoming more mainstream as trends take off. However, some specialties still remain more niche, and we're happy to source that piece for shoppers or diners."

PWPM recently expanded overall offering by welcoming new tenant L.A. Fresh. "They joined us in May 2025," says PWPM's Smith. "They currently operate farms in California and Mexico and also occupy space in the Los Angeles market. They bring a different mix out of Mexico, giving us an even broader selection."

QUALITY FOR CONSUMERS

PWPM excels in serving consumers through managing product quality and shelf life. "The biggest way we can help the end user is



TMK PRODUCE

Fresh produce from around the corner and around the globe

6700 Essington Ave, Units A1 - A6, B1 - B2, I9 Philadelphia, PA 19153

www.tmkproduce.com info@tmkproduce.com Phone: (215) 463-0100 Fax: (215) 463-7758 to ensure they get maximum shelf life," says Colace. "We do this by minimizing time, ordering properly and protecting it — something we do very well in this building. The whole idea is to create a flow that maximizes the customer getting the best shelf life at the end."

PWPM was designed to ensure produce quality is consistently held to the highest global standards, explains Smith. "The fact that the cold chain is kept intact from start to finish is an element many other wholesale produce markets can't promise."

It's a real benefit to have temperature control where the product never really breaks the chain, agrees Penza. "We know our product meets buyer specs at any given point," he says.

Food safety aspects of PWPM also benefit the end user. "Making sure we maintain health and traceability within the supply chain is equally important," says JVI's Spencer. "We take food safety seriously and are constantly adapting our processes to align with industry standards so we can continue to serve our customers in a safe and reliable manner."

Ensuring quality and food safety on local product is another support. "We hold our local suppliers to high food safety standards," says Colace. "We don't cut corners on that. If we have a vendor that can't give us the right documentation, then we don't offer that product. In the end, we're protecting our customer and their customer."

CUSTOMIZING FOR CUSTOMERS

Philly wholesalers provide targeted sourcing options for customers. "We have flexibility by being in the middle of the supply chain," says Wick's Liberta. "We can supply volume for wholesalers or foodservice, or we can also serve those buying smaller amounts."

The biggest advantage a customer gets from buying from a wholesale distributor over direct, according to Levin, is flexibility in purchasing. "If a customer orders too much product direct from a grower, they are stuck, whereas when purchasing from a wholesale distributor, they can cut back, or add, to their order," she says. "The turnaround time is also much quicker. And, if an order comes in with subpar quality, a wholesaler can swap it out or return it."

Nardella's Durante says the wholesale market offers a multifaceted approach. "First, flexibility," he says. "You don't like the product or price, you can return it. Next, reliability. We ensure everything aligns perfectly — the truck arrives to us on time, product gets into cold storage, it's sorted and picked correctly, and delivered on time. Finally, selection."

PWPM wholesalers support customers through relationship. "We're more than a distributor, we're a produce partner," says Bartocci. "We help our customers plan, pivot and innovate. Whether it's sourcing a hard-to-find item with 24 hours' notice, offering storage solutions, or helping a new restaurant develop its seasonal menu, we're fully invested in their success."

SHARING INFORMATION

PWPM wholesalers create value by sharing trends in the marketplace. "Being aware of what's trending with consumers helps us better serve customers," says Feighery. "For example, in summertime we always know once the beach towns start opening, everybody's going to want to fresh oranges and juice for the Orange Crush."

Durante says it's important to stay relevant, responsive, and ready for the future. "A lot of people see us as just companies who move boxes," he says. "But we don't just do that, we consult with chefs on



Pictured are Mark Levin (left) and Ryan Miller of M. Levin and Company.

PHOTO COURTESY LUCAS DUARTE

product, we provide late-night communication, we advise on start of seasons. We look at how we can align, and we use our knowledge of trends to navigate changes and have an open dialogue."

Indispensable information aids customers in making the best decisions. "We offer customers a plethora of information about the items we sell," says Levin. "Our team of produce experts keeps our customers up to date on in-season items, how to pick the best produce, growing and weather condition updates as it pertains to crops, as well as storage tips and tricks."

SERVICING CUSTOMER NEEDS

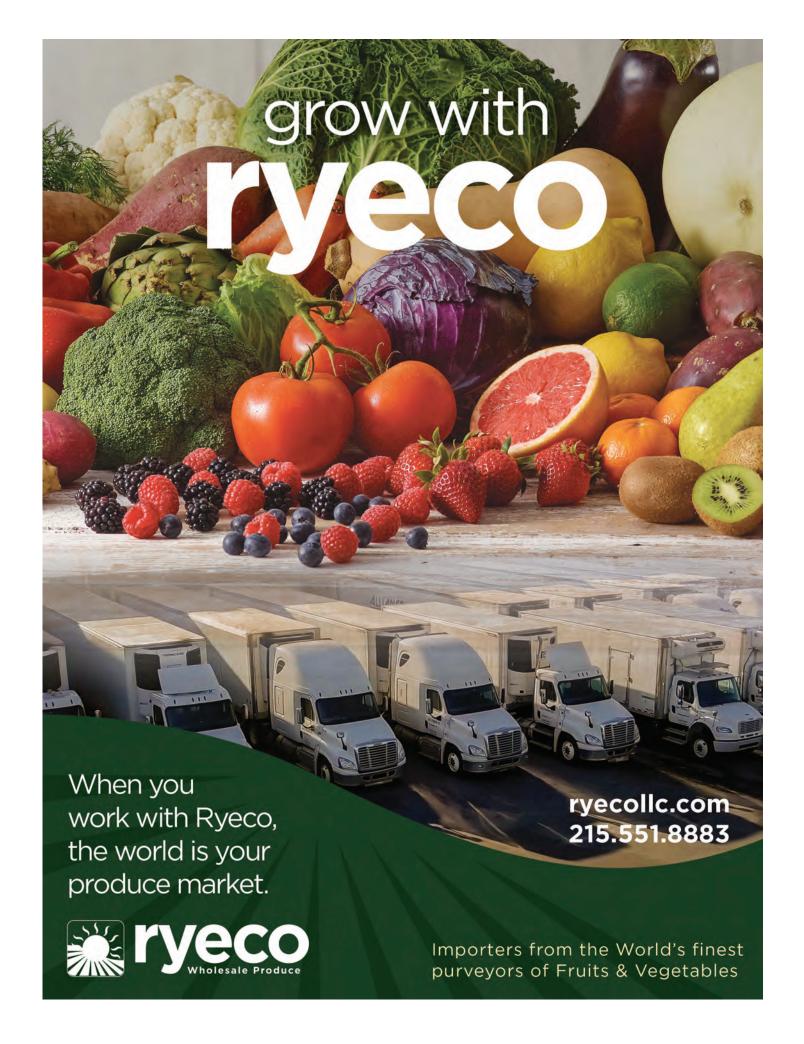
PWPM merchants offer value-added services, including ripening, repacking, special packaging and sorting, providing customized services for clients. "Programs shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all strategy," says Dan Vena, JVI director of sales and marketing. "Our ripening and repacking programs allow us to meet the specific business needs of our customers so they may better serve their customers. We also offer a slew of other services, including logistics and product support, so we can truly be there for our customers every step of the way."

Coosemans offers a range of value-added services, including local delivery, specialty sourcing, custom and specialty packaging, product information, and real-time availability updates. "These services allow our customers, whether retailers or chefs, to operate more efficiently and provide a better experience to their own customers," says Bartocci.

M. Levin is known for its customized ripening programs for customers. "We tailor programs to the individual buying entity to ensure they have optimal fruit at the correct level of ripeness for their end user buyers," says Levin. "Our ripening programs for our banana foodservice customers help them determine the correct quantity and color of bananas they need to accurately purchase for their programs."

JVI offers value-added services specific for foodservice professionals. "Our in-house packing facility allows us to offer splits and portioned packs of many of our bulk products," says Vena.

Freeing up time so clients can focus on their business is increasingly important, and delivery is playing a larger role in this. Ryeco has 30 trucks on the road every day, and forecasts an increase. "I expect to increase four to six trucks over the next six months to a year,"



says Colace. "Many of our customers are realizing it's more valuable for them to be in their facilities so they can have more control over what's going on."

Pinto Bros. offers delivery capabilities via its sister company, A. Penza Inc., including a fleet of refrigerated trucks.

EMPLOYING TECHNOLOGY

Philly merchants harness technology to benefit customers and consumers. One of JVI's social media goals is to educate consumers about specialties. "Specialty products can be new to the average consumer, and it can be intimidating to some," says Spencer. "Starting conversations about unique items gets the consumer more familiar and more willing to seek out variety on grocery store shelves or choose them off a menu."

Companies also use technology to help buyers streamline the pro-

cess. Recently, Ryeco kicked off a new phone app ordering program via Pepper. "We're freeing customer time in ordering," says Colace. "We also purchased Pepper's Al technology. So when customers send us a spreadsheet, we can take a picture of it, and it'll convert it into an order in our system. Our salesmen will have more time to work with customers, whether marketing or helping with on-site setup. That's three or four hours a day now that can be used differently."

Ryeco also employs technology via its warehouse management system. "All our warehouse employees pick orders and load them with computerized scanners," says Colace. "We have absolute traceability of our products. We're getting orders done and trucks on the road faster. It's improved our efficiency by 20%."

For one year, Ryeco has been using a technology tool to route its trucks. "By the end of this year, we expect all our trucks will have tablets, so we'll be paperless," says Colace.

In Philly, It's Produce For All

Two successful programs providing produce to underserved communities.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Philadelphia is fortunate to have two major food nonprofit organizations serving the metro area, both of which have long relationships with the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM).

Food bank Philabundance boasts deep roots in Philadelphia. "We started out in 1984 in the back of a Subaru with a vision of being able to help serve food," says Kara Ferguson, food sourcing for Philabundance. "Forty years later, we've grown exponentially. We serve food desert communities where fresh produce is just not affordable, even for those who are working. We now serve a nine-county area in Pennsylvania and New Jersey."

Sharing Excess was born in 2018 in Philadelphia when founder Evan Ehlers, while attending Drexel University, realized he had extra swipes left on his meal plan at the end of the semester. "He used these swipes to purchase food on campus, then drove around his community delivering them to anyone in need," says Victoria Wilson, operations director for Sharing Excess. "In doing this, he uncovered a hard truth: There wasn't a shortage of food, there was a shortage of access."

These two innovative organizations connect underserved consumers with produce available in the industry while also furthering education and sustainability.

"We're so gratified to be working with two organizations that help solve the maddening paradox of food waste and food insecurity," says Mark Smith, PWPM general manager.

PHILABUNDANCE

In the past year, Philabundance distributed approximately 50 million pounds of food, including 13 million pounds of produce, to its 330 community partners. It operates three warehouses in South Philly, North Philly and Roxborough.

The organization connects with companies in the food industry that have excess or rejected product. "Philadelphia is a huge produce shipping region," says Peter Groton, food industry coordinator for Philabundance's food sourcing department. "Often rejected produce is actually good produce. Companies partner with us to donate it."

Educating consumers is a unique aspect of the organization's work. "We have a newsletter and nutritionist to highlight certain items through recipes or usage," says Ferguson. "These may be unique or unfamiliar items for our clientele. For example, bok choy is something we get excited about when we get it, but people don't know how to use it."

Since everything is donated, Philabundance sometimes has to get creative with what is offered. "Our educational component allows us to say yes to unique offerings from suppliers," says Groton. "If we can provide an awesome recipe or knowledge of what to do with spaghetti squash or rutabaga, then we can take it, and people will use it."

SHARING THE EXCESS

Sharing Excess's affiliation with PWPM began in 2021 when the organization



Food bank Philabundance, Philadelphia, PA, serves food desert communities where fresh produce is not affordable. They serve a nine-county area in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

PHOTO COURTESY PHILABUNDANCE

approached the market to inquire about fresh produce donations. "We learned that many vendors had a consistent supply or unsold surplus, and we pitched a threemonth pilot to build a solution capturing food donations on site," says Wilson.

"Our now fully functioning on-site food rescue operation has captured over 25 million pounds of fresh produce and distributed it to more than 400 hunger relief organizations throughout Philadelphia."

The organization established an on-site team to sort and glean through food donations five days a week, operating out of one of PWPM's bays. It has helped cut PWPM's overall waste by more than 50%.





Merguez Spiced Rack of Lamb is served on a smooth bed of white bean ragout and flanked by leeks, fava beans, cherry PHOTO COURTESY LUCAS DUARTE tomatoes and mint, along with lime yogurt sauce.

Produce Shines at CO-OP Restaurant & Bar

This college-area restaurant in Philly presents elevated dining experience.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

estled on a busy corner between Drexel and Penn universities sits the CO-OP Restaurant and Bar. The stylish 150-seat restaurant, housed in The Study hotel, opened in 2016 and serves elevated Mid-Atlantic cuisine.

"We are a community-based restaurant and focus on sourcing and utilizing ingredients in a responsible manner, while catering to a wide array of experiences," says Executive Chef Daniel Berret. "Through fresh produce, we aim to create a menu that exceeds expectations and satisfies all who visit. I enjoy using local ingredients from Pennsylvania and New Jersey in creative ways."

The restaurant offers breakfast, lunch, dinner, brunch and bar bites. In addition to the standard menu, CO-OP also has a special "Drexel Provisions" lunch menu targeted to college students and staff. Diners have a choice of two items from a limited menu, which is available for dine-in or take-out.

PIVOTAL PRODUCE

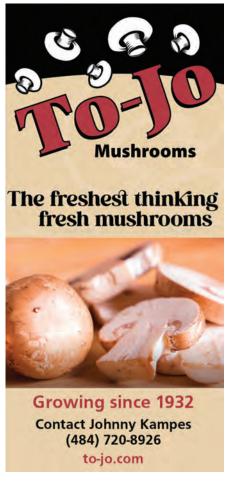
Produce plays a crucial role in the restaurant and accounts for about 60% of the menu. "Produce is critically important for promoting creativity in the menu, adding vibrancy and life to dishes, and existing as the foundation for each concept," says Berret. "We use a wide variety of produce across four different meal periods in a seven-day operation."

The menu changes seasonally, typically four to five times per year. "Changes are basically all centered around produce and determining what is at peak seasonally," says Berret. "For example, we have a Summer Farm Salad with New Jersey watermelon and heirloom tomatoes sourced from Lancaster County. Our Sweet Corn Rigatoni features New Jersey bicolor corn sauce, heirloom tomatoes and fennel."

The restaurant spends about \$1,500 to \$3,000 on produce per week. "Our focus is to buy seasonal and local and highlight exceptional product, while limiting waste," says Berret.

Produce is ordered every day through



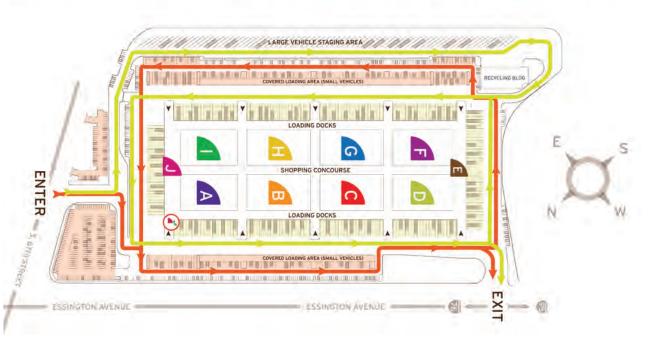




Merchant Directory

Manager's Office: 215-336-3003

	COMPANY NAME	UNIT#	EMAIL	PHONE	FAX
	B.R.S. Produce	D-2 to D-3	brs@orbisinternet.com	215-336-5454	215-336-5220
	Collotti & Sons	I-7 to I-8	info@collotti.com	215-389-3335	215-755-9616
	Colonial Produce	B-6 to B-8	colonialproduce@comcast.net	215-748-6650	215-748-0945
	Coosemans Philadelphia	A-7 to A-9	office@coosemansphilly.com	215-334-3634	215-334-3636
	E.W. Kean Co.	G-1 to G-2, D-1, D-4	sales@ewkean.com	215-336-2321	215-336-1596
	G & G Produce, Inc.	H-8 to H-9	gandgproduce@gmail.com	215-336-9922	215-336-9925
	Garden State Farms, LLC	I-3 to I-6	gardenstatefarms@procaccibrothers.com	215-334-1400	215-339-0974
	John Vena Inc.	F-1 to F-9	info@johnvenaproduce.com	215-336-0766	215-336-2812
	Kaleck Brothers, Inc.	B-5	kaleckbro@orbisinternet.com	215-336-3027	215-551-1083
	Klinghoffer Bros.	C-8 to C-9	fadiabi@yahoo.com	215-336-3800	215-336-5234
	LA Fresh International Inc.	D-9	donhadi@icloud.com	805-689-8070	N/A
	M. Levin & Company, Inc.	H-2 to H-7	info@mlevinco.com	215-336-2900	215-755-6757
	Nardella, Inc.	G-4 to G-6	info@nardella.com	215-336-1558	215-336-5757
	North American Produce Co.	I-1 to I-2	natalie@northamericanproduceco.com	215-525-6444	855-278-5797
	Paterson Produce	B-4	marc@patersonpickle.com	215-330-4020	215-376-5585
	Pinto Brothers, Inc.	G-7 to G-9, C-2	info@pintobrothers.com	215-336-3015	215-336-5422
	Produce Interchange	B-3	produceinterchange@verizon.net	215-389-1782	215-389-0288
\equiv	Ryeco, LLC	C-3 to C-7, D-5 to D-6	info@ryecollc.com	215-551-8883	215-551-9036
	T. M. Kovacevich Philadelphia, Inc	A-1 to A-6, B-1 to B-2, I-9	info@tmkproduce.com	215-463-0100	267-790-0442
	USDA AMS Specialty Crops	C-2 (Rear)	bruce.hildreth@usda.gov	215-336-0845	215-336-2051
	Wick & Brother, Inc.	G-3	wickbro001@aol.com	215-336-2252	215-336-2255





Entrance Detail



Giordano's Garden Grocer online or over the phone. The restaurant also uses Baldor's online ordering system. "Being able to receive the item on a consistent basis is important," says Berrett. "We need availability of an item for two to three months versus only a week. It must make sense not only to the dish, but for the sustainability of the volume needed throughout service."

VARIED AND VIBRANT

The sleek, modern space promises more than just average food and doesn't disappoint, serving up a bounty of beautiful, flavor-packed dishes. For the menu's Shareables, guests choose among a host of fresh options. The lush and buttery Focaccia Tomato Pie is Chef Berret's take on a Philly classic, with a fresh-made garlic focaccia, marinated tomatoes, fresh basil and Parmesan cheese.

The savory Wild Mushroom Toast spotlights Kennett Square mushrooms with Birchrun Hills fromage blanc. Blistered Shishito Peppers arrive with a lemon vinaigrette and kosho mayo. Delectable Sweet Corn Fritters are served



The lush and buttery Focaccia Tomato Pie is Chef Daniel Berret's take on a Philly classic, with a fresh-made garlic focaccia, marinated tomatoes, fresh basil and Parmesan cheese PHOTO COURTESY LUCAS DUARTE

INSIDE THE RESTAURANT

Berries,

Avocadoes

Microgreens

Beans AND MORE.

CO-OP Restaurant & Bar

20 S. 33rd St. Philadelphia, PA 19104 Tel: 215-398-1874 Web: coopphilly.com Hours: All Day Menu: 7 a.m.-2 p.m. (Monday through Friday) Bar Menu: 2-4 p.m. (Daily)

Dinner: 4-10 p.m. (Daily) Weekend Brunch: 7 a.m.-2 p.m.

(Saturday & Sunday)

on a bed of arugula with baby radish slices, jalapeño ranch and peach honey.

Soups and Salads highlight fresh, as well, offering homemade Tomato Bisque or a Rustic Chicken Noodle incorporating root vegetables. The Gem Caesar Salad moves beyond the typical to blend gem lettuce, shaved Brussels sprouts and dill pickles. A Summer Farm Salad features juicy heirloom tomatoes, watermelon, baby arugula, basil,

sunflower seeds and feta with roasted tomato vinaigrette.

Pastas and Mains list a wide variety of options. Highlights include the Ricotta Gnocchi Primavera, an addictive blend of fava beans, asparagus, peas and cherry tomatoes in a beurre blanc sauce. Sweet Corn Rigatoni joins heirloom tomatoes, fennel, roasted corn kernels and chicken sausage in a sweet corn sauce.





Contact - Phil Bartocci Mobile: (570) 604.0733 Office: (215) 334.3634

Fax: (215) 334.3636

Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market 6700 Essington Avenue Units A7 - A9 Philadelphia, PA 19153

PHILABUNDANCE

Every action—big or small—brings us one step closer to ending hunger in the communities we serve.

DONATE FOOD TODAY!

donatefood@philabundance.org

FEEDING AMERICA















Potatoes have continued to outperform other staple vegetables, like onions, tomatoes and carrots, in volume sales over the past three years, moving more pounds than any other vegetable.

PHOTO COURTESY RPE. INC.

Six Ways to Grow Potato Sales

Retailers can boost sales with variety, displays and smart promotions.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

ood historians say there's no specific origin story to the mid-20th-century phrase "meat and potatoes." However, the saying's meaning is clearly defined — "of fundamental importance," "basic," and regarding food, "simple fare," according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

"Potatoes are a cornerstone of our produce department and a household essential for our customers," says Pamela Tiger, fresh manager at the Palm Coast, FL-located Winn-Dixie, one of over 400 stores in this Jacksonville, FL-headquartered chain, which is a subsidiary of Southeastern Grocery.

And that cornerstone was spotlighted when the store's produce manager, Marco Alvarez, earned one of three grand prizes for his display in the Idaho Potato Commission's 2025 Potato Lovers Month Retail Display Contest, a national competition that had over 1,700 entries.

The potato category represented 11.6% of the volume of the top 20 produce items that Circana reports on for the 52 weeks ending June 15, 2025, according to data shared by Potatoes USA, the Denver, CO-headquartered national marketing and research organization.

Plus, taters have continued to outperform other staple vegetables, like onions, tomatoes and carrots, in volume sales over the past three years, moving more pounds than any other vegetable. In the past three years, the volume of potatoes has remained consistently higher than in 2019, indicating potatoes' staying power on consumer plates.

Trends driving the potato category include versatility and health, according to Nick Bartelme, global retail development manager for Potatoes USA. "Potatoes are valued as a real, natural food, nutrient-dense, and satisfying, ranking as America's favorite vegetable for the ninth consecutive year. Sixty-six percent of consumers say potatoes are 'fuel for body and brain', and 68% associate them with sustained energy."

1. SPICE SALES WITH VARIETY

Shoppers find a large selection of potatoes at Robért Fresh Market and Lakeview Grocery, based in New Orleans, LA.

"Baking potatoes are a big seller in the category. We'll move more cases of baking potatoes than all the 5-pound bags combined," says Terry Esteve, produce and floral director for

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

"A best-in-class potato set should in clude organic options — even in a limited assortment — because organic remains top of mind for many shoppers, and research shows that when organic consumers don't find what they're looking for, they often don't substitute; they simply leave the cate gory or seek alternatives elsewhere."

Jessica Congdon, RPE Inc., Bancroft, WI

"The entire baby portion of the category has done the same thing all the packaged varieties of cherry and grape tomatoes have done to the tomato category — taken over."

Terry Esteve, Robért Fresh Market and Lakeview Grocery, New Orleans, LA

"We eat with our eyes, and attractive displays will help maximize potato category profit margins."

Christine Lindner, Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc., Friesland, WI



Brian Castleberry, produce manager, Remke Markets, Crescent Springs, KY, was the grand prize winner in the Idaho Potato Commission's Idaho Potato Lover's Month Contest. His theme was the Wizard of Oz, and he included bagged potatoes and a yellow brick road made of bulk yellow Idaho potatoes. The display was in the center of the produce department for two weeks. PHOTO COURTESY IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION

the six-store chain. "Bagged baby potatoes and bagged fingerling potatoes have taken over the 5-pound red and 5-pound gold potatoes, with a smaller bag size and more suitable for recipes and roasting. These will probably pass 5-pound russets here soon."

Nationwide, russet-type potatoes remain king of the category, says Les Alderete, general manager of the Center, CO-based Skyline Potato Company, a major player in the state's fresh market potato business. "Most consumers are now looking for medium-sized russets, 70- to 80-count."



A best-in-class potato set should include organic options because organic remains top of mind for many shoppers, and research shows that when organic consumers don't find what they're looking for, they often don't substitute. PHOTO COURTESY RPE, INC.

Alderete says Colorado's high altitudes, soil, and cold nights with warm days produce high-quality potatoes, and "also offers a freight advantage to markets we most often ship to in the Midwest, Texas and the Southeast."

Russets comprised over half (60.6%) of the fresh potato category market share for the 52 weeks ending June 29, 2025, based on data supplied by Potatoes USA. Yellow potatoes rank second with a 15.4% share, followed by red (9.3%), petite (5.1%), white (3.6%), medley (1.1%), fingerling (0.1%), and purple (0.01%).

Notable changes from the year prior are a decline in reds by 26.1% and a bump in petites by 47.7%.

"The demand for reds has waned, and yellows have been increasing relative to reds," says Kevin Olson, president of Becker, MN-based Ben Holmes Potatoes, which ships russets, reds, and yellows nine months of the year as far south as Florida and Texas.

Petite potatoes satisfy shoppers looking for convenience, according to Kathleen Triou, president and chief executive officer of Newport Beach, CA-based Fresh Solutions Network, LLC, which sells petite red, yellow, purple, fingerling, medley, and a combo of red and yellow potatoes under its Side Delights brand. "These shoppers want to put dinner on the table in 15 minutes or less. This includes preparing them in appliances like air fryers."

2. ADD ORGANIC SKUS

Organically grown potatoes continue to be an alternative that consumers gravitate toward, says Ken Gray, fourth-generation vice president of sales and marketing for the Bushwick Potato Commission in Woodbury, NY. "Production of organics has increased, and the quality continues to improve every year."

Organic potatoes made up 2.3% of total U.S. fresh potatoes sales during the 52 weeks ending June 29, 2025, based on Potatoes USA-provided data.

"We're seeing growth in our smaller organic pack sizes, particularly 1.5-pound baby potatoes," says Jessica Congdon, category marketing manager, potatoes, RPE Inc., in Bancroft, WI, which buys organic potatoes from growers, such as Cal-Organic Farms, in Bakersfield, CA.

"A best-in-class potato set should include organic options — even in a limited assortment — because organic remains top of mind for many shoppers, and research shows that when organic consumers don't find what they're looking for, they often don't substitute; they simply leave the category or seek alternatives elsewhere."

3. PICK THE RIGHT PACKAGING

One-third (33.6%) of potatoes sold at retail are fresh, with 87% sold in a bag, and 10.7% sold in bulk, based on data shared by Potatoes USA. Of bagged potatoes, 5-pound bags represented 54.3% of market share, with 10-pounders (24.7%), 1-2 pounders (7.2%), 2-4-pounders (6.9%), and 8-pounders (5.4%) making up the rest.

"Fewer shoppers want 10-pound bags today," says Kevin Stanger, president of the Wada Farms Marketing Group, LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID. "We pack almost all 5-pounders and have sold smaller pack sizes like 3 pounds."

The company will introduce a new burlap bag for russets this fall with a photo of Marilyn Monroe and tagged with "irresistible." The theme ties into a famous 1951 photoshoot featuring the American actress and model posing in a dress made from a burlap potato sack.

However, with cuts upcoming to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) affecting an estimated 5 million people, there could be a revival in demand for larger packs like 10-pounders, says Ross Johnson, vice president of retail and international for the Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), in Eagle, ID. "Potatoes are a value, nutritious and satiating. I also think there may be a resurgence in 10-pound bags at a time of the year it makes sense, like the holidays."

As for construction, the top-selling packaging in the potato category is the Fresh Mesh Combo bag, according to Victoria Lopez, marketing and business development

manager for Fox Packaging & Fox Solutions, in McAllen, TX.

"Across the industry, there's a visible shift toward eco-friendly packaging driven by both regulation and consumer demand," says Lopez. "We've rolled out film options containing up to 30% PCR in both clear and opaque versions, even for heavier bags up to five pounds."

Packaging also must protect potatoes, she adds. "For light-sensitive varieties, especially those prone to greening, exposure to UV and visible light can trigger solanine development, compromising flavor and shortening shelf life. Our Fox Combo Ultra Shield tackles this head-on with a dual-layer film that blocks light."

4. CREATE EYE-CATCHING DISPLAYS

Having a fresh, well-uniformed, and merchandised potato category with point-of-sale recipe ideas, educational signage on storage and preparation of fresh potatoes is key to increasing sales of potatoes at retail, says Christine Lindner, marketing manager at Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc., in Friesland, WI. "We eat with our eyes, and attractive displays will help maximize potato category profit margins."

One of the best examples of this is the

award-winning displays built for the IPC's Idaho Potato Lover's Month Contest. For example, Alvarez at Winn-Dixie built a "Potato Farm" display, measuring approximately 12 feet by 6 feet, which remained up for two weeks.

Designed to evoke the charm of a rustic farm, the display featured themed balloons of farm animals and equipment, along with the integration of Idaho potato bags and boxes as structural and decorative elements. In total, the display incorporated more than 80 cases of potatoes, including 40 cases of 5-pound russet potatoes, 20 cases of Klondike varieties, 16 cases of Green Giant One Step potatoes, and six cases of instant potatoes.

Brian Castleberry, produce manager at the Crescent Springs, KY-location of Remke Markets, also entered. Remke Markets is a five-store chain that's part of the Fresh Encounter family of companies in Ohio, Indiana, and northern Kentucky, which joined SpartanNash last year.

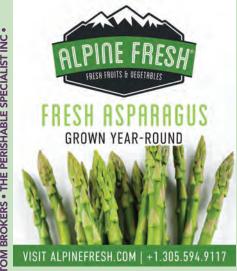
"My theme was the Wizard of Oz, i.e., 'I don't think we're in Idaho anymore," says Castleberry. "This was about 8 feet wide, with a backdrop of the Emerald City, with bagged potatoes, and a yellow brick road made of bulk yellow Idaho potatoes. The



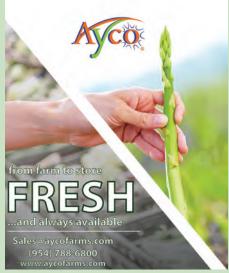




• ALPINE FRESH • ALTAR PRODUCE • AYCO • CARB AMERICAS • CRYSTAL VALLEY • FARM DIRECT SUPPLY •







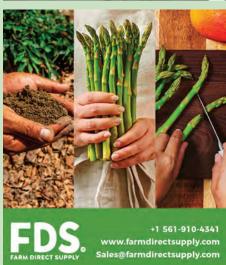


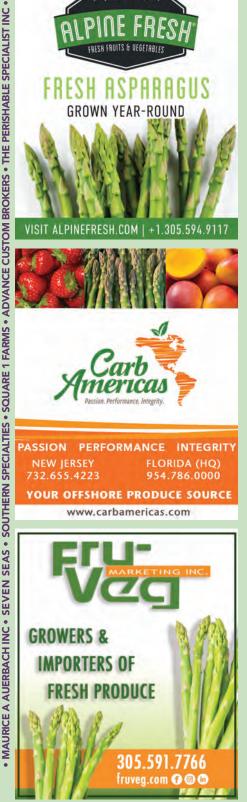


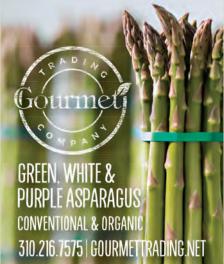
PASSION PERFORMANCE INTEGRITY **NEW JERSEY** FLORIDA (HQ) 732.655.4223 954.786.0000 YOUR OFFSHORE PRODUCE SOURCE

www.carbamericas.com











ALPINE FRESH • ALTAR PRODUCE • AYCO • CARB AMERICAS • CRYSTAL VALLEY • FARM DIRECT SUPPLY •

For a copy of 2025/2026 Fresh Asparagus Statistics, **Category Trends and Demographics Report** visit our website at:

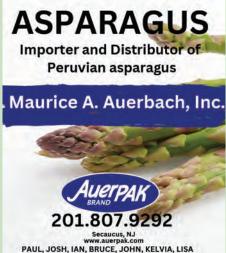
Peruvianasparagusimportersassociation.com





• FRU- VEG MARKETING • GOURMET TRADING COMPANY • HARVEST SENSATIONS • JMB PRODUCE •







Year Round Availability

772.410.0790 or lange-companies.com

























display was in the center of the produce department for two weeks.

"From this year's display, I learned that the potato category is an easy sale for our store, and having a good selection of fresh Idaho potatoes is a great item for our customers."

There are three key display-building messages in Potatoes USA's 2024 Merchandising Best Practices Study, conducted by IRI. One, have a dedicated 15-foot display space. Two, include eight different potato types and offer a mix of pack sizes. Three, the use of endcaps, secondary displays, signage, nutrition messaging, and recipe inspiration about usage occasions can drive incremental sales.

"If retailers adopted these top-performing merchandising tactics, they could achieve a nearly 12% increase in potato volume sales," says Potato USA's Bartelme.

5. BUILD BASKET RINGS

Potatoes are a basket builder, says the IPC's Johnson. "Shoppers purchase additional recipe or meal ingredients at the

Engineering & Delivering Packaging Excellence SAVE 90% WATER & BOOST POTATO THROUGHPUT WITH HAITH. Herth Fox Solutions brings Haith's advanced potato washing, polishing, and destoning systems to cut waste, boost output, and enhance quality. Questions? Scan the QR code or email our Sales Team at info@foxbag.com

Phone: 965.682.6176

2200 Fox Drive | McAllen, TX 78504

www.foxbag.com

same time, which can double the value."

For example, during crawfish season, which runs from mid-January to most of June, Robért Fresh Market and Lakeview Grocery will build secondary displays with the 3-pound bagged red and gold B potatoes, fingerling potatoes, and fingerling sweet potatoes "because the demand is five times higher while in season," Esteve notes

Tried and true ideas for cross-merchandising potatoes include pairing them with onions and garlic, as nearly every potato-based dish contains these ingredients, says Brunswick Potato Commission's Gray. "Cheese and crispy bacon bits as baked potato toppings are an easy upsell, and butter, sour cream, and chives are a classic combo."

Trendier ideas, Gray adds, include potatoes and air fryer liners. "This offers huge Gen Z/Millennial appeal. Call out in signage, 'Crispy in 10 Minutes — Air Fryer Friendly!"

Global flavor zones offer another approach, such as Indian-style potatoes with masala and potatoes with kielbasa, which are popular in Eastern Europe, Gray says. And you can also cross-merchandise a barbecue kit — potatoes, foil, barbecue rubs and corn on the cob.

6. PROMOTE BY PRICE & BEYOND

Because of the current economic climate, Esteve says they keep the 5-pound bagged russets on an everyday low-price program because they are so versatile. "Most of the time, we'll keep the retail between \$1.99 and 2 for \$5 and advertise them once a month for \$1.69."

Place higher-ring, value-added potato items at the beginning of the potato display, suggests Alsum Farms & Produce's Lindner. "This will encourage consumers to try new offerings while picking up budget-friendly or on-ad pantry staples of 5- and 10-pound bags of russets."

Successful potato promotions go beyond just lowering the price.

"It's about creating excitement and driving variety trial," says RPE's Congdon. "Retailers don't need deep discounts to drive potato sales; smart promotions can boost volume and protect margin. Best-in-class tactics include featuring multiple varieties, limiting discounts to under 25%, using 'X FOR' pricing, and leveraging seasonal tieins. The goal is to highlight value, versatility, and relevance — not just price."



Russet potatoes are available year-round from Wisconsin, while yellows and reds finish up by January due to these varieties' storability.

PHOTOS COURTESY ALSUM FARMS & PRODUCE

Don't Overlook Wisconsin: A Potato Powerhouse

The state boasts soil, water and climate ideal for production and provides easy access to US partners.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER. RD

isconsin is a powerhouse potato producer, digging up nearly 3 billion pounds of this vegetable worth \$414 million in 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 2024 State Agriculture Overview. This ranks Wisconsin third overall in potato production in the U.S., after Idaho and Washington. The state sells over a third (37%) of its spuds on the fresh market, based on data from the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA), in Antigo, WI.

A significant retail advantage of purchasing potatoes from the Badger State is its strategic Midwest location, which enables shorter travel times, fresher product, and lower freight costs compared to western states. This is particularly advantageous for markets east of the Mississippi, where over half the U.S. population lives.

What's more, Wisconsin grows a whole category of potatoes, from russets to specialty, offers a year-round supply, and has packers capable of supplying supermarkets with pack sizes and styles desired.

"Wisconsin-grown potatoes are important to our customers,"



The Badger State ranks third in U.S. potato production, shipping fresher spuds to eastern markets more quickly. PHOTO COURTESY ALSUM FARMS & PRODUCE

says Mike Johnson, produce and floral director for the T.A. Solberg Co., Inc., headquartered in Minocqua, WI, which operates five Trig's grocery stores. "We typically carry three SKUs of yellows, three SKUs of reds, and russets in a 5-pound bag and bulk."

WHY WISCONSIN?

Wisconsin's soils, access to water, and climate make it an ideal location for potato production, according to Dana Rady, director of promotion, communication, and consumer education for the WPVGA.

"The growing season began with cool, dry temperatures and has seen more moisture and rainfall," Rady adds. "New crop harvest begins in the southern part of the state and works its way north. Some growers have had reds and yellows available from the first few weeks in August. Russets typically start harvest at the end of August and into early September."

Wisconsin-grown organic russet, red, and yellow varieties started shipping in early to mid-August from Alsum Farms & Produce Inc., in Friesland, WI.

Overall, Mike Carter, chief executive officer for Bushman's Inc., in Rosholt, WI, expects "a good quantity and quality in this year's crop, including a mix of small and large-sized potatoes."



The Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association's promotions program includes cooking demonstrations twice a month on two different TV stations, digital marketing, trade shows, and working with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture on expanding exports of Wisconsin potatoes into Canada and Mexico.

PHOTO COURTESY WPVGA



DOUG BULGRIN Onion Sales

doug@gumzfarmswi.com 608) 697-6775

TOM BULGRIN Potato Sales (608) 697-2137

RYAN BULGRIN Onion & Potato Sales tom@aumzfarmswi.com rvan@aumzfarmswi.com (608) 566-6736





A FULL CATEGORY OF CHOICES

Wisconsin produces the most potato varieties of any state, says Rady. "Since potatoes aren't sold by variety, consumers will be most familiar with seeing russets, reds, yellows and whites. Specific examples of varieties that thrive in Wisconsin, to name a few, are Dark Red Norland and Red Norland (reds), Burbank, Silverton, and Goldrush (russets), Yukon Gold (yellows), and Snowden (whites). Consumers will also see specialties, like blue/purple, fingerlings, and little potatoes, which also come in a medley of colors."

Mark Finnessy, vice president of Okray Family Farms in Plover, WI, says russets "remain king of the category."

Russets are available year-round from Wisconsin, while yellows and reds finish up by January due to these varieties' storability, according to Christine Lindner, marketing manager for Alsum Farms & Produce.

"Our varieties have shifted based on consumer demand at retail. We have seen a considerable growth of yellow potato and petite categories in the past three years. As a result, we have added more acres of yellow potatoes and petite red and yellow potatoes, replacing the previously red potato acres."

Yellow potatoes have overtaken redskinned varieties in sales at Trig's.

"In yellows, B-size in 3-pound bags is the big seller in this area," says Johnson, speaking about the chain's northern Wisconsin market. "We also carry a 5-pound bag of A-size and sell bulk B's that we bag and sell by the pound. These are all yellows."

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

 "By highlighting Wisconsin origin, sustainability certifications like Healthy Grown, and the story behind family-owned operations like ours, retailers can build consumer loyalty and boost margins."

Alexandra Gumz, Gumz Farms, Endeavor, WI

 "We expect a good quantity and quality in this year's crop, including a mix of small and large-sized potatoes."

Mike Carter, Bushman's Inc., Rosholt, WI



T.A. Solberg Co. Inc., Minocqua, WI, which operates five Trig's grocery stores, works with the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association on a partnership with local growers. Trig's uses the "Trig's Love it Local" call-out on Wisconsin potatoes in-store.

PHOTO COURTESY TRIG'S



Wisconsin has several large packing sheds that pride themselves on meeting customer needs, and can provide multiple potato varieties, types, and sizes in a range of pack sizes as well.

"Packaging has consistently shifted to smaller sizes. From 10- and 15-pound bags, it's now 5-pound bags that rule the marketplace, driven by smaller family sizes," says Bushman's Carter. "There's a growing interest in more 3-pounders, but it's a slow crawl rather than a mad rush trend."

Smaller packaging sizes, tray packs, and individually packaged potatoes are among the options Okray Family Farm's Finnessy says the company is considering for the future.

Alsum Farms & Produce, which offers pack options from 12 ounces up to 50-pound packs, and in poly, mesh, paper, or cartons, has installed two final grading Al-driven robots and updated its plant's primary sizer/sorter with machine learning vision inspection cameras and software. These systems also provide high levels of manufacturing data, helping to inform day-to-day execution.

A major packing facility project is also underway, with a summer 2026 completion date, to add new palletizing robots and RPC/DRC filling stations.

TELL THE WISCONSIN STORY & SELL MORE

The biggest challenge to successfully promoting Wisconsin potatoes remains price sensitivity and competition from larger, out-of-state growers who operate on volume, according to Alexandra Gumz, marketing specialist with Gumz Farms, in Endeavor, WI. "But that challenge also presents an opportunity," she emphasizes. "Retailers can differentiate with premium, locally grown potatoes that offer transparency, traceability and quality."

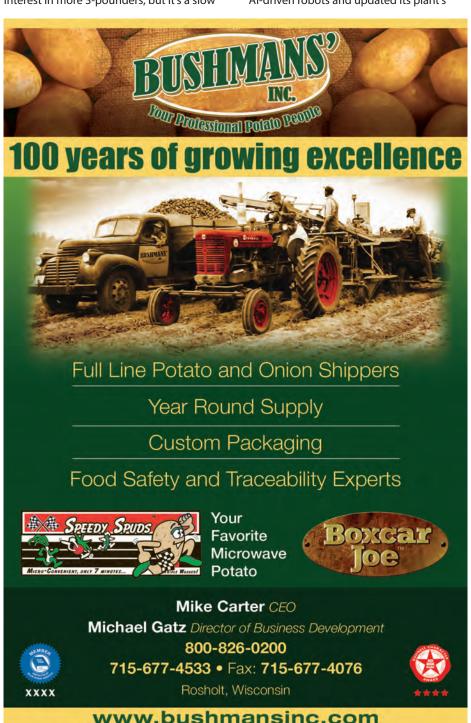
Nearly 30 years ago, the WPVGA partnered with the World Wildlife Fund and other organizations to create the Wisconsin Eco-Potato Partnership. This led to the Wisconsin Healthy Grown brand launch in 2002. Wisconsin Healthy Grown potatoes undergo an annual third-party audit to ensure they are sustainably produced, according to program standards.

"Our team takes pride in working closely with Wisconsin growers who prioritize responsible farming practices and sustainability," says Ryan Dietz, president of Heartland Produce Co., in Kenosha, WI. "These efforts not only promote environmental stewardship, but also give our retail partners a great story to tell, one that resonates with today's conscientious shoppers."

WPVGA is in conversations with independent retail stores to feature Wisconsin Healthy Grown potatoes this fall.

"We are currently working with the WPVGA on a partnership with local growers," says Trig's Johnson. "We also have some of our Wisconsin potatoes with our 'Trig's Love it Local' call-out."

The WPVGA promotions program has several other initiatives, including cooking demonstrations twice a month on two different television stations, says Rady. "We also do a lot of digital marketing; participate in trade shows; and we're working with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture on expanding exports of Wisconsin potatoes into Canada and Mexico."







Shoppers actively search for kiwi, so retailers should go big and bold with attention-grabbing displays.

PHOTO COURTESY ZESPRI

Seven Smart Strategies to Sell More Kiwifruit

The fruit finds its sweet spot with consumers as sales climb.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

iwifruit is taking flight with U.S. consumers. Three data points paint this positive picture. First, while this fuzzy fruit represents less than 1% of total produce sales for the 52 weeks ending July 13, 2025, according to data shared by Chicago, IL-headquartered NielsenIQ, kiwi dollar sales are up 35% compared to the prior year.

Second, when looking at the total fruit bowl, kiwi is the fastest-growing fruit (minimum \$10MM total sales) across the department, increasing by over +24 points, based on Circana Total US MULO+ for the year ending July 13, 2025, as shared by Zespri North America, in Newport Beach, CA.

Third, and looked at a different way, kiwifruit consumption in the U.S. rose 23% from 2022 to 2024, with annual per capita consumption reaching 1.7 pounds in 2024, according to the Aug. 6, 2025-released report, Kiwifruit Market Size, Share, Growth, and Industry Analysis, by Industry Research, with U.S. headquarters in Burlingame, CA.

"Kiwifruit sells well," says Jason Kazmirski, retail specialist for Charlie's Produce in Seattle, WA, which supplies several independent retailers in the Pacific Northwest, such as Metropolitan Market and larger chains, such as Fred Meyer and Sprouts. "The gold kiwi in 1-pound clamshells has especially taken off."

"Consumer demand is largely driven by health trends such as immune and digestive support, premiumization and snacking convenience," explains Ken Kragie, in sales at Western Fresh Marketing, in Fresno, CA.

"In our experience, kiwi shoppers include families looking for versatile fruits for snacks or recipes, and wellness-focused individuals attracted to kiwifruit's high vitamin C content. Other demographics include health-conscious Millennials and Gen Z consumers who seek nutrient-dense, convenient snacks with immune-boosting and digestive benefits."

1. PLAN FOR YEAR-ROUND SUPPLY

California grows much of the U.S. kiwifruit crop, accounting for 94% of domestic production, based on data in the Industry Research report. The season spans from October through May, with December and January as the peak of harvest, according to the California Kiwifruit Commission, in Sacramento, CA.

"Gaps in California-grown golds and reds arise due to limited acreage," says Kragie. "However, we are collaborating with growers on expanding plantings and trialing proprietary cultivars, which are expected to strengthen supply and competitiveness within the next few years."

Imports make up 77% of the total U.S. kiwifruit supply, per the Industry Research report.

Oppy Produce, headquartered in Coquitlam, British Columbia, sources kiwi from New Zealand, Chile, Italy, Greece, Argentina and California, according to Eric Ziegenfuss, category manager of tropicals. "The seasons align well to offer year-round green and just an

eight-week gap for gold that occurs in March and April. We're actively working on filling those gaps by identifying the right supply regions."

2. CARRY ALL COLORS

Green kiwifruit is the top seller at Robért Fresh Market and Lakeview Grocery, a six-store chain based in New Orleans, LA. "Yellow isn't always available here, but when they are, it sells well," says Terry Esteve, produce and floral director.

Green kiwi, the conventionally-grown Hayward variety, remains the top-selling SKU by volume, says Kragie. "Green sells on affordability and tangy flavor. It drives the bulk of the volume. Gold varieties are growing at 7-10% annually in U.S. markets, and growth is due to the sweet, smooth taste that appeals to younger buyers."

Zespri's SunGold kiwifruit fueled a staggering 49% of total kiwi category growth in the past year, according to Bianca Fiedler, trade marketing director for North America, for Zespri North America. "And the best part is, there's still massive untapped profit potential in the category."

Red-gold fleshed kiwi are a niche, but, like the yellow, are fast-growing premium options. Red kiwi has a vibrant color, berry-like flavor, and super-sweet taste.

"Red-gold kiwi volumes are doubling in some seasons, although from a smaller base," says Kragie. "We offer limited volumes of red kiwi fruit during California's peak, packed in 1-pound clamshells."

He encourages retailers to highlight the differences between varieties, i.e., "sweet gold" versus "tangy green," with signage and educational content to drive trial and sales.

3. MIX IN ORGANIC

Conventionally grown kiwifruit accounts for most sales at retail. As of the 52 weeks ending July 13, 2025, 18% of kiwi dollar sales were for kiwi that were stated organic on their packaging, according to NielsenIQ data.

"As more retailers add organic to their assortment, both organic SunGold and Zespri Green have seen triple-digit volume growth rates this season," says Zespri's Fiedler.



A recent third-party study revealed that doubling a kiwifruit display led to a 96% increase in dollar sales. More retail space means more sales.

PHOTO COURTESY OPPY



Packaged kiwifruit is now outselling bulk, due to convenience and quality perception.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/AIMEE TENZEK PHOTO

Organic kiwifruit supply is steadily increasing and aligning well with rising demand, according to Fernando Caudillo, vice president of tropicals for Oppy Produce. "Similarly to conventional, there is no gap for green organic kiwi, and an 8- to 10-week gap for gold, but we're working to close that."

4. MOVE PLENTY WITH PACKAGING

Mighties brand green kiwifruit, grown and marketed by Pasadena, CA-headquartered Sun Pacific, was one of the first brands to pack kiwis in clamshells.

"We recognized the kiwi category was struggling to gain traction due to being sold by the piece, and unfortunately, because of their brown, unappetizing appearance," says Sarah Deaton, Sun Pacific's director of marketing. "With packaging, we were able to show the beautiful inside of the fruit through fruit-forward imagery and provide communication around taste and health benefits. Packaging kiwi really helped propel the category by communicating more value to the shopper."

Packaged kiwifruit is growing fast, especially in clamshells.

"The 2-pound clamshell is the top-selling format, but 3-pound and 1-pound packs are also show strong momentum," says Oppy's Ziegenfuss. "This is good for growth, as consumers are buying more in a single trip. Packaged kiwifruit is now outselling bulk, and it's still growing. Convenience and quality perception are driving that."

This year, Zespri is transitioning to fully home-compostable labels on its kiwifruit.



GIVE US YOUR BEST

Nominate a top young leader from your

produce business for our 20th annual awards

Submit your nomination online Deadline is May 1, 2026

Fill out entry form at: https://producebusiness.com/awards/40-under-forty/

5. BUILD IMPULSE-GRAPPING DISPLAYS

Half of kiwi shoppers decide to buy the fruit on impulse. "These shoppers need to be convinced in-store," says Zespri's Fiedler. "Secondary displays in impulse-grabbing locations, such as the front of category and front of store, are most impactful."

Shoppers are also actively searching for kiwi, Fiedler adds, and recommends "go big and bold with attention-grabbing displays."

"The impact is undeniable. A recent third-party study revealed that simply doubling a kiwifruit display led to a jaw-dropping 96% increase in dollar sales. More space means more sales, so stack it high, make it shine, and watch the product fly off the shelves."

Create a kiwi destination, recommends Ziegenfuss. "Display green, gold and red together."

Sun Pacific's Deaton says retailers who pair eye-catching kiwi displays with putting the fruit on promotion "will see greater sales."

6. GET CREATIVE WITH CROSS-MERCHANDISING

Moving gold kiwi from the exotic section to adjacent to berries may result in a 64% total fresh fruit sales uplift, driven by higher and overall incremental basket spend, according to *Kantar, Everyday Shelf Market Research 2022*, as shared by Zespri.

"Global research shows that secondary displays in the yogurt aisle generate the highest level of stimulus recall, and in-shelf primary display visibility increases stopping power and purchase penetration," says Fiedler.

Merchandise kiwi targeted toward eating occasions throughout the day, adds Sun Pacific's

Deaton. "For example, a smoothie section featuring kale, spinach, kiwi, navels, apples, and yogurt makes it easier and convenient for shoppers to get what they need all in one place."

7. PROMOTE

Promotions are best tied to growing seasons. For example, Oppy focuses on early-season promotions for New Zealand fruit "to re-engage and educate consumers when the season starts," says Ziegenfuss.

The early season for New Zealand kiwifruit typically begins in late February or early March. The red variety is often the first to be harvested. The primary harvest season, including gold and green varieties, generally peaks from mid-April through June.

Peak promotional times for fruit from Chile is March to October, and for California, from October to January, says Western Fresh Marketing's Kragie. "These windows are ideal for front-of-store promotions and seasonal displays."

Well-executed promotions are essential to building awareness, says Oppy's Caudillo, "and growing the entire category."



Kiwifruit is soaring in popularity with U.S. shoppers. From double-digit sales growth to rising per capita consumption, this once-niche fruit is now one of the fastest-growing in the produce department. PRODUCE BUSINESS/AIMEE TENZEK PHOTO

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- "Go big and bold with attention-grabbing displays.
 The impact is undeniable. A recent third-party study revealed that simply doubling a kiwifruit display led to a jaw-dropping 96% increase in dollar sales."

 Fernando Caudillo, Oppy Produce,
 Coquitlam, British Columbia
- "Kiwi shoppers include families looking for versatile fruits for snacks or recipes, and wellness-focused individuals attracted to kiwifruit's high vitamin C content."
 Ken Kragie, Western Fresh Marketing, Fresno, CA



The Honeycrisp apple variety remains desirable in the Michigan region, with Ambrosia and Evercrisp also increasing in demand.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/SUSAN CROWELL PHOTO

Moving Michigan Apples

Highlighting the varieties, flavor and diverse use boost consumer purchases.

BY LISA WHITE

ichigan apples have a distinct advantage over apples from other regions, which creates marketing opportunities for supermarket produce departments. "Michigan's climate provides a growing season of mostly cool nights, warm sunny days and plenty of moisture — ideal

Michigan Apple Committee (MAC) executive director. Shelby Miller, who handles marketing and business development for Applewood Fresh Growers LLC, Sparta, MI, agrees that the climate, along with a central location, gives Michigan apples an edge.

factors in producing a flavorful crop of apples," says Diane Smith,

"Due to our proximity to the Great Lakes, our nutrient-dense soil is a top choice for apples," says Miller. "We also have a climate advantage with the cool nights and warm days — pushing the apples to develop in higher flavor and color. Being centrally located, Michigan can deliver to both coasts and the Midwest faster and fresher than other regions."

She expects the 2025 crop volume to mirror 2024, with Gala and Honeycrisp continuing in popularity, and Ambrosia and EverCrisp gaining traction. Last year's crop was 28-30 million bushels, which equates to about 1.28 billion pounds of apples.

"Our primary goal is to increase consumption of Michigan apples, which is why we have focused our efforts on consumer marketing," says Smith. "Most of our messaging centers on the themes of health,

affordability and convenience — concepts our target audiences care about most."

Messaging consistency is key to building brand recognition, she adds.

"We continue to focus our consumer marketing efforts on social media, with messaging about Michigan apples as a healthy, affordable and convenient fruit for snacking or incorporating into meals."

The MAC reports Michigan apples are sold through 12,000 retail grocery stores across the U.S.

WHAT'S SELLING

Joe Randazzo's Fruit and Vegetable Market, which has a wholesale department and retail locations in Detroit, Dearborn Heights, Roseville and Westland, MI, has been family-run for more than 70 years.

"We carry more than 20 different varieties of apples throughout the year, and beginning in September, more than 10 of those will be locally grown in Michigan," says Sarah Urbani, marketing director.

"Applewood Fresh by FirstFruits are the pioneers of managed/ club varieties grown in Michigan," says Miller. "We specialize in premium flavor varieties, like Rave, SweeTango, Kanzi and Kiku, alongside our classic varieties like Honeycrisp, Gala, Red Delicious and so on. Michigan does continue to grow heirloom varieties, like McIntosh, Jonathans, Jonagolds, etc., that accommodate well to our regional customers."

North Bay Produce, headquartered in Traverse City, MI, anticipates that the 2025-26 apple season will be equal to, or just slightly more than, last year's.

"Last year's crop was very good at approximately 28,000,000 bushels," says Charles (Chuck) Yow, North Bay Produce's business development and account manager. "There is still more to be determined for next season, including the amount of thinning required and the expected rainfall, which determines fruit sizing."

He notes that Honeycrisp remains a desirable variety in the Michigan region, with Ambrosia and Evercrisp increasing in demand.

"Last year, we started the season early, so we are later than we were last year, but we are more aligned with a typical season," Yow says. "Early varieties started in full about Aug. 11 and increased in volume, and more varieties were available in late August. Gala, Honeycrisp, Macintosh, Early Golds and Paula Reds were in production in the middle of August in Michigan. Most others tracked for normal harvest timing in early to mid-September. Ambrosia, Evercrisp and Pink Lady apples will be available with varying dates starting in October."

Riveridge Produce Marketing in Sparta, MI, expects the 2025 crop to be slightly larger than last year, with both Gala and Honeycrisp as top sellers.

BelleHarvest, Belding, MI, also will have slightly higher volume this year versus last season, due to some younger trees coming into production. The selling timetable is late August to June.

"Honeycrisp and Gala apples are the most popular," says Mike Fuher, BelleHarvest's sales director. "Some BelleHarvest apples will go to Florida, Alabama and Texas."

IMPACTFUL PROMOTION

In addition to stacking apples adorned with handwritten signs, Joe Randazzo's uses social media to connect with the community.



Joe Randazzo's Fruit and Vegetable Market, with locations in Detroit, Dearborn Heights, Roseville, and Westland, MI, has been family-run for over 70 years. They carry more than 20 different varieties of apples throughout the year, and beginning in September, more than 10 of those will be locally grown in Michigan.

PHOTO COURTESY JOE RANDAZZO'S FRUIT AND VEGETABLE MARKET



The Michigan Apple Committee reports that Michigan apples are sold through 12,000 retail grocery stores across the U.S. PHOTO COURTESY RIVERIDGE PRODUCE MARKETING

"We share seasonal produce facts, recipes, new product announcements, giveaways, daily deals, and more to keep our customers engaged and attract new ones year-round," says Urbani. "This combination of in-store experience and consistent digital engagement ensures that both longtime shoppers and new customers know exactly where to find the best Michigan apples at the best prices."

With Michigan apple crops varying each year, marketing and selling tactics will also shift.

"We are seeing a continued rise in a need for education on the health benefits of apples," says Applewood Fresh's Miller. "We are here to support retailers in communicating this to consumers through in-store signage, sampling stations, social media outlets and bold signage. We also are using seasonal hooks on in-store signage, along with color contrast breaks on shelves [for yellow, green and red apples]."

Consumer buying habits are also evolving, with more people opting for online ordering, home grocery deliveries and store-side pickups.

"These changes have led to fewer spontaneous purchases and more planned buying decisions," says Yow. "Therefore, we need to adjust our marketing and sales strategies to meet these new consumer patterns."

Yow recommends retailers highlight the strengths of each year's crop, for example, by offering different bag sizes or types of packaging, depending on what the crop can provide.

"We now have access to more data, which helps us understand how consumer preferences and buying habits are changing, particularly in response to increased competition from year-round fruits," says Yow. "It is crucial to maintain shelf space and come up with creative ideas to generate revenue in the competitive produce department."

North Bay provides flavor profile cards and a collection of apple recipes on its website. The company also actively engages with

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

 "It is crucial to maintain shelf space and come up with creative



ideas to generate revenue in the competitive produce department." Charles (Chuck) Yow, North Bay Produce, Traverse City, MI

"Where and when available, retail stores try to make sure their apples are from their region.
 Local can mean fresher, a smaller environmental footprint because the food hasn't traveled as far, but most importantly, it means supporting your community and the folks who grow your food."
 Trish Taylor, Riveridge Produce Marketing, Sparta, MI

retailers to promote its crops throughout the season.

"We sell apples year-round and are creating more social content to highlight the health and lifestyle benefits of apple consumption," says Trish Taylor, Riveridge's marketing manager. "Our YouTube channel includes a small spend targeting health-conscious demographics and those making food purchasing decisions, showing ways apples can play a role in their active lifestyles."

PLAY UP LOCAL ANGLE

Buying local has become more important to both retailers and consumers. "Where and when available, retail stores try to make sure their apples are from their region," Taylor says.

"Local can mean fresher, a smaller environmental footprint because the food hasn't traveled as far, but most importantly, it means supporting your community and the folks who grow your food."

This is what Riveridge emphasizes with its marketing tactics.

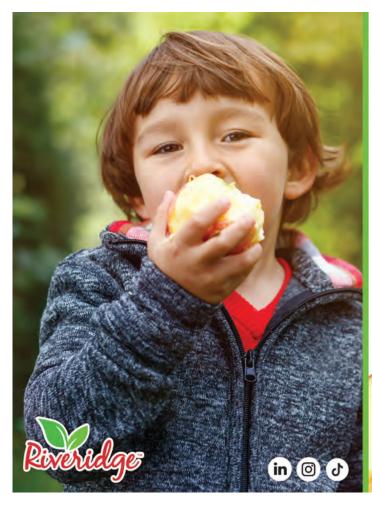
"For us, it's about showing apples are grown by families," Taylor says. "All Riveridge apples come from family-operated orchards. We like to show the faces behind those who grow apples, from the families to their employees to the seasonal help. Everyone in the chain is an important piece — from those producing the apples, transporting the apples, to buying the apples. We all play a role in supporting one another."

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Over the past few seasons, Applewood Fresh Growers has implemented several changes to streamline distribution for its retail partners. These include investing in more efficient packing-line technology, upgrading cold storage facilities to extend freshness and adopting advanced inventory tracking systems for real-time order management.

"We've also optimized our trucking schedules and expanded our logistics partnerships, allowing us to reduce transit times and improve on-time delivery rates," Miller says. "Combined, these updates ensure that retailers receive fresher product faster, with greater consistency and fewer disruptions."

At North Bay, the most significant improvement is the combination of increased storage capacity and technological advancements for storing fruit, which





With your customers more on the go than ever, healthy snacking is important. Remind them, An Apple a Day Builds Energy to Play.



enables the company to operate year-round on some varieties and extend Honeycrisp into June in some seasons.

"We expect Honeycrisp to become a year-round product very soon, possibly this season, as more orchards come into production," Yow notes. "Additionally, Michigan is improving its color by implementing new high-density orchards and newer subvariety strains, which provide more color and a better combination of tray fruit and bag sizes. Diversifying the variety mix in Michigan allows for more fruit on each truck, which cuts down transportation costs."

Riveridge apples travel broadly east of the Mississippi River, with up to one-sixth of them moving throughout Michigan.

"The last few seasons and moving forward, thanks to our grower network investing in their orchards and more volume coming online, we have a consistent supply year-round," says Taylor. "This allows retailers to continue to source from one vendor."

By integrating Al directly into its electronic sorting software, Riveridge's operators have increased accuracy and efficiency at tailoring pack specifications during production, including color, size and external defects.

New initiatives at North Bay include forecasting based on its grower-owned co-op objectives of more scientific and data-driven processes, implementing the newest best practices regarding controlled atmosphere storage and more scientific approaches for growing and increasing yields in its orchards.

"There has been an abundance of new [Michigan apple] varieties introduced in the past several years, but to help with the confusion,



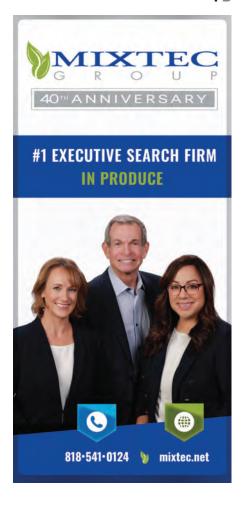
Buying local has become more important to retailers and consumers because it supports freshness, reduces environmental impact, and helps sustain regional growers and communities.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO**

North Bay has focused on the best varieties to please consumers," says Yow. "We are excited to sell more fruit, extending our customer base and shipping regions, and offering year-round options for our customers."







The New York Apple Association highlights "The Big Flavor" in its current marketing campaign, and offers in-store signage and merchandising aids to help retailers sell more NY apples. PHOTO COURTESY NYAA

New York Apples Take Center Stage

The Empire State apple season promises a strong harvest and sales excitement.

BY MIKE DUFF

ith favorable weather conditions and support from retailers, growers and the New York Apple Association, the Empire State fall apple harvest should be sweet for

"New York apple season is a marguee time in the produce calendar, especially for a Northeast-based retailer," says Mathew Blair, produce category business manager, of Northeast Shared Services, Schenectady, NY, which serves Price Chopper/Market 32 Supermarkets and Topps Markets as part of Northeast Grocery Inc. operations.

Northeast Shared Services promotes apples with circulars, social media engagement and in-store signage, while taking a variety of approaches to get consumers excited about New York apple season.

"We lean into local season and local signage," says Blair. "Customers connect with the idea of supporting New York farmers. We are always sure to call out locally grown products and do grower spotlights when possible."

"We make more space for regional favorites, like the SnapDragon, Ruby Frost, etc.," he adds. "Core varieties are still important, like the

Gala and Macs, but the newer varietals are gaining popularity with the younger generation shoppers."

Education also is an important part of promoting New York apples, Blair notes. "We also use POS (point-of-sale) materials to help communicate the message to the shoppers on flavor profiles and best uses, for example, best for baking versus fresh eating."

ADD A LITTLE FLAIR

Northeast Shared Services also develops destination displays beyond their typical in-store presentations.

"We don't just stock apples in their home categories during local season," he says. "We have expanded secondary displays throughout the department, featuring tote bag apples and 5-pound bags that aren't fully available outside of the fall selling months. All displays are usually built with a fall-themed decoration to help grab the customer's attention and drive that extra sense of excitement."

Displays always include complementary products. Popular items include caramel dips/wraps, apple cider, pie crusts and cinnamon sticks, among other items that help boost basket size and get the customers thinking beyond just buying a piece of fruit.

In addition, Northeast Shared Services runs what Blair calls, "a very aggressive ad campaign featuring New York apples while in season. You will see them advertised at least twice a month on our cover page at an aggressive retail that is often best in market."

In its approach to New York apple season, Bargain Grocery, Utica, NY, sees an abundant opportunity through the fall to keep the



DAILY EVENTS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2025









OPENING COCKTAIL RECEPTION



KEYNOTE AWARDS AND THOUGHT LEADER BREAKFAST

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2025



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2025

TRADE SHOW & EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025





INDUSTRY TOURS







The New York Apple Association works closely with retailers in the New York metropolitan area on in-store promotions, while targeting consumers through social advertising that show-cases New York apple growers, their orchards and their fruit.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO**



Customers connect with the idea of supporting New York farmers, so retailers should call out locally grown products and do grower spotlights when possible. PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

presentation fresh. Mike Servello, chief executive, says from the start of the season in early fall, apples are something that the operation can move in volume.

"We usually deal with western New York," he says. "As they start, you get the early varieties. We buy things in bins and put them out at a reasonable price. As they come on, we put out the other varieties. We try to have everything unless it's exotic and expensive."

Bargain Grocery's approach is to broaden the varieties it offers through midseason, then scale back to popular favorites as New York apple season begins to wind down.

PLENTY OF VARIETY

As summer rolled through New York, indications were the apple season would be a good one.

The season kicks off with early season varieties, including Paula Red, Ginger Gold, Jonamac, Zestar! and Premier Honeycrisp, followed by SweeTango, Honeycrisp, McIntosh, Gala, SnapDragon Macoun, Empire, EverCrisp, Fuji, Red Delicious and RubyFrost and many others in September and October, says Cynthia Haskins, president and chief executive, New York Apple Association

(NYAA), Fishers, NY.

"New York is known for 'The Big Flavor,' a signature taste that sets our apples apart and reflects the quality and care of our state's apple growers," she says.

Harvest wraps up as late as the first part of November, depending on the weather. New York grows more than 250 apple varieties, Haskins notes, with more than 36 available in promotable volumes. Many are sold through retail chains and direct-to-consumer markets, such as farm stands, u-pick orchards and farmers markets. In all, New York has more than 500 apple growers, many of them multigenerational.

Kaari Stannard, president and owner of Yes! Apples, Glenmont, NY, says New York's apple industry is undergoing a transformation. "From unpredictable weather to rising labor costs, growers are facing real challenges, but they're also rising to the occasion," Stannard says. "Through innovative breeding, smart technology and a fresh focus on variety, flavor and sustainability, New York's apple growers are finding new ways to grow stronger, smarter, and more resilient than ever before."

Yes! Apples, a consumer-focused brand managed by New York Apple Sales, actively champions New York apples through direct-to-consumer marketing, retail merchandising and strategic partnerships, she explains. "We support retailers through promotions and shopper marketing, and we're working hard to connect with consumers in meaningful ways to highlight the incredible apples grown by our New York-based family orchards."

In recent years, New York growers have faced increased growing and harvesting costs, among other challenges, says Tim Mansfield, director of sales and marketing at Sun Orchard Fruit Co., Burt, NY. "Labor, materials, packaging, equipment have all increased in cost. Tariffs, or the threat of tariffs, have contributed to the Canadian customer not wanting U.S. apples."

Varietal development seems to have slowed, Mansfield adds, and Honeycrisp still seems to be the most popular. "Pazazz, one of the newer varieties has a strong following for the retailers we work with."

Jessica Wells, executive director, Crunch Time Apple Growers, Newark, NY, says the proliferation of varieties, including in New York, has made shopping the fruit more complicated for consumers. Crunch Time raises the profile of its SnapDragon and RubyFrost apples at promotion time, and the company suggests that retailers can start thinking apples as summer warms and apples continue through their growth

cycle, so they'll be prepared for the au-

SweeTango, a managed apple variety, is grown by licensed growers in New York and a handful of other states, as well as Nova Scotia, Canada. The variety is marketed by Next Big Thing, a growers' cooperative.

"NBT plays a central role in marketing and merchandising of SweeTango," says Jennifer Miller, executive director, NBT, Emmaus, PA. "Although it gets some help from the New York Apple Association, NBT is diligent with its marketing support, which includes social media and influencer partnerships, in-store merchandising and cooperative advertising, and retailer engagement and educational outreach."

And it doesn't end there. "Destini product locators are a key element of our strategy and to get consumers to SweeTango," she says.

GRAB ATTENTION

Marketing may be more important today than ever, given the proliferation of apple varieties, and Crunch Time does what it can



The Big Flavor, Grown with Care.

Join us in driving a more sustainable future and reduce freight costs at the same time by sourcing closer to the orchards. New York growers are located close to major U.S. population centers, reducing fuel costs and emissions with every load.

Contact your New York apple shipper today!

NEW YORK APPLE ASSOCIATION ApplesFromNY.com

to make sure its apples stand out. However, it recognizes that variety has its advantages.

"There's a major upside," says Wells. "With so many options to choose from, people have no reason not to have a favorite apple. We have the opportunity to be that favorite. It's not a responsibility we take lightly."

Miller says a managed variety such as SweeTango can get attention despite the crowded field, "In a market that is highly competitive and crowded, you have to stand out as an apple variety," she says. "NBT continues to find avenues to drive home that message to consumers."

Education for managed varieties is key and needs to be fully understood by the retailer community, Miller adds. "Apples are

very diverse and each apple has a different consumer taste profile. Farmers grow an average of 23 varieties that go into retail and foodservice. That, combined with over 100 apple varieties grown commercially in the U.S., makes for a confusing space in retail without guidance. This innovation of managed varieties can be a key to helping customers choose a flavor profile more suited to their preferences."

ELEVATE APPLES EARLY AND OFTEN

Retailers who dive into the New York apple season early have an opportunity to start spotlighting popular apple varieties as they reach the store and keep the presentation fresh.

"The marketing of New York apples should kick off as soon as pos-



SHOWCASE apples



WE HAVE SPECIALIZED IN GROWING, STORING, PACKING AND SHIPPING FRESH APPLES **FOR OVER 60 YEARS**

We offer many packs & sizes including trays of 56 to 175 counts, polybags ranging from 3 to 10lbs, tote bags & clam shell packs

FOR THE BEST APPLES FOUND ALONG THE LAKE ONTARIO SHORELINE

CONTACT: JERRY BUCOLO, CHRIS BUCOLO **RICHARD HITE & JOHN KING**

> john@niagarafreshfruit.com richard@niagarafreshfruit.com

(716) 778-7631 5796 Wilson Burt Rd, Burt, New York 14028













A tradition of quality, since 1914

- Growing, Packing, Shipping -

- Apples
 Peaches
- · Cherries · Pears
- Plums
 Nectarines
- · Apricots · Onions

Sales:

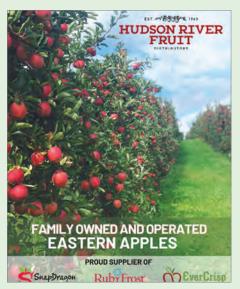
208.459.9191 208.459.8064

Fax:

208.459.6932

eva@symmsfruit.com www.symmsfruit.com

Caldwell, Idaho



El Vista

Home of El Vista brand Poly Bags & Trays

Shipping Apples through Mid-February

717.642.8414 Fax 717.642.8028

- Fairfield, PA -

sible," says Wells, "ideally, the very first day apples are available."

"We want to lock in loyalty for the whole season by establishing buying patterns early in the fall," she explains. "Additionally, we've found that the New York Grown certification helps with merchandising, as does the Buffalo Bills partnership, at least in Bills Country, that is."

Mansfield says New York retailers Sun Orchard works with "do an excellent job of promoting and using New York apples," and adds, "local has been a boost in keeping New York apples front and center in the stores."

For the past several years, Stannard says the New York's apple sector has introduced



Retailers can highlight New York apples with vibrant displays, promotions, and grower spotlights.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

apples



McIntosh, Cortland, Honeycrisp, SnapDragon & RubyFrost Apples All Available in Multiple Sizes

Henry Forrence & Seth Forrence

518.643.9527 Fax: 518.643.9509

Peru, New York

new initiatives to drive awareness and sales, from grassroots social media campaigns and virtual farm tours to expanded retail promotions and influencer partnerships.

"Yes! Apples has played an integral role in elevating New York-grown apples in the broader CPG space, building brand recognition among Millennials and Gen Z, and creating connections through direct-to-consumer marketing, co-branded collaborations and social storytelling," she says. "These efforts are helping to shape the future of apple marketing, while reinforcing the strength of long-standing programs that continue to deliver results at retail."

A combination of storytelling and promotion has successfully engaged consumers. "Storytelling helps consumers connect more deeply with the food they're buying and the people behind it, bringing New York's family orchards and apple varieties to life," says Stannard. "At the same time, strong promotional support drives traffic and moves volume at retail, making it a powerful one-two punch for building brand affinity and increasing sales."

Miller said effective merchandising strategies should keep timing in mind, so kick off promotions in early September as the harvest comes in and keep pushing through fall with in-store sampling, local storytelling that highlights grower stories and regional pride, all supported by digital marketing campaigns that include social media and influencer content to reach younger audiences.

A TALE TO TELL

Stannard says the best marketing deliv-

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

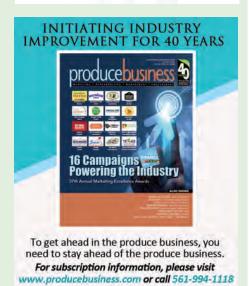
- With so many options to choose from, people have no reason not to have a favorite apple."
 Jessica Wells, Crunch Time Apple Growers, Newark, NY
- "Storytelling helps consumers connect more deeply with the food they're buying and the people behind it, bringing New York's family orchards and apple varieties to life."

Kaari Stannard, Yes! Apples, Glenmont, NY

ers effective storytelling based on bringing the people and place behind the fruit to consumers via social media, influencers and digital campaigns.

Wells points out that the work of the New York Apple Association has been effective in spreading the message about the state and the high quality of the crop. "Overall, statewide support for agriculture, including at major industry events, helps to drive visibility and foster connection for New York growers."

NYAA promotes the health benefits of consuming New York apples through a range of social media content delivering on "Big on Flavor, Big on Nutrition," says Haskins. Kelly Springer, registered dietitian



for the New York Apple Association, will deliver content focusing on apple health benefits.

"New York apples are a perfect healthy snack, and we're using social media to share the many ways they can be enjoyed," adds Haskins.

The association also is launching a blog focusing on health on ApplesFromNY.com, which gets 300,000 visitors a year.

NYAA will again run The Big Flavor in the Big Apple campaign in New York City, says Haskins, which features a large digital billboard in Times Square and 225 other digital billboards located across all five New York boroughs, with many near grocery stores. The digital billboards spotlight New York apple growers and apples along with taglines referencing participating retailers.

NYAA has been working closely with retailers in the New York metropolitan area on in-store promotions, while targeting consumers through social advertising that showcases New York apple growers, their orchards and their fruit. PB



The New York apple season kicks off with early season varieties, including Paula Red, Ginger Gold, Jonamac, Zestar! and Premier Honeycrisp, followed by SweeTango, Honeycrisp, McIntosh, Gala, SnapDragon Macoun, Empire, EverCrisp, Fuji, PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO Red Delicious and RubyFrost.

SWEETANGO.COM



Peruvian Onions Bolster US Market

Production climbs, giving retailers access to steady, high-quality supply, and consumers the mild, sweet flavor they crave year-round.

BY STEVEN MAXWELL

omplementing the U.S. onion season, Peruvian imports are available between September and February each year, offering primarily yellow varieties, as well as smaller volumes of red and white onions. Making the most of this availability can reap dividends for U.S. grocery retailers who can take advantage of the products' mild, sweet flavor and consistent quality.

According to the Peruvian export promotion organization PromPeru, onion production is booming in the Andean country. From 526,000 metric tons in 2022, production rose to 591,000 tons in 2025. By May 2025, volumes had already surpassed the levels reached in the same period of 2024.

PromPeru's InfoTrade platform reports exports to the U.S. also increased, with the total worth of shipments up from \$60 million in 2023 to \$68 million in 2024. For Juan Francisco Ramos, PromPeru's New York, NY-based international trade specialist, the U.S. remains an attractive prospect for Peruvian onion exporters despite the uncertainty created by the Trump administration's tariffs.

"This situation can even become an opportunity, given that some competitors face higher tariff rates," Ramos says. "Additionally, Peru's counter-season production gives us an advantage over suppliers from the Northern Hemisphere."

CONSISTENT QUALITY

Based in Glennville, GA, G&R Farms imports sweet onion varieties — primarily Century, Macon and Campo Lindo — from Peru to closely match the flavor, size and sweetness consumers expect from the company's own Vidalia volumes, according to general manager and vice president of sales, Steven Shuman. Having launched its year-round sweet onion program in 2009, G&R has now been marketing Peruvian onions for over 15 years.

The company's Peruvian season runs from around Labor Day through March, bridging the gap before and after the Georgia Vidalia season. G&R counts on its own full-time production team on the ground in Peru, which collaborates with growers to ensure consistent quality, flavor and sustainability.

"We have been building and nurturing this partnership for 15 years, have daily contact with the team on the ground there, and regularly visit the farms in Peru to ensure the best quality, yield and flavor," says Shuman.

"Consumers overwhelmingly embrace Peruvian sweet onions for their mild, sweet flavor, long shelf life, and consistent quality, especially when domestic sweet onions are not in season," he continues. "Demand remains steady and helps maintain year-round supply."

Acreage in Peru, according to Shuman, has been relatively stable



The Peruvian sweet onion season runs from September through March, bridging the gap before and after the Georgia Vidalia season. PHOTO COURTESY CORNER MARKET

in recent seasons, with the 2023-24 season reporting acreage more or less steady, although volume experienced a dip due to weather.

Shuman says there is little sign of tariffs directly affecting Peruvian onions, noting weather impacts and logistics delays have taken precedence over trade policy.

Another grower-marketer based in Glennville, GA, is Bland Farms, a business which, as well as its Georgia acres, produces sweet onions over 660 hectares, or 1,630 acres, in Peru.

According to Chief Executive Troy Bland, the company's premium sweet onions from Peru are grown from the same seed varieties as its Vidalia sweet onions, making the taste and quality nearly indistinguishable. "If you bite into a Peru onion and Vidalia onion, you can hardly tell the difference. They are the two sweetest onions that are produced in the world."

"We're one of the only premium sweet onion companies, if not the only one, to run our own crops in Peru," Bland adds. "We grow our own, take care of our own and actually have our own employees that oversee the crops there."

Although Bland Farms' typically begins sourcing from Peru after Labor Day, the expected extended availability of Georgia Vidalias this season through late September will likely mean a later start to the Peru deal. Even so, Bland anticipates the Peruvian program will continue through February 2026, ensuring a year-round supply of sweet onions.

Bland says his team are hands-on year-round when it comes to making sure the Peruvian crop meet Bland Farms' standards. "Unlike other growers who rely on contracts or constantly changing sources, we work the same land year after year. That consistency is rare, and it gives us unmatched control over quality," he says.

One of the newest entrants to the Peru deal is Stockton, CA-located JJB Family Farms, which is launching a new, year-round organic sweet onion program in late September, starting in Peru. According to company president Derrell Kelso, JJB will bring in an initial 31



The upcoming Peruvian sweet onion season is shaping up solidly, with favorable conditions pointing to a high-quality crop with consistent size, flavor and mildness.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/SUSAN CROWELL PHOTO

containers of Peruvian sweet onions, with the program expected to run until December.

Peru does a great job, says Kelso, adding that JJB's entry into Peruvian sweet onion packing was sparked by a customer who was looking for high-quality sweet onions, and will benefit from access to "very good" products from Peru year-round.

STRONG PROSPECTS

Despite challenges that arise with any international operations, Bland says consistently optimal growing conditions remain a real positive when it comes to producing onions in Peru. "The region has one of the best climates, with little rainfall and plenty of sunshine."

The company's acreage in Peru may be slightly down this year — mainly due to the longer-than-usual Georgia Vidalia crop — but Bland believes a bigger challenge may come in the form of global container availability and positioning.

"With limited exports in and out of certain countries, including Peru, there's concern that containers may not be readily available where and when we need them."



Peruvian onion production is on the rise, according to the country's export promotion agency, PromPeru. Output increased from 526,000 metric tons in 2022 to 591,000 tons in 2025, reflecting a steady upward trend.

PHOTO COURTESY THE MARKETPLACE

"Peru doesn't import as heavily, so outbound container supply can be more unpredictable — and more expensive," Bland explains. "Higher container costs and tighter availability could present logistical hurdles, and we're also keeping a close eye on tariffs, which continue to influence costs and sourcing decisions.

"We're working proactively with our logistics partners to stay ahead of these issues and ensure a smooth transition and consistent supply for our customers."

For Reidsville, GA-headquartered Shuman Farms, having a Peruvian sweet onion program plays a key role in delivering on its promise to provide "RealSweet" premium sweet onions year-round. "These onions meet our high standards for flavor, appearance, and consistency," says President and Chief Executive John Shuman.

"Grown to reflect the same quality our consumers expect from the RealSweet brand, our Peruvian crop ensures we continue to provide a sweet, mild onion that's approachable, versatile, and perfect for everything from quick weeknight meals to elevated culinary experiences."

Shuman is pleased with how the upcoming season is shaping up, with favorable conditions pointing to a high-quality crop with consistent size, flavor and mildness. "We anticipate that this season will continue to build on the quality benchmarks we've set, giving consumers a sweet onion they can count on for everyday meals, holiday dishes, and everything in between."

According to Shuman at G&R, Peruvian imports contribute significantly to annual U.S. sweet onion shipments, having increased from approximately 130,800 metric tons in 2018 to around 164 metric tons in 2022, with a value estimated at \$67 million for 2022.

Through its Growing America's Farmers program, G&R provides striking onion packaging, bins, and in-store point-of-sale, which are available to retailers year-round.

PromPeru, which participates in trade shows and specialty food trade missions, such as the Summer Fancy Food Show, has plans to continue promoting Peruvian onions during the remainder of 2025 through regional trade shows aimed at attracting U.S. importers.

This year, the organization will hold business matchmaking events at Expo Perú Sur in Arequipa and Expo Perú Los Andes in Cusco, where U.S. distributors and potential buyers have been invited to meet directly with Peruvian producers.

PROVIDING MEAL INSPIRATION

Ramos at PromPeru suggests U.S. retailers highlight the flavor of Peruvian onions as being ideal for barbecues. "We offer varieties that could be appealing to this market, along with competitive pricing."

Shuman at G&R recommends cross-merchandising displays featuring Peruvian sweet onions with other fresh produce and meats to "provide meal inspiration and lift sales." The company also leverages strong bagged and bulk promotions during key windows to trigger impulse purchases.

Shuman advocates incorporating omnichannel marketing, like in-store signage, digital, online meals-of-the-week, and out-of-home ads to help keep sweet onions top of mind. "Highlighting the quality, sweet flavor, and sustainability of G&R's Peruvian program reinforces consumer trust and affinity year-round."

Under its RealSweet brand, Shuman Farms provides "best-in-class packaging, category insights, and marketing programs," says John Shuman. The company also sees a significant opportunity in consumer education, especially around the versatility of sweet onions.

"Our upcoming initiatives will highlight how one bag of RealSweet onions can

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

 "We anticipate that this season will continue to build on the quality benchmarks we've set, giving consumers a sweet onion they can count on for everyday meals, holiday dishes,



and everything in between." John Shuman, Shuman Farms, Reidsville, GA

 "Consumers overwhelmingly embrace Peruvian sweet onions for their mild, sweet flavor, long shelf life, and consistent quality, especially when domestic sweet onions are not in season."
 Steven Shuman, G&R Farms, Glennville, GA become the foundation for multiple family-friendly meals," says Shuman. "We're also continuing to invest in digital storytelling and in-store messaging that meet shoppers where they are — online, on social, and in the produce aisle."

Like many in the industry, Shuman Farms is navigating shifting consumer behaviors and rising input costs. "What helps us overcome these challenges is our unwavering focus on quality and brand integrity," Shuman says. "We continue to invest in innovation, sustainability, and transparen-

cy, ensuring our products and our message remain relevant, trusted, and valuable to consumers and retailer partners alike."

Similarly, Sloan Lott, director of sales at Bland Farms, says the company continues to see strong sales volumes on imported onions, driven by their consistent quality, signature sweetness, and reliable year-round supply.

"Consumer demand for sweet onions doesn't slow down after Vidalia season—and thanks to our Peruvian program, we're able to meet that demand without compromising on flavor."





Prominent placement and well-maintained organic banana displays in the produce department are key to capturing shoppers' attention.

PHOTO COURTESY NATURAL GROCERS

Maximizing Organic Banana Sales

Once a niche item, organic bananas are now a produce aisle powerhouse.

BY JILL NETZEL

riven by growing consumer demand and increasing awareness of the environmental and health impacts of conventional farming, organic bananas have gained traction and are no longer a niche item. With double-digit growth in recent years and a loyal following among health-conscious, sustainability-driven consumers, this category has become a produce department staple.

Organic banana sales and volume outpace conventional bananas in some markets. But unlike their conventional counterparts, organic bananas require careful attention to procurement, merchandising and marketing to meet shopper expectations and maximize profitability.

THE RISE OF ORGANIC BANANAS

Over the past five years, the organic banana category has experienced consistent growth, according to Jamie Postell, vice president of sales, Chiquita North America, Dania Beach, FL. "We've expanded our organic offerings and made them more accessible across a range of retail environments. While all bananas — whether conventional, premium or organic — meet high standards of quality, freshness and taste, our organic line appeals to shoppers seeking certified organic options as part of a holistic lifestyle."

The numbers back it up. Equifruit, Montreal, Quebec, which offers organic fair trade bananas certified by Fairtrade International, reports a 521% volume growth over the past five years.

"One in three organic bananas is now fair trade," says Kim Chackal, vice president of sales and marketing. "Major retailers are driving this growth by switching their organic banana program to organic

fair trade. Costco Wholesale Canada also expanded their organic banana program with Equifruit, which has contributed to significant category growth. Equifruit organic fair trade bananas are now available in two-thirds of Costco stores in Canada."

Meanwhile, Natural Grocers, headquartered in Lakewood, CO, sells only 100% organic and GMO-free produce, and considers organic bananas a top-tier product year after year.

"They're a must-have for our customers," says Matt Fowler, category manager for produce. "We don't track shifts between conventional and organic because we're 100% organic. Bananas consistently rank among our top 10 produce items. Our customers shop with us precisely because they don't want to weigh the pros and cons between conventional and organic. They're here for the organic from the start, with no need to worry about pesticide residue or cross-contamination."

Daniella Velázquez de León, general manager of Organics Unlimited, a woman-owned grower and wholesaler in San Diego, CA, says bananas continue to experience strong growth. "Over the last few years, bananas have consistently been one of the strongest performers within organic produce. The category grew by over 15% in 2024 alone, making bananas one of the fastest-growing organic fruit items."

BIGGER DISPLAYS, BIGGER SALES

Bananas are the most popular item in the produce department, and their vibrant yellow color is an easy way to create a high-impact display, says Velázquez de León. "Prominent placement and well-maintained displays are key to capturing shopper attention."

It's also important to remind customers about bananas beyond the produce aisle, she adds. "Near the deli to pair with lunch or by checkout for an on-the-go snack, mobile displays help drive incremental sales. One of our retailers saw a 10% increase in organic banana sales after introducing mobile banana displays throughout their store."

Postell says Chiquita looks beyond space-to-sales ratios and focus

on the broader value bananas bring to the produce department. "Bananas, whether premium or organic, are a high-frequency, high-impact item that consistently drives foot traffic, supports basket building, and reinforces a store's position as a fresh, health-focused destination."

Chackal agrees. "The larger the display, the more bananas you sell. It's as simple as that."

Natural Grocers follows a similar approach. "Keep displays full and front-facing," savs Fowler. "Bananas are a hands-on item. Shoppers want to choose their preferred ripeness. Ensuring abundant, well-stocked displays is key to supporting both sales and customer satisfaction."

Organic bananas, in particular, are gaining momentum, but all banana formats play a critical role in produce performance, explains Postell. "We see the most success when shelf space reflects this impact and when merchandising strategies, from prime placement to creative displays, are used to capture attention and enhance the shopper experience."

SEVEN STAGES OF RIPENESS

Shoppers have varying preferences regarding banana ripeness, and their ideal ripeness level often depends on how they intend to use the fruit. There are seven stages of ripening, ranging from fully green to yellow with brown spots. The stages are characterized by changes in color, texture and sweetness.

At Chiquita, flexibility is key. Postell says that while vibrant yellow is often considered the optimal stage for visual appeal and immediate consumption, the reality is that shopper preferences can also vary. Some consumers seek greener bananas for longer shelf life, while others prefer fully ripened, brown-speckled fruit for baking, blending, or natural sweetness.

"We've invested in advanced, flexible ripening systems that allow us to deliver consistent quality across the entire ripeness spectrum. This ensures retailers can meet diverse consumer needs while maintaining high standards for taste, appearance and freshness," he says.

Fresh Del Monte, Coral Gables, FL, recommends delivering organic bananas at stage 3 ripeness — slightly green — to give retailers time to sell at peak ripeness. "Consumers want their organic bananas to be ripe and ready to enjoy at the time of purchase, with minimal green and no spotting," says Gustavo Carranza, senior product manager.

Fowler echoes the almost-ripe banana preference. "We aim for 'almost ripe' to give

WHAT THE EXPERTS **ARE SAYING**

- "Bananas, whether premium or organic, are a high-frequency, high-impact item that consistently drives foot traffic, supports basket building, and reinforces a store's position as a fresh, health-focused destination." Jamie Postell, Chiquita North America, Dania Beach, FL
- "The larger the display, the more bananas you sell. It's as simple as that."

Kim Chackal, Equifruit, Montreal, Quebec

customers flexibility to enjoy their bananas over a few days. But we also try to accommodate those seeking ripe or overripe bananas for smoothies, baking or just personal preference."

Chackal, from Equifruit, says the recommended color to sell is between a stage 4 or 5, meaning the fruit is yellow with slightly green tips. "Many retailers scale back the ripeness on their organic program to mitigate shrink, but this simply turns off customers. Customers want to eat that banana right away or over the next few days. Nobody wants to buy green bananas and watch them ripen on the counter for a week before they can enjoy them."

PACKAGING PREFERENCES

Packaging choices for organic bananas are influenced by regional preferences, but sustainability and convenience are major considerations.

Chiquita takes a flexible approach. "In some urban or convenience-focused markets, bagged bananas offer speed and ease — particularly for grab-and-go shoppers," says Postell. "In other areas, consumers value the ability to hand-select individual bananas, often with ripeness and portion control in mind."

Fresh Del Monte overwhelmingly supports banded bananas. "In general, 98% of our organic bananas are banded," says Carranza. "Only 2% are bagged, and this figure is fairly consistent across North American regions."

Natural Grocers goes even further: "We don't sell bagged bananas," says Fowler.











Organics Unlimited says bananas' broad appeal spans young families seeking healthy choices to younger generations prioritizing sustainability, social impact, and ethical sourcing through the company's GROW Program. PHOTO COURTESY ORGANICS UNLIMITED

"We minimize produce packaging wherever possible, including bananas. They're easy for customers to grab loose and carry as is, or shoppers can use our compostable paper or plant-based produce bags if needed."

"In the U.S., most organic bananas are still sold loose, with some larger retailers opting to use bands to differentiate them," says Velázquez de León. "This approach makes sense because today's consumers are environmentally conscious. Why add plastic to a produce item that comes with its own nature-made packaging?"

MARKETING THAT STICKS

Bananas are universally loved, but targeted marketing sharpens their appeal.

"We tailor our marketing and merchandising strategies to resonate with consumers across all life stages and cultural backgrounds," explains Juliana Furlan, director of marketing at Chiquita.

Furlan says Chiquita also recognizes the importance of cultural relevance, particularly in communities where green bananas or plantains are culinary staples. "That's why we work to ensure these varieties are available, merchandised thoughtfully, and supported with messaging that reflects their cultural significance."

Fresh Del Monte echoes that bananas' broad appeal is a strength. "We support marketing programs to boost incremental sales across both conventional and organic varieties with marketing campaigns, initiatives and retailer programs," says Carranza.

Meanwhile, Equifruit focuses its social media campaigns on TikTok and Instagram toward Millennials and Gen Z. "These younger audiences will represent the majority of purchasing power in the next five years," says Chackal. "They are receptive to brands like Equifruit who are authentic, women-owned, B Corp, and deliver disruptive messaging."

Organics Unlimited connects with different groups since the magic of bananas is their broad appeal. "Young families are a huge driver," says Velázquez de León. "Parents want healthy, pesticide-free options for their kids. For Gen Z and Millennials, it's all about the bigger picture: sustainability, social impact and ethical sourcing. That's where our GROW Program really shines. We've always been a 100% organic brand, and our GROW Program offers customers an option that not only matches their health and environmental values, but gives back to the communities that grow their food."

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Pricing for bananas is on the rise. According to the Consumer Price Index from June 2025, banana prices rose 3.3% in May from

BEST PRACTICES FOR GROWING AN ORGANIC BANANA CATEGORY

- Invest in bigger displays to increase volume.
- Ripen to yellow (stage 4-5) to meet consumer demand for ready-to-eat fruit.
- Favor banded over bagged for sustainability and visual appeal, unless regional preferences dictate otherwise.
- Target key demographics with promotions and recipe ideas, health-based adult messaging, and bold Gen Z social media tactics.
- **Don't fear the premium** if you tell the story right, the price gap won't shrink sales.
- Add Fairtrade certification to amplify your sustainability messaging and differentiate your organic program.

the previous month. Organic bananas tend to cost slightly more than conventional bananas.

Fresh Del Monte sees organic bananas as the preferred choice by many health-conscious consumers. "Price has not been a barrier," says Carranza. "In fact, category growth suggests that many shoppers see added value in organic farming methods and environmental sustainability."

Organic bananas command a premium, says Chackal. "There's money on the table in the U.S. market. Many retailers are conservative in their pricing and keep the delta around 10-20 cents between conventional and organic. In comparison, some retailers in Canada have a 60-cent spread between the categories, and organics are still growing."

According to Velázquez de León, organic bananas typically carry about a 20-30% premium over conventional at retail.

"We still have a long way to go to achieve truly fair prices for bananas," she emphasizes. "Bananas are notorious for being the cheapest item in the produce department, and while affordability is important for consumers, we can't lose sight of the difference an extra two to five cents per pound makes for the people growing, harvesting and packaging the fruit."

FAIR TRADE & ORGANIC

Fair trade and organic bananas offer consumers a way to support sustainable farming practices and fair labor conditions.

"Fair trade and organic attract similar consumers who prioritize certification," says Chiquita's Peter Stedman, director of sustainability. "Chiquita emphasizes a deep commitment to responsible farming, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship throughout our entire supply chain. By sharing this authentic, values-driven story, we build trust with consumers who want their food choices to genuinely reflect their principles."

"Most Equifruit customers switch over their organic bananas to Equifruit organic fair trade bananas," says Chackal. "When the story is told and the message is clear, the results are positive."

PB PRODUCE BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Friends,

For nearly four decades under th leadership of Jim Prevor, PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine has been a leading industry influencer in the effort to increase overall produce consumption, whether by one commodity at a time or through educating the entire produce buying sector about ways to sell more fruits and vegetables.

PRODUCE BUSINESS renews this commitment, and we invite you to help us continue our mission! In addition to devoting even more editorial pages to assist the industry in moving the needle on consumption, we invite you to nominate key players we can highlight in our pages for the industry to learn by their examples.



Here's how:

Throughout the year, we will be selecting companies and people exemplary in selling and marketing fruits and vegetables to consumers. Introduced through 4 new cover stories that are based on industry nominations, we will showcase awarding-winning examples of companies and individuals doing superb jobs in consumer engagement.

PLEASE LOOK FOR LINKS ON OUR WEBSITE TO ACCESS THE NOMINATION FORMS FOR THE FOLLOWING AWARDS:









Our team of award-winning editors will select the top recipients based on your nominations and descriptions of each company's contribution to increase produce consumption.

We urge you to participate in our recognition awards as often as possible so we all contribute to the success of this program to raise the bar on produce consumption.

If you would like to reach me, my telephone number is 561-994-1118, extension 101. Again, thank you for your support.

Ken Whitacre

Publisher/Editorial Director

Kwhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

P.S. As we enter the next phase of Jim Prevor's mission to "initiate industry improvement," we encourage your input and hope you will contact us to discuss ways to increase produce consumption. Our regular-appearing "Voice of the Industry" column, for example, is just one way to express yourself to help increase produce consumption.



Pistachios are commonly found in the produce department due to their perceived health benefits and natural, whole-food association.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

Pistachios Riding Crest of Healthy Eating Wave

The major driver of demand globally is increasing awareness of health benefits.

BY STEVEN MAXWELL

hen it comes to pistachio production, the U.S., or more specifically California, remains the big player. According to American Pistachio Growers, California accounts for 99% of annual U.S. pistachio production, with more than 312,000 acres being farmed across the state. In total, the yearly production represents over \$1.6 billion to the California economy.

Nichols Farms, Hanford, CA, is a fourth-generation family-owned and -operated pistachio farm in the San Joaquin Valley and is counted among the top five producers in the country.

Senior brand manager Christine Trageser says the category has benefited from the rising consumer demand for better-for-you snacks high in protein. "Coupled with the viral Dubai chocolate trend, pistachios as a snack and as a flavor have soared in popularity," she says. "Nichols Farms branded product has seen volume increase 55% over the last year."

Trageser believes another major driver of pistachio demand globally is increasing awareness of their health benefits. "Consumers seeking plant-based protein, healthy fats, fiber, and antioxidants are drawn to pistachios as a nutritious snack or ingredient," she says. "This is especially true for Gen Z and Millennials who have shown an outsized interest in health-conscious snacking and plant-based protein sources."

As the world's largest grower and processor of pistachios, Los Angeles, CA-headquartered Wonderful Pistachios grows, markets, and distributes California pistachios in more than 70 countries.

According to the company's vice president of marketing, Diana Salsa, the company has used the past 12 months to build on a strong presence in Europe, the Middle East and China — in addition to its U.S. business — and to expand into Mexico and India, taking advantage of rising disposable income and increased health consciousness.

"Pistachios have truly owned the past year, not just as a trend, but as a full-blown movement," says Salsa. "As both an indulgence and

an everyday snack staple, they offer an approachable luxury that resonates with today's consumers. Their rise is driven by a unique blend of aesthetics, taste and health, making them a standout at the intersection of flavor and wellness."

WELCOME TO FLAVORTOWN

Based in Terra Bella, CA, Setton Farms is the second-largest pistachio grower-processor in the U.S. and exports internationally, including to emerging markets, as well as selling substantial volumes within the domestic market.

The company recently launched Tajín-seasoned pistachio kernels, as part of a move to introduce new flavors into the category, according to Executive Vice President Joseph Setton.

"Traditionally, people have looked toward chips and other fried snacks for their flavor experiences. However, with this introduction of seasoned pistachios, we're giving people the best of both worlds," he says. "They are able to get their flavor experience with a healthy product that is protein-packed, with antioxidants and other healthy fats."

Setton says the company's dry-roasted pistachios offer a healthy snack "without any of the extra oils or mess that comes along with fried products."

Wonderful, which offers both in-shell and no-shell products, has a lineup of flavors that include Sweet Chili, Roasted & Salted, Salt & Pepper, Seasoned Salt, Lightly Salted, and Unsalted for in-shell, and Chili Roasted, Honey Roasted, Sea Salt & Vinegar, Jalapeño Lime, Smoky Barbecue, and Sea Salt & Pepper for no-shell. This range was recently complemented by the launch of a no-shell Dill Pickle flavor.

Nichols, which offers a variety of pistachio products, from in-shell and no-shell to organic pistachios, markets a wide range of flavors, including the traditional Roasted with Sea Salt, as well as the more adventurous Cocoa Cookie, Garlic and Garden Herb, and Jalapeño Lime. The company's organic line features Roasted with Sea Salt, plus flavors such as Habanero Lime, Rosemary Garlic, Maple Butter and Hot Honey.

With the rising popularity of pistachio products, Trageser says Nichols is exploring additional flavor varieties and product lines to meet consumer demand.

EFFECTIVE MERCHANDISING

Commonly found in the produce department due to their perceived health benefits and natural, whole-food association, pistachios are frequently grouped with other packaged nuts and dried fruits, Trageser says, creating a "trail mix" destination.

A winning secondary placement for pistachios is among lettuce and leafy greens, highlighting the nuts' effectiveness as salad toppers, she adds. "Placing them near bagged salads, salad kits, or bulk salad bar ingredients can inspire consumers to add pistachios for crunch and protein."

Given their versatility, pistachios can be paired with both sweet and savory offerings, allowing retailers flexibility with instore placements. Trageser adds that using stand-alone displays that share the benefits of consuming pistachios are effective merchandising options for retailers without "clean floor" policies.

As well as providing in-store point-ofsale (POS) displays, Wonderful offers a dedicated in-house merchandising team to help stores build larger-than-life displays. According to Salsa, stores using Wonderful's POS displays see up to two times higher sales velocities on average.

"Highlighting the health benefits and unique flavors of Wonderful Pistachios through bold signage, promotions, and on the packaging itself can help attract health-conscious consumers looking for nutritious snack options," she says. "By leveraging these merchandising strategies, retailers can maximize their salty snack sales effectively."

To capitalize on pistachios' appeal as a snack, Salsa recommends cross-merchandising in complementary areas outside the produce area, such as snack aisles, beer and beverage sections, or on endcaps with clip strips.

With pistachios being the "No. 1 nut" for many retailers, Setton believes more prominent placement will encourage greater numbers of shoppers to pick up a pack as they head to the checkouts. "Pistachios are in high demand. If you give them some extra exposure, you're going to see customers flocking in to purchase them."

Setton recommends cross-merchandising pistachios with beers, mocktails or even water, as well as maintaining a presence alongside the produce aisles.

PACKAGING PISTACHIOS

Setton notes Setton Farms has experienced particular success with packaging pistachios in zip-close bag pouches, and says the option has worked well for the new, seasoned pistachios by locking in the extra ingredients, while also showcasing the contents.

Setton expects to see more recyclable packaging in the category, adding that his company is already fully equipped to handle recycled versions of its current packs.

Trageser believes the best packaging solutions for pistachios are those that offer a longer shelf life to both retailers and consumers. This, she says, will guarantee the pistachios are fresh once they make it into a kitchen pantry.

At the same time, she says pistachio packaging has evolved to meet the needs of consumers and their lifestyles. "Many prefer smaller pack sizes to benefit an onthe-go lifestyle or for snacking occasions that don't take place in the home."

Following the success of the Tajín-seasoned pistachios, Setton reveals that Setton Farms will be introducing further additions to its seasoned pistachio range in the near

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- "Pistachios have truly owned the past year, not just as a trend, but as a full-blown movement."
 Diana Salsa, Wonderful Pistachios, Los Angeles, CA
- "Pistachios are in high demand. If you give them some extra exposure, you're going to see customers flocking in to purchase them."

Joseph Setton, Setton Farms, Terra Bella, CA

future. "With the Tajín pistachios, we have opened up the market to something that's never been done before," he says. "We have been able to find customers who wouldn't normally buy pistachios, so stay tuned to see what's coming next."



How to Control Costs Without Cutting Corners

Wholesalers should

invest in cold-chain

infrastructure and

build robust

in-house repacking

capabilities.

BY JOSHUA WEBER

n today's unpredictable economy, the produce industry is facing pressure from every angle — tariffs, inflation, labor shortages, energy costs, you name it. As chief financial officer of V. Marchese and Cut Fresh, I see firsthand how these challenges play out across the supply chain.



But I also see something else: opportunity. Opportunity to innovate, to plan smarter, and to build resilience that benefits both our business and our

At V. Marchese, we've made a deliberate decision not to chase short-term gains or simply react to market swings. Instead, we've developed a proactive approach that helps us protect pricing stability without compromising on service or quality.

We start with forecasting. Rather than waiting for costs to spike, we anticipate them. Our team uses time-series models and historical pricing data to align purchasing with seasonal trends. That allows us to lock in favorable pricing from our domestic partners and strategically time our imports. The result? Fewer surprises — and more stable costs for our clients.

But smart sourcing is just one piece of the puzzle. Wholesalers should invest in cold-chain infrastructure and build robust in-house repacking capabilities. That control over inventory and

shelf life not only cuts down on spoilage, but it also gives flexibility to shift product based on demand.

Industry data backs this up: Refrigerated supply chains can reduce food waste by up to 41%. We've seen similar benefits firsthand.

Our repacking facilities, for example, give us the ability to extend product life, minimize waste, and pass those savings directly onto customers. We've also leaned into demand-smoothing strategies, like bundled or opaque packaging (what some call "chef's choice" boxes). These allow us to keep inventory moving without overcommitting specific SKUs, which reduces both shortages and excess stock. It's a strategy rooted in data, but it pays off on the floor.

Labor is another major pressure point, especially in foodservice. With 80% of operators saying they're understaffed, this isn't just a convenience, it's a necessity. And it's a differentiator that adds real value.

Of course, none of these strategies work in a vacuum. Communication is key. Building strong relationships by being transparent with clients is important. Sharing pricing forecasts, market trends, and even potential inventory concerns in advance makes planning easier on both sides of the table.

Take that transparency a step further with technology that can provide real-time insights into inventory age, pricing trends and spoilage risk. This kind of visibility empowers customers to make smarter, faster decisions — and puts us on the same side of the planning equation.

This isn't just theory. Research from BCG and Deloitte confirms what we've seen in practice: Companies that use data-driven supply

> chain tools and Al-backed analytics can cut warehousing and distribution costs by 10 to 20%. The goal is to bring those benefits to clients - whether they're managing a massive institutional account or a single-location kitchen.

> At the end of the day, our job isn't just to move produce. It's to be a strategic partner — to help our customers meet challenges with solutions that are scalable, practical and built to last.

When you blend smart sourcing, operational control, labor-saving innovations, and transparent communication with the invisible hand of experience, you avoid some of the pitfalls that

other companies may fall into. In the end, you just don't survive volatility — you thrive through it. PB

Joshua Weber is chief financial officer at V. Marchese Inc. & Cut Fresh LLC. He brings over a decade of financial and operational leadership to his role overseeing sourcing, logistics, analytics and client strategy. A Concordia University–Wisconsin MBA graduate with a background in public service and cross-industry leadership, Weber is a board member and former treasurer of Milwaukee's Harbor District BID 51. His leadership is defined by data-driven efficiency, collaboration, and a passion for elevating customer service across every link of the supply chain.

WRITE FOR PRODUCE BUSINESS!

We welcome analysis and insight from industry leaders who have expertise to share in retail, wholesale, foodservice, or trends that impact produce across the world. Reach out to us at editor@producebusiness.com to inquire about column submissions.

Food Waste: Not Just an Environmental Issue

BY SARAH CALCUTT

cross the U.K.'s fields, polytunnels and packhouses, a hidden crop grows. Not of new varieties or experimental strains, but of surplus food.

This is the national waste crop: millions of tons of fruit and vegetables, grown with skill and care by British farmers, but deemed unsellable due to size, shape or market oversupply. It is food that could nourish a family, but instead becomes waste, sent to anaerobic digestion, turned into animal feed, or simply left to rot.



This is not just an environmental issue. It is a business issue, a social issue, and a moral one. As both a sixth-generation apple grower and the chief executive of the food redistribution charity City Harvest, I have seen both ends of the supply chain — the heartbreak of produce plowed back into fields, and the transformative impact of fresh food on communities that need it most.

That is why our team at City Harvest launched Harvest for Hunger, a plan supported by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to intercept this "national waste crop" at the farm gate and reroute it directly to people experiencing food insecurity.

With new funding, we will be collecting surplus produce, free of charge to farmers, and distributing it to over 350 frontline charities, community hubs and schools, ensuring that no good food goes to waste while millions go hungry.

THE SCALE OF THE WASTE

According to The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), around 3.6 million tons of food are lost or wasted at the primary production level in the U.K. each year. That is £1.2 billion (\$1.6 billion) worth of food, most of it perfectly edible, grown using the same land, labor, water and energy as anything on a retail shelf.

At the same time, around 20% of the population need food support. Four million people in the U.K. are going hungry, while others are forced to skip meals or rely on less nutritious food due to price pressures. The irony is stark — produce abandoned in the field coexisting with a gap at the table.

As a sector, we have a choice. We can continue to accept waste as a cost of doing business, or we can rethink our models and revalue surplus as part of the solution.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Retail specifications are one of the primary drivers of waste, often for cosmetic reasons rather than quality. A carrot that is curved, an apple that is blemished — these are still nutritious, still delicious, still British-grown. What they lack in conformity, they make up for in nutrition.

But waste also costs money. Every ton of unsold food represents lost inputs, sunk costs and missed opportunity.

By partnering with food redistribution networks like City Harvest, growers and packers can reduce disposal costs, boost environmental credentials, and feed into a circular economy model that values every part of the harvest.

This is not about charity. It is about smarter supply chain management, better resource use, and unlocking new value from existing systems.

A FARMER'S PERSPECTIVE

For me, this is personal. I know how much love goes into every tray of apples. I also know how crushing it is to watch tons of food rejected, not because it is not good, but because it is not "perfect."

What I have seen through City Harvest is that there is a huge appetite for this food. We distribute over 120 tons of surplus food every week, reaching more than 130,000 people through our network. Our partners include schools, homeless shelters, food banks, refugee centers and more. And the feedback is always the same: Fresh food changes lives.

We have delivered over 75 million meals' worth of food since 2014. In doing so, we have also prevented over 100,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions. That is the power of connecting the dots between surplus and need.

A CALL TO ACTION

City Harvest's Harvest for Hunger scheme means farmers can now request free pickups of surplus directly via our website. DEFRA's funding allows us to scale this service, expand our fleet and depots, and reduce barriers for producers who want to do the right thing, but previously lacked the logistics or support to make it happen.

I believe it is a matter of national pride that we make better use of what our incredible growers' produce. We grow everything from berries to brassicas, and, with the right systems in place, we can ensure more of that bounty reaches people's plates.

The U.K. fresh produce industry has always been agile, resilient and community-minded. This is an opportunity to lead the way once again, showing that our sector can feed both people and progress. PB

Sarah Calcutt is chief executive of City Harvest, London, UK. Find out more at www.cityharvest.org.uk/harvest-for-hunger.

Produce Needs Flavor-First Strategy

BY M. JILL OVERDORF

he produce industry is at a critical crossroads. Despite research linking fruit and vegetable consumption to longer, healthier lives, the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is sobering: Only one in five U.S. adults eats the recommended daily servings of fresh produce.

This reality poses both a challenge and an opportunity — one that requires a dramatic shift in how we talk about, market, and serve fresh fruits and vegetables.



For decades, the industry has leaned on messages of health, nutrition, and "good for you" benefits to encourage consumption. While these messages are well-intentioned, they are often uninspiring when competing against the consumer-packaged goods (CPG) giants.

Frito-Lay doesn't market Doritos as "contains some corn" or "good for your cholesterol." They sell "bold flavor" and "extreme crunch." That difference in approach and semantics matters — and it's

time fresh produce learned to compete on that same playing field.

The most powerful way to change eating habits is to connect with consumers on an emotional level. Calling produce "healthy" or "nutritious" is accurate, but it's not what wins hearts and cravings. Flavor, texture, aroma, and experience are what drive repeat purchases and loyalty.

Restaurants understand this truth. Diners don't order a salad because the menu says "rich in antioxidants." They order it because the menu says "charred sweet corn tossed with creamy avocado, crisp romaine, and smoky chipotle-lime dressing."

A recent Pew Research Center survey confirms taste beats health as a motivator nearly two-to-one when people decide what to eat.

This approach is equally critical in K-12 school foodservice. Kids are not swayed by fiber counts; they respond to "juicy melon slices," "crispy oven-roasted potatoes with sea salt," or "sweet mango chunks that taste like summer."

Marketing produce like a delicious treat can help dismantle the perception that fruits and vegetables are an obligation, rather than a delight.

THE COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

The produce industry's competition is not just other fruits and vegetables — it's the snack aisle. CPG brands spend billions annually to create crave-worthy products, strategic branding, and campaigns that tap into fun, social connection and convenience. They invest in in-store placement, package design, and relentless sampling.

Fresh produce, in contrast, is often displayed with minimal signage, inconsistent quality, and little sensory marketing. If an orange were marketed with the same flair as an energy drink, its potential would skyrocket.

To compete, the produce sector needs a bold, coordinated strategy built around the same principles CPG brands use.

BUILDING A SEASONAL ROADMAP

While monthly campaigns can be resource-intensive, a seasonal roadmap offers a manageable framework to create momentum all year. Each season offers unique produce stars.

Fall:

Apples, pears, winter squash, and root vegetables can be paired with warm spices or roasted to intensify sweetness. Restaurants can feature limited-time menus with harvest bowls, spiced apple desserts, or roasted squash soups.

Winter:

Citrus fruits, pomegranates, hearty greens, and sweet potatoes shine this time of year. Marketing should emphasize freshness and vitality, "a burst of sunshine in every bite." Restaurants can incorporate these into winter menus as zesty garnishes, bold salads or comforting sides. Schools can host "winter warm-up" produce days. **Spring:**

Spotlight tender asparagus, sweet peas, strawberries and baby greens. Partner with restaurants to feature seasonal salads, flatbreads, or desserts with spring-forward flavors. In K-12 cafeterias, introduce "first tastes of spring" days.

Summer:

Summer produce is already nature's candy. The marketing opportunity lies in making them the hero of social occasions. Think "grill-ready veggie skewers," "watermelon wedges for the beach," and "tomatoes so sweet, you'll skip the sugar." School programs can offer grab-and-go produce snack bags.

FOODSERVICE AS THE FRONT LINE

Restaurants, hotels, and institutional dining operations hold a unique power in shaping produce perception. The way chefs describe, present, and integrate produce into dishes can elevate it as the centerpiece or relegate it to a side note.

Leading restaurant brands have shown that produce-forward dishes can be both profitable and popular when they're treated with the same creative attention as proteins.

A CALL TO ACTION

If the industry wants to shift the one-in-five statistic from the CDC toward a majority, it must unite to make fresh produce the most delicious, convenient and exciting choice on the plate. This requires investment in marketing innovation, foodservice partnerships, seasonal storytelling and consumer experience.

If we want to build a future where fruits and vegetables are a central part of daily life, we must stop positioning them as the thing you "should" eat, and start presenting them as the thing you can't wait to eat. That means borrowing the boldness of CPG advertising, the creativity of restaurant menus, and the immersive experiences of seasonal food culture.

The produce industry has the product. It has the science. Now we all need the story.

M. Jill Overdorf is founder and president of The Produce Ambassador, which provides strategic insight, brand development, and innovative solutions for the foodservice, produce, hospitality and culinary sectors.

Receive supplier information fast by using the Produce Business Information Showcase. Here's how: Contact the advertiser directly via the website, email, or phone listed in the ad.

SEPTEMBER 2025

COMPANY	PAGE #	PHONE	WEBSITE	COMPANY	PAGE #	PHONE	WEBSITE
Advance Custom Brokers & Consultants	50-51	786-470-0400 advance	customsbrokers.com	Harvest Sensations, LLC.	50-513	305-907-3230	.harvestsensations.com
Alpine Fresh, Inc.	50-51	305-594-9117	alpinefresh.com	Heartland Produce Co	542	262-653-1000	heartlandproduce.com
Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc	55	920-348-5127	alsum.com	Hudson River Fruit Distributors	708	845-594-4429	hudsonriverfruit.com
Altar Produce, LLC	50-51	760-357-6762	altarproduce.com	International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA	A) 10 3	302-738-7100	freshproduce.com
Ayco Farms, Inc	50-51	954-788-6800	aycofarms.com	Jacobs Malcolm & Burtt (JMB)	50-512	209-367-0990	jmb-produce.com
Bland Farms				John Vena Inc			
Bolthouse Farms, Inc.	17	661-366-7209	bolthousefresh.com	M. Levin & Company, Inc	432	215-336-2900	mlevinco.com
Bushman's	56	715-454-6200	bushmansinc.com	MIXTEC Group	645	62-652-2299	mixtec.net
Capital City Fruit Co, Inc.	24	515-981-5111	capitalcityfruit.com	New York Apple Association, Inc	695	85-924-2171	applesfromny.com/
Carb Americas	50-51	954-786-0000	carbamericas.com	Niagara Fresh Fruit	717	716-778-7631	niagarafreshfruit.com
Coast To Coast Produce, LLC	27	203- 271-2006	ctcproduce.com	North Bay Produce Co., Inc	642	231-946-1941	northbayproduce.com
Coosemans Philadelphia	45		coosemansphilly.com	Onions 52	218	301 773-0630	Onions52.com
Crunch Time Apple Growers	13	716- 300-8522 crunchtir	meapplegrowers.com	One Banana North America Corp	167	786-577-3251	onebananas.com
Crystal Valley Foods	50-51	305-591-6567 cr	ystalvalleyfoods.com	Philabundance	462	215-339-0900	philabundance.org
Dole Food Company, Inc	25	704-213-3478	dole.com	Produce Blue Book			
Dole Food Company, Inc.	2	704-213-3478	dole.com	Riveridge Produce Marketing Inc	636	516-887-6873	riveridgeproduce.com
El Vista	70	717- 642-8414apple	pickingorchards.com	Ryeco, LLC	41 2	215- 551-8883	ryecollc.com
Equifruit	77	833 511-3247	equifruit.com	Setton International Foods, Inc.			
EV Produce International, Inc.	15	956-215-8872	evproduce.com	Seven Seas/Tom Lange	50-512	217-786-3300	tomlange.com
Farm Direct Supply Inc.	50-51	561-910-4341f	armdirectsupply.com	Shuman Farms, Inc.	21, 759	912- 557-4477	shumanfarmsga.com
Fierman Produce Exchange, Inc	24	718- 893-1640	.fiermanproduce.com	Southern Specialties, Inc	50-519	954-784-6500	southernspecialties.com
Forrence Orchards Inc	69	518-643-9527 goadir	ondack.com/entries/	Square 1 Farms, LLC	50-515	61-614-2814	sq1farms.com/
			forrence-orchards	SweeTango (Next Best Thing Coop)	728	366-716-3428	sweetango.com
Fox Packaging & Fox Solutions	52	956-682-6176	foxbag.com	Symms Fruit Ranch Inc	702	208-459-4821	symmsfruit.com
Fresh Innovations, LLC. (Yo Quiero Brands).	16	817-674-9120fre	shinnovationsllc.com	T. M. Kovacevich Phildaelphia Inc	392	215-336-3160	tmkproduce.com
Fresh Produce Association of the Americas .	_	, , , ,		The Foundation for Fresh Produce	52	202-303-3435	freshproduce.com
Fru-Veg Marketing, Inc	50-51	305-591-7766	fruveg.com	The Perishable Specialist Inc	50-513	305-477-9906 thepe	rishablespecialist.com/
GLC Avocados	18	805-612-5558	glccerritos.com	Thermal Technologies, Inc.	888	803-691-8000th	nermaltechnologies.com
Gourmet Trading Company				To-Jo Mushrooms			
Grimmway Farms (Cal-Organic)	52	661-845-5229	grimmway.com	Vidalia Onion Committee	219	12-537-1918	vidaliaonion.org
Gumz Muck Farms LLC	54	608-981-2488	gumzfarmswi.com	Wilcox Fresh	492	08-356-6668	wilcoxfresh.com

The must-attend event for the produce industry is back!

Join us in Tucson for SWIPE 2026, where the fresh produce industry comes together for networking, innovation, and unforgettable experiences. From the golf course to the expo floor, every moment is designed to inspire, connect, and grow your business.





January 22-24, 2026

Tucson, AZ

JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort & Spa

SWIPEexpo.com

FEATURING THE:





Robert Dasher and his brother, Gerald, took over G&R Farms after Walter Dasher, founder, passed away in 1971.



Pictured is a G&R Farms onion harvest in the 1970s.

G&R Farms Celebrates 80 Years

&R Farms, the third-generation Vidalia and Peruvian sweet onion grower in Glennville, GA, is celebrating its 80th anniversary in 2025, honoring eight decades of dedication to farming excellence, family values and community roots.

Founded in 1945 by Walter Dasher, G&R Farms began as a modest family operation with a simple mission: grow the best-tasting onions possible. Over the years, through hard work, perseverance, and a deep respect for the land, the farm grew steadily, becoming a trusted name in sweet onions.

Today, under the leadership of third-generation Chief Executive Blake Dasher, G&R Farms continues to be guided by the same principles that started it all: hard work, integrity, and putting people first.

"Our longevity is a testament to staying true to our roots while always working to improve," says Blake Dasher. "We're proud to still be family-owned and -operated after all these years. Many of our employees have been with us for decades — they are more than team members, they are family. Celebrating this milestone together with them made it even more meaningful."

The anniversary was marked with a special celebration for employees, paying tribute to the people who have been the foundation of the farm's enduring success. Employees gathered April 8 to share memories, recognize achievements, and look ahead to the future.

While celebrating the past and its anniversary, G&R Farms also looks to the future. The company remains dedicated to continuous improvement through seed trials, sustainability efforts, innovative farming practices, and supporting the next generation of agricultural leaders through its Growing America's Farmers program.

As G&R Farms celebrates this major milestone, one thing is clear: The commitment to quality, people, and progress that started 80



Georgia-based G&R Farms was founded in 1945 by Walter Dasher, beginning as a modest family operation with a simple mission: grow the best-tasting onions possible.

PHOTOS COURTESY G&R FARMS

years ago is still what drives the farm today. With a legacy deeply rooted in family, farming, and stewardship, G&R Farms looks forward to continuing its story for generations to come.

"This isn't just our history," says Blake Dasher. "It's our future, too. We're proud of what we've built, and we're excited for what's ahead."

Grow Your Retail & Foodservice Business

Connect with retail and foodservice companies serving the fresh produce supply chain with Blue Book's credit rating and marketing information.



Grow Sales

Connect with thousands of businesses throughout the produce supply chain with our searchable online database.

Manage Business Risk

Know a company's Blue Book rating, predictive score, and pay practices before making the sale.

Resolve Challenging Transactions

Use Trading Assistance to resolve a business dispute or collect a past due payment.

Grow Your Business—Contact Us Today!

