

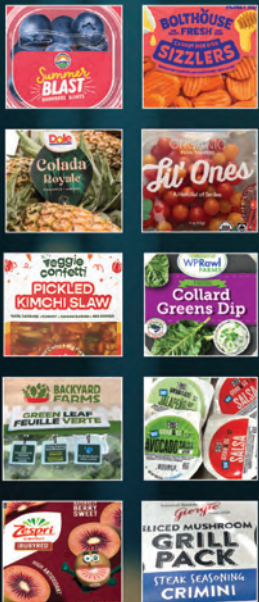
PB

PRODUCE BUSINESS

COVER STORY

TOP 10 NEW PRODUCT INNOVATIONS

Brilliant branding, smart packaging and convenience highlight this year's standout produce items.



NOVEMBER 2025
VOL. 41 | NO. 11 | \$9.90
INITIATING INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT

SUPPLEMENT

NEW YORK
PRODUCE SHOW
BOOTH REVIEWS

PROCUREMENT

Imported Onions
Florida Tomatoes

FEATURES

People of
Purpose:

Jesse Himango
Tom Smith
Nichole Towell

REGIONAL PROFILE

Detroit

RISING RETAILER

Fiesta
Farms

MERCHANDISING

Bananas
Citrus
Winter Merchandising Guide





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there's one for you.

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COVER STORY

27 Ninth Annual Innovation Awards

We showcase the 10 highest-scoring innovation entries and invite the industry to determine which one deserves the annual Joe Nucci Award for Product Innovation.

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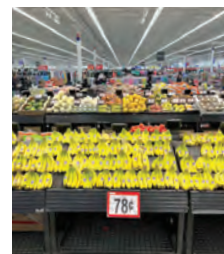
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THIS MONTH'S WINNER

GLORIA SCHOPPEL
Office Staff
Vineland Cooperative
Produce Auction
Vineland, NJ

At Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction, Vineland, NJ, Gloria Schoppel keeps things running smoothly behind the scenes. Her role involves verifying produce sales, ensuring buyers and growers are on the same page, and entering daily information into the auction system — work that demands both accuracy and a deep understanding of the fast-paced produce trade.

Schoppel's roots in the produce industry go way back. She's spent her entire career in produce and trucking alongside her late husband, Charlie. Even after retiring for a year, she found she missed the business. "I retired one year and found that I needed to keep busy, so when the staff of the Vineland Produce Auction asked if I wanted to

return on a seasonal basis, I accepted."

She says the best part of her career is interaction with people. "I've worked with many of the same folks throughout my career and have watched some of them grow up and build their own businesses. Now, I get to share my experiences with the younger staff — and we laugh a lot, which keeps me young!"

Outside of work, Schoppel treasures time with her family, including three great-grandchildren. She also enjoys gardening and helping care for the many animals her family raises.

When asked what she likes best about PRODUCE BUSINESS, she says she appreciates learning how retailers across the country promote fresh produce in their regions. It's one more way she stays connected to the industry she's spent a lifetime supporting.

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

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 January 2026 issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS.

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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!



QUESTIONS FOR THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

- 1) "Go Tarpless!" is the slogan for which ripening room company? _____
- 2) Scott Scepis is a team member for which NY-based wholesaler? _____
- 3) Which brand can be found in the "Ultimate Dip Destination"? _____
- 4) In what year did Consalo Family Farms start Farming Freshness? _____
- 5) What is "The Trusted Logo Consumers Look For"? _____
- 6) Which commodity's Road Map has 6 Ways to Drive Sales? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
Company _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
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Photocopies or scans of this form are acceptable.

Please send answers to one of the following: (1) email: editor@producebusiness.com

(2) snail mail to: NOVEMBER PB QUIZ • P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481 or (3) Fax: 561-994-1610

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

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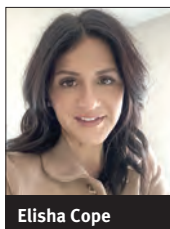
TRANSITIONS

JBj and Veg-Land

Elisha Cope has joined the team at JBj and Veg-Land, Fullerton, CA, where she will take on a pivotal role in driving the development and expansion of the company's organic vegetable program.

With a career spanning over a decade in agricultural leadership, Cope has built a reputation for her industry knowledge and commitment to serving growers. She began her career with over six years at Cal-Organic, followed by an eight-year tenure at Braga Farms. Most recently, Cope served as director of sales and marketing at Lakeside.

She will be based out of JBj and Veg-Land's new satellite office in Bakersfield, CA.



Elisha Cope

Ippolito International

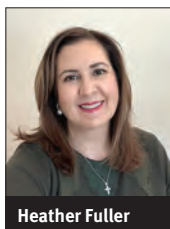
Ippolito International, Salinas, CA, has added **Heather Fuller** to its sales team as vice president of business development.

With over 20 years in the fresh produce business, Fuller began her industry work as a field inspector in the Salinas Valley, earning her way to a commodity crop manager's role and then into a sales management position, most recently at Braga Fresh. She is a graduate of the United Leadership Class 24 and has held numerous volunteer positions at IFPA's grower-shipper and fresh-cut councils.

Ippolito International also promoted **Michele McNeece** to the role of vice president, new business development.

McNeece has over four decades in the fresh produce industry, including 12 years with Growers Express, and most recently as the national director of business development at Ippolito.

In her new role, she will continue to focus on new account development across both retail and foodservice channels while strengthening existing partnerships nationwide.



Heather Fuller



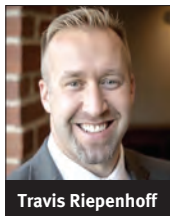
Michele McNeece

Wakefern Food Corp.

Wakefern Food Corp., Keasbey, NJ, appointed **Travis Riepenhoff** as group vice president, fresh. Riepenhoff succeeds **Mark Van Buskirk**, who now leads Wakefern's Center Store divisions as group vice president.

Riepenhoff will oversee Wakefern's fresh food divisions, including foodservice, bakery, meat, seafood, produce and floral.

With over 23 years of experience in the supermarket industry, Riepenhoff brings expertise in retail operations and merchandising across all fresh departments. He most recently served as



Travis Riepenhoff

vice president of fresh merchandising at Giant Eagle, where he developed high impact merchandising programs, led assortment optimization and worked to elevate product quality across the chain. Prior to that, he was senior director of meat and seafood at Kroger.

He holds a bachelor's degree in business management from Shawnee State University and completed Leadership Education and Development at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

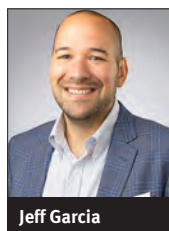
In his new role, Van Buskirk succeeds **Paul Patten** as Wakefern's group vice president of center store. Patten is retiring after a 43-year career with the cooperative.



Diego Ureta



Dave Michael



Jeff Garcia

Hampton Farms

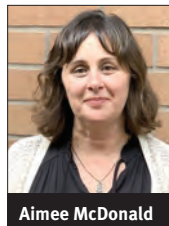
Hampton Farms, Raleigh, NC, has added three professionals to its sales team: **Jeff Garcia**, national director of supermarket sales; **Diego Ureta**, Western regional account manager; and **Dave Michael**, Midwest regional sales manager.

These three bring complementary skills and expertise that will strengthen Hampton Farms' reach and deepen relationships with customers nationwide.

Markon

Markon, Salinas, CA, appointed **Aimee McDonald** as its new director of food safety. A California native and Cal Poly graduate, she brings decades of food safety experience within the realm of produce.

Her career spans the fresh-cut, frozen, retail, and foodservice sectors, giving her a well-rounded understanding of every stage in the food supply chain. She has had a depth of experience in food safety and quality assurance and has held leadership roles with several leading food companies, most recently with organicgirl in the Salinas Valley.



Aimee McDonald

ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Mango Board Awards Vallarta Supermarkets 2025 Retailer of the Year

The National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL, has named Vallarta Supermarkets as its Mango Retailer of the Year, 2025 edition, recognizing the company's commitment to driving mango sales and inspiring consumers nationwide.

The award, presented on Oct. 17 during the Mango Reception at IFPA's Global Produce & Floral Show in Anaheim, CA, honors the brand for its impressive year-over-year mango sale growth,



creative in-store merchandising and impactful consumer engagement campaigns that helped bring mangos to more households than ever before.

Each year, the Mango Retailer of the Year award celebrates retail partners who go above and beyond in their support of the mango industry. Honorees are selected through a comprehensive evaluation of sales growth, marketing creativity, consumer education and overall commitment to advancing the mango industry.

Maria Lovera, retail marketing manager of the NMB, presented the award to vice president of produce and floral, Robert Veilleux, of Vallarta Supermarkets.

Fyffes Launches 'How Bad Are Bananas?'

Fyffes has announced a new partnership with U.K.-based purpose-led company, Future We Want, to empower thousands of young people to take meaningful climate action and reduce food waste within their communities.

The two- to four-year collaboration will see the launch of the "How Bad Are Bananas?" youth program across 13 national youth organizations in the U.K., equipping group leaders with the tools and training to deliver carbon literacy education.

"There is a myth that tropical fruit is comparatively high carbon," says Caoimhe Buckley, director of corporate affairs at Fyffes. "What many don't realize is that bananas are one of the most sustainable foods, with a relatively low carbon footprint. We're thrilled to partner with Future We Want on this innovative initiative to engage young people in sustainability and climate awareness."

**A&A Organic Farms Launches Mexican Organic Eureka Lemon Season**

A&A Organic Farms, Watsonville, CA, is announcing the arrival of its 2025 Mexican Organic Eureka Lemon Season, sourced from the groves of Hermosillo, Mexico, and now loading from Nogales, AZ.

The eco-friendly biodegradable bags offer retailers an attractive and sustainable option for displaying A&A's Organic Eureka Lemons.

This season also celebrates an important milestone: One of A&A's long-standing ranch partners in Hermosillo has achieved organic certification for the very first time, bringing decades of citrus-growing expertise in the organic era.



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Wakefern Food Corp. Hosts Shareholders' Meeting

Wakefern Food Corp., Keasbey, NJ, is leveraging technology, new growth opportunities and the power of its family-owned member companies to ensure success for generations to come. That's the message leadership delivered during the cooperative's annual shareholders' meeting Oct. 16 at the Hilton in Parsippany, NJ, where 500 people including shareholders, store management and Wakefern teammates were in attendance.

Wakefern reported retail sales of \$20.7 billion for the 52-week fiscal year ending Sept. 27, 2025, a 3.1% increase from the prior year. Cooperative members opened three state-of-the-art ShopRite stores and one The Fresh Grocer during the same period. Wakefern also acquired grocer Morton Williams, adding 17 stores in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Jersey City to the cooperative.



Honeybear Brands Spotlights Exclusive Apple Varieties

Honeybear is kicking off the apple season with the harvest of its exclusive apple varieties, including the ruby red, sweet-and-tangy Pazazz and the crisp, sweet-flavored Juici brand apple. Both varieties are now shipping to retailers nationwide.

Juici is the company's newest varietal addition, strengthened by Honeybear's packing partnership with Starr Ranch Growers announced earlier this year.

In addition to bringing new-season fruit to market, Honeybear Brands is once again supporting Second Harvest Heartland through its Ice Out Hunger program. Tied to a NIL sponsorship with the University of Minnesota men's hockey team, the campaign donates fresh apples to the food bank every time a Gopher player tallies an assist — also known in hockey lingo as an "apple."

Last year, Ice Out Hunger resulted in 12,000 pounds of fresh apples donated to community members experiencing food insecurity.



FairFruit Shares US Market Vision

FairFruit is announcing a strategic plan to expand its position on the U.S. market as a reliable year-round supplier of safe, sustainable, and nutritious specialty vegetables from Guatemala and Peru.

For the last two decades, FairFruit has made inroads into the U.S., with a goal of exporting a broad product range, while building on the first-class reputation FairFruit has achieved in Europe — as an honest brand that consistently offers fairness, higher quality, and transparency that both buyers and consumers can trust.

Having successfully established an export business for stringless snow peas and sugar snap peas



from Guatemala and Peru to the U.S., the company is fulfilling U.S. demand for a broader portfolio of fresh produce that includes: French beans, baby carrots, English peas and butternut squash. At the same time, FairFruit is preparing to launch new products, such as rainbow carrots and broccolini.

Avocados From Mexico Partners With Rob Riggle

Avocados From Mexico has tapped comedian and actor Rob Riggle as its "Guac Guru." The brand's national shopper marketing campaign includes an in-store promotional strategy that includes marketing materials featuring Riggle, such as bulk and bagged avocado displays.

This campaign runs from Jan. 19 to Feb. 8, aligning with Big Game party prep season when guacamole demand is expected to hit its peak.



Food Lion Apple Bag Campaign Delivers 13.8 Million Meals

Fueled by the generosity of its customers, Food Lion Feeds' annual Gala Apple Bag campaign provided the equivalent of more than 13.8 million meals to local families experiencing food insecurity. This year's total marks the campaign's second-largest number of meals provided since it began in 2014.

Customers supported the effort from Sept. 17-Oct. 7 by purchasing specially marked bags of Gala apples or making cash donations at the register. Proceeds benefit hunger-relief organizations that receive grants through the Food Lion Feeds Charitable Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Food Lion.

Each year, the foundation awards more than \$1 million in grants to community partners nourishing neighbors in need across the towns and cities Food Lion serves. Since the Apple Bag campaign's inception, customer support has helped generate the equivalent of more than 57 million meals for families facing hunger.



Martori Farms Acquires Sol Group

Fyffes and Martori Farms, a fourth generation, family-owned leader in fresh produce, announce their agreement to sell Fyffes entire melon business to Martori, including farms in Honduras and Guatemala and the distribution business in Miami, FL.

Martori Farms, with roots in Arizona and California, is known for its signature melons. With this acquisition, Martori Farms will offer a seamless, year-round supply of melons, strengthening its position as a leading supplier across the U.S. and Canada.

Sol Melons stands as the largest supplier of winter melons in North America. This integration



brings Martori Farms a year-round business model, while enabling Fyffes to sharpen its focus on core perennial categories — bananas and pineapples — by dedicating resources and expertise to their continued growth and market leadership.

Yerecic Label Expands Press Capacity at Arizona Facility

Yerecic Label, New Kensington, PA, is adding a new Mark Andy P7 printing press cell at its Arizona facility. This strategic investment strengthens production capabilities and enhances Yerecic Label's ability to meet customer demand with speed and flexibility.

Jon Egbert, general manager of Yerecic Label's Arizona facility, was one of the original team members who relocated from Pennsylvania to launch the site. With experience across both locations and a deep understanding of Yerecic Label's operational culture, Egbert now leads the Arizona team.



Wish Farms Wraps Up Successful 'Pick-A-Berry, Pick-A-Cause'

Wish Farms, Plant City, FL, recently concluded its annual \$10,000 charitable consumer campaign, Pick-A-Berry, Pick-A-Cause.

Now in its fourth year, the initiative continues to grow organically, engaging consumers while supporting meaningful causes aligned with the Wish Farms Family Foundation's pillars of giving: food security, youth education and community.

This year's donations were distributed among three nonprofit organizations: Feeding Tampa Bay, Redlands Christian Migrant Association and Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Tampa Bay.

The campaign ran from Aug. 27 to Sept. 30, generating 259,027 entries and 517,348 impressions — a 27% increase in participation over the previous year. Five entrants received cash prizes totaling \$2,000.



NEW PRODUCT

JBT Marel Launches New Fresh'n Squeeze Citrus Juicer

JBT Marel, Lakeland, FL, unveiled the Fresh'n Squeeze 1800 Citrus Juicer at the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) Global Produce and Floral Show. It features the same whole fruit extraction technology as the larger free-standing models in the Fresh'n Squeeze product line. The big difference lies in the size. The 1800 model features a smaller countertop footprint that will save retailers on labor and space.

The Fresh'n Squeeze 1800's advanced whole fruit extraction process delivers fresh juice by instantly separating juice from peel and seeds to preserve its integrity. This fresh citrus juice solution maximizes juice yield by up to 50% per fruit, compared to traditional cut-and-press technology. It can process up to 50 ounces of juice per minute.



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'Mind' Diet is Good for Cognitive Health

BY AISLING PIGOTT AND SOPHIE DAVIES

There's long been evidence that what we eat can affect our risk of dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and cognitive decline as we age. But can any one diet actually keep the brain strong and lower dementia risk? Evidence suggests the so-called "Mind diet" might.

The Mind diet (which stands for the Mediterranean-Dash Intervention for Neurocognitive Delay) combines the well-established Mediterranean diet with the "Dash" diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension). However, it also includes some specific dietary



Aisling Pigott



Sophie Davies

modifications based on their benefits to cognitive health.

Both the Mediterranean diet and Dash diet are based on traditional eating patterns from countries that border the Mediterranean Sea.

Both emphasize eating plenty of plant-based foods (such as fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds), low-fat dairy products (such as milk and yogurts) and lean proteins, including fish and chicken. Both diets include very little red and processed meats. The Dash diet, however, places greater emphasis on consuming low-sodium foods, less added sugar and fewer saturated and trans-fats to reduce blood pressure.

Both diets are well-researched and shown to be effective in preventing life-style-related diseases — including cardiovascular disease and hypertension. They're

also shown to help protect the brain's neurons from damage and benefit cognitive health.

The Mind diet follows many of the core tenets of both diets, but places greater emphasis on consuming more foods that contain nutrients which promote brain health and prevent cognitive decline, including:

- Flavonoids and polyphenols found in fruit, vegetables, tea and dark chocolate
- Folate found in leafy greens and legumes
- N-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids found in oily fish, nuts and seeds.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the Mind diet, and the evidence for this dietary approach's brain health benefit is pretty convincing.

For instance, one study asked 906 older adults about their usual diet — giving them a "Mind score" based on the number of foods and nutrients they regularly consumed that are linked with lower dementia risk. The researchers found a link between people who had a higher Mind diet score and slower cognitive decline when followed up almost five years later.

Another study of 581 participants found that people who had closely followed either the Mind diet or the Mediterranean diet for at least a decade had fewer signs of amyloid plaques in their brain

when examined post-mortem. Amyloid plaques are a key hallmark of Alzheimer's disease. Higher intake of leafy greens appeared to be the most important dietary component.

A systematic review of 13 studies on the Mind diet has also found a positive association between adherence to the Mind diet and cognitive performance and function in older people. One paper included in the review even demonstrated a 53% reduction in Alzheimer's disease risk in those that adhered to the diet.

It's important to note that most of this research is based on observational studies and food frequency questionnaires, which have their limitations in research due to reliability and participant bias. Only one randomized control trial was included in the review. It found that women who were randomly assigned to follow the Mind diet over a control diet for a short period of time showed a slight improvement in memory and attention.

Research in this field is ongoing, so hopefully we'll soon have a better understanding of the diet's benefits — and know exactly why it's so beneficial.

U.K. public health guidance recommends people follow a balanced diet to maintain good overall health. But the Mind diet offers a more targeted approach for those hoping to look after their cognitive health.

While public health guidance encourages people to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily, the Mind diet would recommend choosing leafy green vegetables (such as spinach and kale) and berries for their cognitive benefits.

Similarly, while U.K. guidance says to choose unsaturated fats over saturated ones, the Mind diet explicitly recommends that these fats come from olive oil. This is due to the potential neuroprotective effects of the fats found in olive oil.

If you want to protect your cognitive function as you age, here are some other small, simple swaps you can make each day to more closely follow the Mind diet:

- Upgrade your meals by sprinkling nuts and seeds on cereals, salads or yogurts to increase fiber and healthy fats.
- Eat the rainbow of fruit and vegetables, aiming to fill half your plate with these foods.
- Bake or air fry vegetables and meats instead of frying to reduce fat intake.
- Use tinned salmon, mackerel or sardines in salads or as protein sources for meal planning.

These small changes can have a meaningful impact on your overall health — including your brain's health. With growing evidence linking diet to cognitive function, even little changes to your eating habits may help protect your mind as you age.

Aisling Pigott is lecturer in dietetics at Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff Wales. Sophie Davies is lecturer in nutrition and dietetics at Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences, Cardiff Metropolitan University. This article was provided by The Conversation, a nonprofit, independent news organization dedicated to unlocking the knowledge of experts for the public good.



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Dole



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Morton Williams



Amber Gray
Wild Hive



Steve Grinstead
Fresh Edge



Dwight Ferguson
Foundation For
Fresh Produce



Andy Hamilton
Markon



Jamey Higham
Idaho Potato Comm.



Jesse Himango
Empower Fresh



Stefanie Katzman
Katzman



Matt Landi
OTA



Ron Lemaire
CPMA



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Promotion Board



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Tom Smith
Gem-Pack



Nichole Towell
Duda Farm Fresh



Katiana Valdes
Crystal Valley



Jin Ju Wilder
Vesta Foodservice



Maria Wieloch
ICA

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS: PEOPLE OF PURPOSE

If there's one thing **PRODUCE BUSINESS** has always stood for, it's creating a space where leaders can come together — to exchange ideas, to challenge one another, and to strengthen the industry. That spirit of thought-leadership and camaraderie has guided us for 40 years, and it's at the heart of this special anniversary series.

During our **PRODUCE BUSINESS** 40th anniversary year, we're curating 40 powerful voices in a special editorial series, which began in October, to help shape the future of the produce industry. Over the next 10 months, we'll be sharing the voices of 40 individuals whose perspectives matter most right now. We bring you three leaders' insights in this issue, and then we will share three more trend articles each month of our anniversary year.

These are growers who nurture crops from the ground up, shippers and distributors who keep the supply chain moving, retailers and foodservice operators who connect with consumers every day, and innovators who are reimagining how fresh produce fits into

modern lives. Each brings a unique lens, but all are united by a common goal: ensuring that more people eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, more often.

That goal has never been more important. At a time when consumers are seeking healthier choices, communities are focused on well-being, and businesses are competing for attention in a crowded marketplace, fresh produce has a distinct advantage. Yet turning that advantage into consistent growth requires new ideas, bold leadership, and a willingness to think differently.

We believe the insights shared in this series will do more than inform — they'll inspire. They'll spark conversations in boardrooms, warehouses, fields and stores. And most importantly, they'll remind us all that by working together, we can grow not only an industry, but also healthier families, stronger communities, and a brighter future.

Send your comments on any of these articles/topics to editor@producebusiness.com.



From Instinct to Algorithms: Why the Grocery Industry Needs AI

BY JESSE HIMANGO

The grocery industry is at an inflection point. Store shelves may look full, but behind the scenes, many operations are running on fumes, especially in fresh departments like produce. The root of the problem? We're still relying on human ordering and decision-making practices built for a different generation, while the labor market, customer expectations, and technological landscape have moved on.



THE HIDDEN COST OF HUMAN-DRIVEN ORDERING

When I was a produce retail director, I witnessed firsthand how inefficient traditional ordering could be. Well-meaning department managers, armed with clipboards and muscle memory, would guess at quantities. My father, who is still

in the grocery industry as chief executive for Kirby Foods, ordered with pen and paper back in the '70s the same way I did much later, and the same way most still do! Nationally, produce shrink averages around 5% to 9%. That's billions in lost revenue and tons of food waste each year, much of it due to over-ordering or poor forecasting.

Then came the generational shift. For every five experienced Boomers exiting the workforce, only two Gen Z workers are entering. Boomers often stayed at a company for a decade. Gen Z? Eighteen months is the average. The institutional knowledge that has stabilized store operations for years is evaporating — and the new workforce expects technology to fill that gap.

Retailers who embrace AI now will reduce shrink, boost employee retention, and create a more resilient supply chain.

MY FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

Pre-COVID, I had the opportunity to help pilot one of the first AI tools for fresh produce ordering. We trained it with real sales data and guided it with guardrails based on merchandising goals. The result? Out-of-stocks dropped. Shrink decreased. Inventory turns improved because the system didn't "hedge" with extra cases.

The biggest surprise? Employee satisfaction rose because the pressure to "guess right" in an antiquated process was removed. Managers felt supported, not replaced. Ancient, cumbersome processes now graduated to the digital age.

That experience sparked a passion. Today, at EmpowerFresh, we're developing AI tools for wholesalers and retailers that can analyze thousands of SKUs across locations, weather patterns, seasonality, and promotions. Our system runs thousands of computations per second and has achieved 90%+ accuracy on average. We're not just suggesting orders, we're forecasting with precision. Saving time and money for retailers.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT THE ROBOTS

Let's be clear: This isn't science-fiction. It's not about robots replacing people. It's about tools that extend what we can do faster, more accurately, and with less burnout.

Narrow generative AI, purpose-built for retail use cases, is already proving masterful at spotting trends, recommending order quantities, and forecasting demand. In three to five years, we'll see AI managing most key retail processes: buying, forecasting, promotional planning, schedule writing, production planning, theft prevention and even inventory counts. The tedious, error-prone tasks that drain human capacity are the ones AI is best suited to handle.

Meanwhile, humans will shift to interpreting the data, guiding the strategy, and managing exceptions. In many ways, it's a return to grocery retail craft, but with better tools.

WHY THIS TREND MATTERS NOW

COVID accelerated change, but it was just the beginning. The volatile supply chain, rising wages, high turnover, inflation, and customer demand for freshness collided to expose our industry's weakest link: outdated systems. The status quo isn't just inefficient, it's unsustainable.

Retailers who embrace AI now will gain a serious edge. They'll reduce shrink, boost employee retention, and create a more resilient supply chain. Those who delay may find themselves unable to attract talent or meet shopper expectations.

AI won't stop at ordering. Already, we're seeing tech like inventory-tracking cameras, shelf-scanning drones and robotic produce sorters. Imagine a world where every link in the chain, from farm yield predictions to last-mile delivery will be optimized by smart systems. It's coming. The only question is: Will we lead, or will we lag?

MY ADVICE TO INDUSTRY LEADERS

1. Start small, but start now. Pilot in one department. Let your team experience the relief of data-driven support. The ROI will speak for itself.
2. Invest in training, not just tech. AI is a tool, not a magic wand. Empower your people to understand and guide the systems. Raise the bar, set 100% use as expectation, don't waiver in vision or goal.
3. Stay human first. The future isn't man vs. machine. It's man with machine. Use AI to reduce noise and let your people focus on what they do best.

When we piloted that first AI system years ago, our goal wasn't to replace the order writer. It was to help them make better decisions, to reduce stress and increase consistency. We didn't just improve margins. We improved morale. And, in today's grocery retail landscape, that might be the most important metric of all.

Jesse Himango is chief operating officer and chief product officer at EmpowerFresh Company, an AI-centric company purpose built for independent retailers' produce departments.

From Farm to Fork: How Distribution Partners Drive Culinary Success

BY TOM SMITH

AS PRODUCE BUSINESS marks its 40th anniversary, I'm honored to contribute a voice that reflects both continuity and forward momentum. At Gem-Pack Berries, our network of foodservice distribution partners isn't just a delivery mechanism — they're our strategic extension. They take our berries from the farm and deliver them, in the right quality, quantity and timing, into kitchens so chefs can create dishes that amplify consumption, inspire diners, and keep fruit volume growing.



DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS WEAR MANY HATS

Beyond transport, our partners play several critical roles in the produce chain:

- Placing product orders on behalf of operators, translating menu plans into

accurate volume forecasts. They act as the purchasing interface for chefs and operators.

- Receiving product from Gem-Pack Berries, managing bulk case deliveries into their refrigerated warehouses.

- Breaking bulk into case, pallet, or unit quantities tailored to each operator's weekly or daily needs — essential to manage perishability and minimize waste.

- Ensuring quality, traceability and compliance before delivery — verifying freshness, proper cold-chain handling, food safety and packaging standards.

- Loading and routing deliveries, coordinating refrigerated trucking to get berries into kitchens on schedule.

These functions combined create a value-added system that producers, chefs, and operators lean on heavily.

This matters to us at Gem-Pack Berries because we consolidate premium berries and ship to partners who must manage intake, storage, and outbound distribution. Without reliable warehousing and handling, our farm-fresh berries would likely degrade before reaching chefs.

By relying on these distribution networks:

- We ensure order accuracy and fulfillment.
- Our partners manage cold-chain integrity.
- They protect against labor disruptions or logistical bottlenecks.

In essence, they are our operational backbone.

CHEFS DEPEND ON DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS

Chefs innovate when they don't have to worry about supply chain surprises. And with tight margins and limited kitchen staff, they increasingly rely on distributors as operational partners.

Key ways distribution partners support chefs:

- Order and volume reliability: Chefs can plan creative seasonal specials or limited-run dishes because the distributor assures they'll receive the berries they need, when they need them.
- Precision logistics: Deliveries arrive in small, chef-ready case

quantities — ensuring freshness, reducing shrink, and minimizing handling in busy kitchens.

- Quality assurance and traceability: Distributors enforce internal quality checks, provide documentation and tracking, enabling chefs to share provenance stories with diners.

- Flexible scheduling: Distributors adjust order and delivery plans to match changing kitchen needs or unexpected shifts — crucial in labor-constrained operations.

Chefs view these distribution and logistics partners as enablers — ensuring supply consistency so they can focus on menus, flavor, innovations and customer experience.

TECHNOLOGY ENHANCES, BUT TRUST MATTERS MOST

While technology underlies many distribution and logistics improvements, it serves a supporting role:

- Inventory management systems help distributors track incoming cases, forecast operator demand, and prevent stockouts or overstocks

- Warehouse management platforms coordinate receiving, case breakdown, and order assembly with minimal errors.

- Route planning tools optimize refrigerated trucking routes to ensure timely delivery without compromising cold-chain integrity.

Yet the real differentiator is trust and execution consistency.

Chefs innovate when they don't have to worry about supply chain surprises.

SHARED VISION: RELIABLE DISTRIBUTION, INSPIRED MENUS, AND CONSUMER LOVE

We need a fresh produce industry where producers and chefs alike prioritize strong distributor relationships. These partners extend your capabilities from farm through kitchen. Chefs should collaborate with distributors, sharing demand schedules and menu plans to enable efficient planning and delivery.

Next-gen leaders should think holistically, investing in ecosystems — grower + distributor + operator — not siloed capabilities and isolated infrastructure.

Picture this:

- Chefs designing menus around unique berries because they trust distribution partners to deliver exactly what they need.

- Gem-Pack Berries focusing on growing varieties and quality, knowing our partners manage ordering, warehouse handling, and deliveries seamlessly.

- Consumers enjoying, berry-centered dishes that drive demand beyond grocery and into memorable dining experiences.

The future of our industry depends not solely on logistics or farms, but on seamless, trust-built distributor partnerships. They take orders, warehouse product, break cases, and deliver produce to chefs — enabling culinary creativity even under workforce and margin pressure.

At Gem-Pack Berries, our commitment is clear: grow great berries, rely on distribution partners to handle the details, and empower chefs to create the experiences that make people fall in love with berries again — time after time.

Tom Smith is vice president of export sales and foodservice for Gem Pack Berries, Santa Monica, CA.

Rethinking Innovation: It's About the Bite

BY NICHOLE TOWELL

When our industry talks about innovation, we often focus on new product launches — unique product mixes, novel packaging or creative branding. While these attributes play a role in product appeal, they are arguably secondary to what true innovation looks like with fresh fruits and vegetables.

At its core, innovation in produce isn't just about what's new on the shelf; it's about continuously improving the eating experience through seed research, growing practices, and a relentless commitment to a superior eating experience.



INNOVATION STARTS WITH THE SEED

The heart of our industry's innovation begins long before our products reach the store. Seed companies and growers are constantly working to breed varieties that deliver consistently superior taste, texture and shelf life.

This isn't a simple process. Developing a new seed variety can take years of research, test-

ing, and refinement. For Duda, that looks like developing around 1,400 new lines of celery each year. Some of the many quality variables we look at are seeder resistance and less stringiness, with a high priority on sweetness and crunch. Our proprietary seed varieties, Duda Generations, are specifically bred to deliver a superior eating experience for our shoppers that has propelled the growth of celery as a snacking item over the last decade.

Historically, breeding programs may have emphasized yield or durability, often at the expense of flavor. But in today's competitive marketplace, taste is taking its rightful place on the forefront.

The promise of better flavor appears to be reducing price sensitivity for certain commodities, particularly those led by brands that consistently deliver an exceptional eating experience. Standout examples include newer grape varieties with distinctive flavor profiles, berries known for their reliably superior taste, and snacking tomatoes that offer consistent sweetness and quality.

These brand successes weren't driven by flashy packaging, but by a deep commitment to flavor that starts at the source. Through seed innovation, refined growing practices, and a supply chain optimized to preserve quality and consistency, these brands have carefully selected and enhanced traits that translate into genuine delight when the consumer takes a bite.

In today's competitive marketplace, taste is taking its rightful place on the forefront.

CONSTANT BATTLE FOR CONSISTENCY

The fresh produce industry faces a unique challenge: natural variability. Weather, soil conditions, pest pressures, natural plant diseases, and growing regions all affect the quality of a crop. Unlike manufactured goods, no two crops are identical. That's why the pursuit of consistency is a form of innovation in itself.

Consumers want to trust that when they buy a particular apple or salad mix, it will deliver the same quality every time. Achieving that requires continuous refinement — aligning seed selection, farming practices, and post-harvest handling into a coordinated system. It's less about unveiling something "new" each season and more about ensuring the eating experience is reliably excellent. I don't know that we as an industry emphasize enough to our retail partners the importance of these behind-the-scenes innovations that matter so deeply to consumer satisfaction.

INNOVATION AS A LONG GAME

The temptation to equate innovation with novelty is understandable. In a crowded marketplace, new product development generates attention and drives trial. But for fresh produce, true differentiation and loyalty come from substance, not sizzle. A clever marketing campaign might win a first purchase, but only an extraordinary eating experience secures the second, third and 10th.

This is why the industry's most meaningful innovations may not be visible at first glance. They happen quietly in the greenhouse where new seeds are bred, in the fields where growers adjust practices, and in the labs where data on flavor and texture are meticulously tracked. These efforts may not grab headlines, but they shape the future of produce.

A CALL FOR A BROADER DEFINITION

Unlike consumer-packaged goods, fresh produce doesn't allow for reformulation once it leaves the field. A tomato, strawberry, or peach must stand on its own. The consumer's impression, whether positive or negative, comes down to the inherent eating experience of that fruit or vegetable. Was it sweet enough? Was the texture appealing? Did it deliver on the expectation set by its appearance?

These are the questions that determine whether a shopper buys again. In an industry where repeat purchase is everything, perfecting the product itself is the most powerful form of innovation.

As we think about the future of the fresh produce industry, it's time to broaden our definition of innovation. Yes, new products matter. But the deeper, more impactful work lies in the continuous pursuit of a better bite — through better seeds, smarter growing practices, and a focus on delighting consumers at the most fundamental level: taste.

Nichole Towell is senior director of marketing and innovation for Duda Farm Fresh Foods, headquartered in Salinas, CA.

PB



At Fiesta Farms in Toronto, Ontario, shoppers are greeted by the produce section running up the center of the entire store, a focal point to a vibrant shopping experience.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTOS

Fiesta Farms Focused on the Customer

Toronto retailer boasts an abundant produce section overflowing with perfectly curated and high-quality produce.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Fiesta Farms has served its Toronto, Ontario, community since 1989. The store was founded by the late Joe Virgona, born from his lifelong passion for the grocery industry, which began when he worked as a stock boy in his teens, says Carmen Papia, produce manager and buyer for Fiesta Farms.

"Today, his children, Tracey and Dino, proudly carry on his legacy, continuing to provide fresh, unique, high-quality products and a welcoming shopping experience."

The 30,000 square foot store serves a diverse demographic, "from singles to couples to families and from every ethnic background," says Papia. "Our customers are very loyal. Many are from the surrounding community, but others are from outside the Toronto area."

Fiesta's produce department prizes what is brought into the store, how it is displayed and how the staff serves shoppers. "Whatever our magic formula is, it keeps our customers coming back," says Papia. "Whether it's our commitment to quality, community, or simply the love we put into everything we do, we're grateful to be a trusted destination for shoppers."

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC

The store's success is rooted in its focus on the customer. "We're a family-run business in a progressive, multicultural city center and we partner with producers to stock what people are interested in buying," says Papia. "People are buying products produced and or created in Ontario, but also products that are unique reminders of where they came from. They're buying organic. And they're buying more eco-friendly."

The store's produce selection is vast, featuring everything from everyday staples to rare and unique finds. It offers conventional and organic options, ensuring a diverse range for every customer, says Papia. "Our commitment to variety means sourcing products that many stores simply don't carry, such as lychee, soursop, cardone (also known as cardoon), and puntarelle. Whenever it's in season and available, we strive to provide something for everyone."



A 6-foot endcap is dedicated to a variety of mushrooms in beautifully appointed displays. Cross-merchandised next to the mushroom display is a glass case featuring truffle and other upscale oils.

Papia says the store's goal is to ensure every customer leaves happy and confident. "We want them to know they can rely on us for all their produce needs. We aim to introduce them to a wider variety of fruits and vegetables, expanding their choices and enriching their experience."

COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

The store's 4,500 square foot produce department is a cornerstone of its success. "We take pride in offering fresh, high-quality fruits and vegetables with a strong focus on seasonal and locally sourced options," says Papia. "Our commitment to freshness and variety keeps customers coming back, fostering a loyal community that values quality and sustainability."

Produce is the draw of the store, he explains. "By maintaining well-stocked and carefully curated displays, we enhance the shopping experience and reinforce our reputation as a trusted destination for produce lovers."

The store strategy is simple: Focus on quality and freshness. "We don't use a lot of gimmicks," says Papia. "We let the product speak for itself. Our entire operation, from purchase to final sale, is about quality and freshness. Every arrangement is carefully maintained to ensure the freshest selection with a focus on fresh, fresh, fresh."

PRODUCE FRONT AND CENTER

Entering the front door, shoppers are greeted with an impactful produce section running up the center of the entire store. "Our produce department is located in the center of the store, making it the focal point customers see when they walk in and creating a welcoming and vibrant shopping experience," says Papia.

The department is flanked on the left side by a 60-foot wet wall and an 8-foot refrigerated salad case. Staking claim down the center of the section are nine immense, 19-by-6-foot island displays, two refrigerated and seven dry, showcasing major categories of product from berries to tomatoes to potatoes. Each copious display is organized, bright and inviting with informative, attractive signage.

The front of the section, closest to the door, is reserved for highlighting seasonal, local and new products. In June, displays of Ontario Grown products, including strawberries, rhubarb, mushrooms and eggplant, greeted shoppers.

"During prime local season, we merchandise an abundance of local product in baskets in the front of the store, turning it into a veritable farmers market of local," says Papia.

While the overall layout of the department remains consistent, the placement of products shifts with the seasons. "This continuous rotation creates the impression of a changing layout, keeping the shopping experience fresh and dynamic," says Papia.

SETTING A HIGH BAR

Papia takes pride in what he does for Fiesta Farms as evidenced

by his 30-year career with the store. He is hands-on when sourcing, and places great emphasis on procuring the best value for customers. "Our goal is to give shoppers the lowest price possible on the best quality products."

The benchmarks for Papia's sourcing are quality and freshness over anything else. He shops in-person at the Ontario Food Terminal wholesalers five days a week in addition to procuring from other sources. Principal sources vary depending on time of year, however, the store aims for as many local growers as possible, including organics, he says. "The majority of the time our sources are 50% wholesalers, 50% local growers."

Partnering with a diverse range of wholesalers and farmers allows the store to offer a broad selection of produce, while ensuring reliability, he explains.

Papia also credits the importance of having a good team to the store's success. The store has 23 produce employees, both full time and part time, with six to 10 on the floor at any given time. "Customers will always see someone on the floor to be able to ask questions of and provide feedback. Customer interaction is very important to us." **PB**



INSIDE THE STORE

Fiesta Farms

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CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS ACROSS CONTINENTS

EXPLORE THE MUST-ATTEND EVENTS OF 2026!



FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Friends,

For nearly four decades under the leadership of Jim Prevora, 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 award-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.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Ken Whitacre'.

Ken Whitacre

Publisher/Editorial Director

Kwhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

P.S. As we enter the next phase of Jim Prevora's mission to "initiate industry improvement," we encourage your input and hope you will contact us at editor@producebusiness.com 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.



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BOOTH REVIEWS





BOOTH #320
ARK FOODS
Brooklyn, NY



Ark Foods began with a single vegetable (the Shishito pepper) and a big mission: to build a modern-day farming company focused on making fresh food accessible to all. Today, we spend our time growing vegetables from our farms up and down the East Coast and crafting our signature Clean Label Eats in crave-worthy flavors.

BOOTH #404
BABÉ FARMS
Santa Maria, CA



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BOOTH #335
BLAND FARMS
Glennville, GA



Sweeten up your holiday spread with Bland Farms Premium Sweet Onions from Peru and Sand Candy Sweet Potatoes. Stop by booth #335 to preview our new dual holiday bins, learn about this season’s crop updates, and see how our Gameday Sweetness campaign can help you drive retail excitement — and sales — all winter long.

BOOTH #237
BUDDY FRUITS
Bloomfield, NJ



Buddy Fruits is excited to be at this year’s New York Produce Show! Discover our delicious, wholesome fruit pouches crafted for convenient snacking. Stop by to explore our latest innovations and see how we’re redefining snacking with real fruit, bold flavor and endless fun. We can’t wait to meet you!

BOOTH #571
**CALIFORNIA ENDIVE
FARMS**
Rio Vista, CA



California Endive Farms (Say ON-DEEV!) invites you to sample at our booth at the 2025 NYPS. Established 1983, we are the largest endive producer in the Americas. Conventional and organic product is available year-round. Come meet and learn the story behind our versatile vegetable with a most complex growing process.



BOOTH #405 COLOMBIA AVOCADO BOARD

Orlando, FL



Raised by rain. Raised by culture. Raised by tradition. Hass Avocados, Raised by Colombia — on track to reach 150 million pounds this year — the highest U.S. volume to date. Find us at booth #405 to discuss volume growth, retail promotions and more.

BOOTH #231 CRISPY GREEN

Fairfield, NJ



Crispy Green, the No. 1 selling freeze-dried fruit brand, debuts its new Crispy Fruit Trial Pack at the New York Produce Show! This seasonal pack features four fan-favorite flavors — Strawberry, Mango, Apple and Pineapple — in family-friendly pouches. It's the perfect "New

Year, New You" snack to taste the difference real fruit makes.

BOOTH #241 GENEROUS BRANDS

Bakersfield, CA



Generous Brands inspires people to thrive through the power of vibrant nutrition through its leading brands,

Bolthouse Farms, Health-Ade and Evolution Fresh. Bolthouse Farms provides chilled juices, smoothies and protein drinks. Health-Ade is the fastest-growing kombucha brand, and Evolution Fresh is a premier cold-pressed juice brand. New items to be featured at the NY Produce Show (ready in spring of 2026): Bolt-house Farms MAX Protein, Evolution Fresh Functional Tea and Evolution Fresh Organic Soda.

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**BOOTH
536**



BOOTH #511
**GOLD BELL/
DISILVA FRUIT**
Chelsea, MA



DiSilva Fruit and Gold Bell are family-owned companies with decades of produce expertise. Gold Bell offers flexible sourcing and packaging of conventional and organic produce. DiSilva Fruit delivers premium freshness and joyful experiences through global grower partnerships, ensuring year-round supply and vibrant quality for retailers and wholesalers.



BOOTH #252
F&S FRESH FOODS
Vineland, NJ



F&S Fresh Foods is a family-owned fresh-foods manufacturer headquartered in Vineland, NJ, with six production facilities across the U.S. The company delivers fresh-cut fruits, vegetables, and meal solutions to retail, foodservice,



and industrial partners — driven by innovation, quality, and a commitment to supply-chain excellence.

BOOTH #532
**FIERMAN PRODUCE
EXCHANGE**
Bronx, NY



Freshness runs in the family! Fierman Produce Exchange, a fourth-generation company rooted in the Hunts Point Market, brings nearly a century of produce expertise to your table. From crisp greens to hearty potatoes and sweet onions, we deliver quality, freshness, and service that keeps customers coming back.

BOOTH #229
**FRESH
INNOVATIONS,
LLC/YO QUIERO!**
Rhode, TX



Fresh Innovations, LLC/ Yo Quiero! Brands will be featuring our new roasted salsas and candied jalapeno peppers at this

year's New York Produce Show. As innovators in the dip category, Yo Quiero! continues to create delicious, on-trend items that consumers crave. Stop by booth #229 and taste for yourself.

BOOTH #453
**GRIMMWAY
PRODUCE GROUP**
Arvin, CA



Grimmway Produce Group (GPG) consolidates the strengths of Grimmway Farms, Cal-Organic Farms, RPE, Tasteful Selections and San Miguel Produce into a global produce leader and North America's premier grower, shipper and processor of carrots, potatoes and organic vegetables. GPG is planting and harvesting across 19 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces.

BOOTH #352
LGS SALES
New Rochelle, NY



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next. Still innovating. Still growing. Still delivering. A legacy like ours doesn't stand still — it keeps moving forward. Celebrate 35 years of innovation, partnership, and success with us at NYPS booth #352!

BOOTH #243
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Winters, CA



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#152**



BOOTH #525
MISIONERO
Gonzales, CA



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Misionero specializes in organic and conventional produce, offering specialty salads, washed and trimmed lettuces, and premium salad kits. We're passionate about creating delicious, feel-good food, and constantly innovating with fresh and bold, modern flavor combinations. See you at booth #525.



BOOTH #448
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 #448!



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will be an exhibitor at the 2025 New York Produce Show, highlighting a selection of conventional and organic fresh vegetables under the Foxy and Foxy Organic brands along with recently integrated Foxy brand value-added items (Arcadian Harvest, Better Burger Leaf, Simply Singles, etc.).

BOOTH #300
OPPY
Newark, DE



Innovation isn't something we take lightly. At Oppy's booth, you'll discover fresh ideas, bold products, and new ways to grow your business — from Blue Diamond almonds and Pink Cosmo pink blueberries to the coveted Dole brand and more. Stop by and see what's next from Oppy!

BOOTH #307
PERO FAMILY FARMS
Delray Beach, FL

Since 1908, Pero Family Farms has been dedicated to innovation and sustain-



able farming. With over 115 years of experience across five generations, we grow premium vegetables with unmatched quality — making it easier for families to enjoy healthy, flavorful and nutritious meals.

**BOOTHS #358, 360,
362, 364**
**PHILADELPHIA
WHOLESALE
PRODUCE MARKET**
Philadelphia, PA



Join the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market at booths #358, 360, 362 and 364 — right across from Central Park! This year, we'll feature an all new booth and a short video that shows you the benefits of "never losing your cool" at our fully enclosed, fully refrigerated state-of-the-art marketplace.



BOOTH #501
**THE NUNES
COMPANY**
Salinas, CA

The Nunes Company, Inc.,



BOOTH #176 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 #275 REAL GREEN Foxboro, MA



Real Green produces a line of refrigerated super-premium, super-healthy, super-delicious salad dressings and marinades. They're made with simple, whole, plant-based ingredients, 100% pure olive oil, and nutrient-dense organic microgreens. Our line includes Vegan Goddess, Vegan Ranch, Balsamic, Lemon Basil, Serrano Lime and Maple Mustard.



BOOTH #232 SENECA SNACKS Yakima, WA

Seneca Apple Chips are made with apples grown and harvested from orchards in the fertile volcanic soils of the Yakima Valley region of Washington State. Our apples are hand-picked, then carefully selected for their firmness, perfect color and crisp texture. Real Apples. Real Apple Taste. Crisped Apple Perfection.

BOOTH #225C SHUMAN FARMS Reidsville, GA



Visit Shuman Farms at booth 225C! Stop by to learn about our premium RealSweet sweet onions, upcoming retail programs, and cause marketing initiatives that drive sales and make a difference. Experience how our sweet onions can help elevate the onion category and drive year-round produce department sales.



WHAT IS YOUR 2C?

For less than 2¢ per avocado, you can **empower farmworkers** to invest in their **community**. Whether building a **food dispensary** or launching a **water storage project**, the **Fair Trade** program adds value to **every member** of the supply chain.





BOOTH # 240 SPICE WORLD

Orlando, FL



At Spice World, we set the bar high and work to keep raising it. Whether it's fresh, chopped, minced or roasted garlic, or the unique, exotic flavors of whole shallots, we follow the strictest guidelines and only use products that meet our high standards to give the consumer the absolute best value.



BOOTH #473 STEMILT GROWERS

Wenatchee, WA



Stemilt Growers, a family-owned and operated tree fruit grower in Wenatchee, WA, cultivates people and delights consumers through excellence with its world-famous apples, pears and cherries. Stemilt offers a robust mix of apple and pear programs, including Artisan Organics, Lil Snappers kid-size fruit and Cosmic Crisp apples.

BOOTH #223 TASTE OF THE NORTH

Levis, Québec

TASTE of the North

Taste of The North was founded 30 years ago by its current owner, driven by a dream to share Québec's exceptional fruits and vegetables with our neighbors across the border. We supply the Northeast with fresh Québec berries in summer and greenhouse products year-round, staying true to our original vision.

BOOTHS #130, 128 TAYLOR FARMS/ EARTHBOUND FARM

Salinas, CA



Taylor Farms and Earthbound Farm are pleased to attend this year's New York Produce Show. Come visit booths 130 and 128 to see our latest product innovations and discover what's next in fresh produce. Each product reflects our commitment to delivering fresh, exciting, and relevant solutions for customers and consumers alike.

BOOTH #247 VALUED NATURALS

Randolph, NJ



Valued Naturals brings over 25 years of snack manufacturing expertise to every bite. Family-owned and rooted in quality, we offer Snack Programs and display solutions at competitive prices. With established partnerships with major distributors and a passion for helping our customers grow, Valued Naturals is your trusted guide in building successful, shelf-ready snack solutions.

BOOTH # 170 VINELAND COOPERATIVE PRODUCE AUCTION

Vineland, NJ



Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction, farmer owned and operated since 1931, is the premier produce auction in the Eastern United States. "Fresh from the Garden State" are words that represent the quality and variety of produce grown, bought and sold at the Vineland Produce Auction. It is picked and sold same day.

BOOTH #435 ZGROUP USA

Callao, Peru



ZGROUP USA delivers turn-key, plug-and-play modular solutions for the fresh produce industry — including cold storage, pre-cooling and ripening systems. Our mobile and scalable units are designed to deploy anywhere, helping growers and distributors protect freshness, reduce waste, and stay flexible from harvest to market.

Top 10 New Product Innovations

Cast your vote for this year's Joe Nucci Award.

From collard greens dip to RubyRed Kiwifruit, the ninth annual PRODUCE BUSINESS Innovation Award entries brought their best to the table and store shelves.

With a focus on Product, Packaging and Process, PRODUCE BUSINESS presents the 10 top-scoring entrants and leaves it up to the industry to decide which item merits the annual Joe Nucci Award for Product Innovation.

The judging, which took place in the Boca Raton, FL, offices of PRODUCE BUSINESS, was conducted by editors and staff who are well-versed in the fresh produce industry. Technological examinations were conducted via research in published journals and in corroborating data sent to us.

This annual award will be presented at the Thought Leaders Keynote Breakfast during the annual New York Produce Show and Conference, Dec. 3, at the Javits Center in midtown Manhattan. Only PRODUCE BUSINESS readers will evaluate the top-scoring products selected from numerous entries. Please read the descriptions on the following pages and cast your vote to choose this year's Joe Nucci Award.



PB PRODUCE BUSINESS

TOP 10 NEW PRODUCT INNOVATIONS

Brilliant branding, smart packaging and convenience highlight this year's standout produce items.

CAST YOUR VOTE | CHOOSE A WINNER

1. GO TO PRODUCEBUSINESS.COM
2. CLICK ON THE INNOVATION 2025 BUTTON.
3. FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS TO SELECT YOUR TOP 3 CHOICES.
4. POLLING ENDS AT 5 P.M. PST ON NOV. 21.

The winner will be announced at The New York Produce Show and Conference

BACKYARD FARMS GREENLEAF LETTUCE

MASTRONARDI PRODUCE LTD.
KINGSVILLE, ONTARIO

Greenhouse-grown, this lettuce is fresh, full and crisp. In addition to its standout quality and flavor, another notable feature of Backyard Farms Greenleaf Lettuce is its packaging: a resealable paper-based bag that replaces a conventional plastic tray. This switch cuts plastic use by 65% compared to a traditional PET tray with top seal, a significant step toward reducing environmental impact. The bag isn't just sustainable — it's smart. Its resealable design helps maintain freshness longer, which means less food waste and more convenience for shoppers. It's a thoughtful solution that aligns with growing demand for eco-conscious choices.

Whether tucked into a sandwich, layered in a wrap, tossed into a salad, or used as a burger topping, the lettuce delivers a fresh, crisp texture that elevates everyday meals. Its broad appeal makes it a staple for families, foodies, and anyone seeking nutritious, flavorful greens.





CARROT SIDE DISH SIZZLERS

BOLTHOUSE FRESH FOODS

BAKERSFIELD, CA

Bolthouse Fresh Foods introduces Carrot Side Dish Sizzlers — a ready-to-cook veggie kit that turns everyday meals into craveable side dish moments. These artisan-sliced carrots come paired with chef-crafted sauces, offering a fresh and convenient solution for consumers seeking flavorful, home-cooked sides

without the hassle. Each 10-ounce kit is designed to be roasted, air-fried, or sautéed in minutes. With three bold, on-trend flavor options — Garlic Herb, Herb Vinaigrette and Sweet Honey Heat — Sizzlers make it easy to serve a fresh, elevated veggie side that pairs with everything from weeknight proteins to holiday roasts.

COLADA ROYALE PINEAPPLE

DOLE FOOD COMPANY

CHARLOTTE, NC

With the launch of Dole Colada Royale, Dole Food Co. redefines what's possible in the legacy pineapple category. Colada Royale delivers a new, elevated pineapple experience that blends exceptional flavor, natural breeding innovation, and social impact in one product. The Colada Royale represents the culmination of more than 15 years of research and development by Dole's agricultural and R&D teams. Developed through traditional, non-GMO breeding methods, the variety was engineered to deliver a completely new flavor experience without relying on genetic modification or artificial enhancement. Colada Royale is immediately identifiable by its lighter, cream-colored flesh, a visual cue that hints at its uniqueness. Each fruit is hand-selected for ripeness on Dole's historic La Ceiba farm in Honduras.

The real surprise, however, is in the taste. Colada Royale's flavor is naturally sweet with subtle coconut undertones, evoking the tropical smoothness of a piña colada. Nutritionally, Colada Royale offers the same benefits that consumers expect from pineapples — rich in vitamin C, manganese, dietary fiber, and more than 2.5x the levels of B6. Dole has designed a limited-release model for Colada Royale, with controlled distribution at select U.S. retailers.



COLLARD GREENS DIP

WP RAWL

PELION, SC

WP Rawl's Collard Dip is a first-of-its-kind innovation, bringing collard greens to consumers in a completely new form. Inspired by a cherished family recipe developed over two decades ago, this creamy, savory dip was a fan favorite at countless events and tastings. After years of requests and overwhelmingly positive feedback, WP Rawl made the decision to produce and bring it to market, delivering a unique twist to the Southern staple.

Collard greens have long been a nutrient-packed leafy green with strong cultural roots, but consumer usage outside of traditional cooked dishes has been limited. This product reimagines collards as a flavorful, snackable, and party-ready dip — meeting consumers where they are with convenience, taste, and health in mind. The launch of the Collard Dip not only opens new doors for collard consumption, but it also aligns with growing trends in plant-forward eating, regional flavor exploration, and comfort foods with a story.



GRILL PACKS

GIORGIO FRESH CO.

BLANDON, PA

For over nine decades, Giorgio Fresh has been a trusted leader in mushroom production and innovation, bringing consumers and retailers fresh, flavorful, and convenient ways to enjoy produce. Continuing this legacy, Giorgio introduces Grill Packs, exemplifying creativity in flavor development, packaging design, and consumer engagement, making it easier and more exciting than ever to enjoy vegetables. Recognizing the growing demand for restaurant-quality flavor experiences at home, Giorgio Fresh has transformed how consumers prepare and enjoy mushrooms and peppers.

Giorgio's Grill Packs bring bold, perfectly seasoned mushrooms to the grill or oven, ready to elevate any meal. Available in three distinctive flavor varieties, each pack offers a unique sensory experience: Steak Seasoning, Smokey Honey Habanero and Brown Sugar Bourbon. Packaged in grill-ready trays, these products eliminate prep work and cleanup, appealing to modern consumers looking for flavor-forward convenience.



LIL'ONES

WHOLESUM

AMADO, AZ

In May 2025, Wholesum introduced Lil'Ones, the first certified organic pearl tomatoes. Smaller and sweeter than the average snacking tomato, Lil'Ones deliver a vibrant, flavorful experience designed for today's health-minded, on-the-go consumer. Packaged in convenient 4-ounce packs, these pearl-sized tomatoes are ideal for healthy snacking, salads and family lunches. The early market response has been strong, signaling growing demand as Wholesum plans to scale up production. Lil'Ones represent a first-to-market innovation that combines convenience, taste and sustainability — reflecting Wholesum's ongoing commitment to quality, joyful snacking and organic leadership.



RUBYRED KIWIFRUIT

ZESPRI

NEWPORT BEACH, CA

In spring 2025, a new fruit made its grand entrance to the U.S. fruit aisle, Zespri RubyRed Kiwifruit. With its striking red interior and irresistible berry-sweet taste, the vibrant kiwifruit brought fresh new flavors and variety to consumers' fruit bowls. After more than two decades of precision breeding, this new cultivar is a testament to dedication to innovation and marks a bold step forward in evolving the kiwifruit category to inspire and delight a new generation. Zespri RubyRed Kiwifruit is high in antioxidant Vitamin C. It also includes anthocyanins, the natural plant nutrients that give its vibrant red color.

Zespri strategically launched RubyRed on the West Coast as a limited-time offering to test and learn. This limited trial allowed Zespri to carefully monitor and understand supply chain performance, shopper demand and consumer perceptions — all while maintaining high-quality standards. RubyRed is available earlier in the season, helping to extend the New Zealand Kiwifruit season.



Meet the Team Scott Schepis



Tradition at Work.

Scott Schepis has been a dedicated member of the D'Arrigo New York team for 15 years. He began his career unloading railcars and advanced through the roles of Porter, Warehouse Associate, and Foreman before becoming an Operations Supervisor. Scott's journey reflects the D'Arrigo family tradition of hard work, loyalty, and opportunity. These values that have guided the company for generations. As Scott shared, "knowing you will be recognized for your work drives me to continue learning daily." His story is a testament to how dedication and integrity continue to shape the D'Arrigo New York legacy.

D'ARRIGO
NEW YORK



SUMMER BLAST BLUEBERRY SNACKING CUP

MASTRONARDI PRODUCE LTD.
KINGSVILLE, ONTARIO

The Sunset Summer Blast Blueberry Snacking Cup redefines how consumers experience healthy snacking. At a time when convenience and nutrition are top priorities for shoppers, this new package format offers a unique alternative to processed snacks, without compromising on flavor. Traditional fresh fruit packaging has long struggled to meet the needs of busy, mobile consumers. The Summer Blast Blueberry Snacking Cup solves this with a single-serve, resealable container that's intentionally designed with snacking on the go in mind. Whether tossed into a lunchbox or purse, the cup keeps blueberries fresh and intact, with a small fork included for a ready-made snack.

Inside this innovative package aren't just any berries — they're Sunset Summer Blast Blueberries, known for their sweet, crunchy texture and vibrant flavor. Grown in controlled greenhouse environments, these berries are picked at peak freshness to ensure consistent high-quality flavor. Unlike many packaged snacks that rely on preservatives or artificial flavoring, Summer Blast Blueberries offer a natural, nutrient-rich alternative that satisfies sweet cravings.



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VEGGIE CONFETTI PICKLED VEGGIE SLAWS

OFFSHOOT BRANDS

CONSHOHOCKEN, PA

Consumers are seeking fresh, bold flavors that add convenience and excitement to their meals, and Veggie Confetti's new pickled slaw line delivers just that. Featuring three brand new flavors — Pickled Kimchi Slaw, Pickled Veggie Rainbow Slaw, Pickled Mango Fiesta Slaw — these blends combine crisp veggies with tangy spices for a ready-to-use topping that instantly elevates any dish in three unique ways. Pickled Kimchi Slaw is a medley of crisp veggies and bold, vibrant spices that will satisfy taste buds with a tangy punch of heat

and a whole lot of celebration-worthy flavor. Those looking for a burst of color and crunch will enjoy the Pickled Veggie Rainbow Slaw, which was handcrafted with simple, real ingredients and freshly pickled with spices like mustard seeds, peppercorn and cumin. The newest innovative addition to the lineup, Pickled Mango Fiesta, brings a citrusy crisp mix of mango and jicama seasoned with a zesty kick of chile-lime. All three slaws come in easy-to-use, upright resealable packages.



YO QUIERO! GRAB & GO

FRESH INNOVATIONS, LLC/YO QUIERO! BRANDS

RHODE, TX

This innovative product line is designed to meet the rising consumer demand for convenient, healthier snacking options at grocery and convenient stores. With 92% of consumers expected to maintain or increase their purchases of grab-and-go items, according to Technomic, these products are on trend. Yo Quiero! is committed to delivering fresh, high-quality ingredients, making it even easier for consumers to enjoy delicious, nutrient-dense snacks wherever they are. As

a leader in better-for-you snacking, Yo Quiero! is offering a selection of its signature products in the new 4-ounce Grab & Go format, including: Original Guacamole, Chunky Guacamole, Hatch Chile Guacamole, Red Salsa, Corn Salsa, Avocado Salsa Verde, Original Bean Dip, Black Bean Dip, Creamy Jalapeno Dip and Smoke House Onion Dip. The Yo Quiero! Grab & Go line comes in easy, tear-away, display-ready cases featuring 12, 4-ounce cups.

PB



Winter merchandising sets the stage for seasonal success, as retailers spotlight fresh produce with displays and holiday promotions.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

Winter Produce Merchandising Heats Up

Retailers can boost cold-season sales by spotlighting apples, citrus, potatoes, carrots and more.

BY MIKE DUFF

Winter is coming, and retailers have the opportunity to capitalize on the season and its sales opportunities by creating strong presentations, leveraging promotional programs, and embracing holidays and events.

Frank Kolovich, director of operations at Mannix Family Markets, Staten Island, NY, which recently opened its fourth ShopRite supermarket in its native Big Apple borough, says winter merchandising begins even as summer departs, as the store brings commodities, such as apples and pears, up front.

"We move the soft fruit to the back of the department because of limited availability," he says.

By mid-September, the company was offering prominent displays of apples and citrus, with both large aisles and specialized endcap presentations of apples and oranges in its newest Staten Island, NY, store. Summer items, including berries, remained prominent, but seasonal change was evident.

"Fall transition is one of the most exciting times for our produce associates," says Dave Holloway, director of produce and floral, Busch's Fresh Food Market, Ann Arbor, MI.

THE BIG PICTURE

Produce suppliers who are focused on commodities that get their best play in winter have a range of approaches to presentation and the results.

Winter is vegetable prime time, says David Bright, vice president of marketing at Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA. Grimmway also

owns Cal-Organic Farms. "The weeks leading up to Thanksgiving and Christmas rank highest in sales for vegetables during the year."

The holidays are critical for vegetable sales, and retailers who lean into them have a better chance of building sales.

"Holiday events are key to attracting shoppers into the store by providing excellent value on both high-volume items, like carrots and potatoes, while highlighting how products like greens and fresh herbs can transform staple items into something special for a holiday event," says Bright.

Retailers should be ready to execute against post-holiday opportunities as well, as consumers move into resolution season.

Bright says it's "very important to emphasize the value, health benefits, and sense of care that the purchase and preparation of fresh vegetables brings shoppers responsible for nourishing their households."

Price promotions are particularly effective on key items, like carrots and potatoes, to draw shoppers into the store, he adds. "Now is the time for retailers to work with their growers and distributors to plan promotions to draw shoppers into the store with great values."

Susan Noritake, vice president of sales and marketing, Bako Sweet, Bakersfield, CA, says the company is reviewing macroeconomic trends and working closely with retailers to get ready for how circumstances will play out in an uncertain economy.

"That said, we remain confident in the category," she says. "Sweet potatoes continue to grow, attracting new shoppers who are finding ways to make them part of everyday meals. They also shine as a comfort food, which resonates strongly during the winter months."

STAND OUT TO SELL

Noritake says successful merchandising has a foundation in "physical availability." That means dedicating more space, using prominent locations, and above all, keeping display bins full.

"If product isn't stocked, sales are missed," she emphasizes. "With labor challenges, this can be difficult, but we partner with retailers to provide merchandising support whenever possible to



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Colorful citrus displays draw attention during the winter, with retailers using high-traffic areas to promote wellness.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

help ensure strong, uninterrupted displays throughout the entire year."

The role of guacamole in holiday gatherings, which is becoming more prominent and is particularly associated with football, has prompted Avocados from Mexico, Irving, TX, to introduce a variety of retailer-supporting promotions. For the third consecutive year, it has struck a deal to become the Official Avocado Brand of the College Football Playoffs.

Besides taking advantage of the college promotion, Stephanie Bazan, senior vice president, commercial strategy and execution, Avocados from Mexico, says retailers should take into consideration that displays are stronger when bulk and bagged products both get prominent display.

She notes that 70% of U.S. households purchase avocados 11 times per year. Offering both bags and bulk is the base foundation of avocado merchandising in the winter, as about 35% of sales are in bagged, and that proportion is growing.

A merchandising study from Avocados from Mexico demonstrates that bigger produce department displays do generate additional unit sales, even unbranded, with satellite presentations pushing purchasing.

Sales got an even greater lift when displays included Avocados from Mexico identification, Bazan says, which suggests that branding can have an impact on how consumers respond to certain commodities.

THE FRUITS OF DISCUSSION

Strong citrus displays are key to winter merchandising success, says Cassie Howard, senior director of category management and marketing at Sunkist Growers, Valencia, CA. "Citrus is a natural fit for impactful, eye-catching displays, especial-

ly in high-traffic areas, such as perimeter entrances, island displays or secondary refrigerated sections. From holiday-themed builds to vibrant specialty citrus destinations, we've seen success with retailers who cross-merchandise citrus alongside health-forward items, such as water, tea and immune-supporting snacks."

Presentation of produce and complementary fruit items is evolving, and the changing environment warrants new thinking about specialty produce, says Alex Jackson of Frieda's Branded Produce, Los Alamitos, CA. "Price alone won't move the needle," she observes. "Today's shoppers expect inspiration and value."

Retailers might consider successful tactics, including building endcap displays featuring bagged Meyer lemons or kumquats complemented by simple recipe cards, with circular support tied to citrus and other winter season items to drive volume.

When it comes to support, a boost can come from out-of-the-box thinking, such as "digital activations on Instagram, TikTok, and loyalty apps that link citrus to trending cocktails, snacking or immunity boosts, QR codes at shelf that tie to quick videos or recipes take it further," says Jackson.

This season, Frieda's is supporting retailers with turnkey citrus promotions, multi-purpose shippers and cross-merch ideas like kumquats with ginger or turmeric, Jackson says. "For foodservice, we encourage chefs and distributors to work one season ahead, sampling now to develop recipes and plan for next year."

Wonderful, Los Angeles, CA, supports its citrus products using myriad approaches, including in-store point-of-sale, often supported by the company's staff of merchandisers.

"Traditional tools, like eye-catching dis-



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WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Each holiday is an opportunity to highlight different items to enable the shopper to prepare something special for their household and all who visit their homes."**

David Bright, Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA

- **"Citrus bins can be used to create 'wellness reset' displays for New Year promotions, capitalizing on both functionality and flavor. Seasonal storytelling is key: Shoppers are looking for both relevance and inspiration."**

Cassie Howard, Sunkist Growers, Valencia, CA

plays and circular ads, continue to be effective in generating awareness and encouraging immediate purchase decisions," says Zak Laffite, president, Wonderful Citrus. "However, retailers now have opportunities to leverage targeted promotions, including using retailer loyalty card data, as well as physical and digital couponing."

Jennifer Hirano, vice president of marketing, POM Wonderful, notes the California fresh pomegranate season takes place from October through February. "We see an uptick in sales for our whole pomegranates and POM Pomegranate Arils in December, January and February, as consumers are eager to get them while they can during the winter season."

She says they have found consumers typically purchase pomegranates on impulse, so they leverage point-of-sale displays to generate buzz around the season. "Additionally, fresh pomegranates have become a household staple for holiday entertaining, adding a festive ruby-red pop of color to dishes."

APPLES SELL BEYOND FALL

Apples are a key component of winter produce merchandising, and Cynthia Haskins, president and chief executive of the New York Apple Association, Fishers, NY, says the fruit attracts consumers year-round, so retailers can count on demand when merchandising is abundant.

"This is a repeat-buy item, and we encourage retailers to build large displays, as consumers will come back for more," says Haskins.

Winter merchandising has continuity, but hitting high points can keep produce department presentations fresh. Diane Smith, executive director, Michigan Apple Committee, Lansing, MI, says consumer favorites,

such as Gala and Fuji apples, can satisfy consumers year-round, and retailers have an opportunity to highlight apple varieties that peak at different times across the calendar.

"We encourage consumers to try Ever-Crisp after the first of the year," she says. "It's a great apple variety that stays fresh for a long time."

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Six Ways to Sell More Bananas

The category is a year-round staple and retail powerhouse in produce.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Say the name Wellfleet, MA, and oysters might be the first food to come to mind. However, it's at this Cape Cod port in 1876 that ship captain Lorenzo Dow Baker first arrived with 160 stems of bananas from Jamaica.

In 2024, the U.S. imported approximately 10.4 billion pounds of this peel-and-eat fruit, up from 10.2 billion pounds in 2023, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) import data. That means shoppers can walk into any U.S. supermarket, regardless of the month, day, or time of day, and buy bananas.

And buy they do. The banana category represented 4.3% of total produce sales, up 3.2%, for the 52 weeks ending Sept. 13, 2025, as provided by NielsenIQ Retail Measurement, Total Store data.

"Bananas are very important to produce sales," says Jeff Salchenberg, produce program and category manager at New Seasons Market, a 22-store chain headquartered in Portland, OR. "They are on just about everyone's shopping list and are a constant top sales item."

Case in point, 35% of respondents to the Dole Fruit Company's 2024 National Banana Survey ranked bananas as a must-have grocery staple, more so than any other produce item, and sixth on the list of all supermarket items, behind bread, eggs, meat, milk and coffee.

Best of all for shoppers, bananas are one of the most affordable items in the produce department, with an average price per pound under \$1. More specifically, the average cost of bananas was 63 cents per pound for the year ending Sept. 13, 2025, based on NielsenIQ data, up 1 cent from the previous year.

Here are six ways to keep bananas on top:

1. BUILD SALES ON THE CAVENDISH VARIETY

"The Cavendish variety remains the most preferred banana by consumers," says Ahiby Rodriguez, trade marketing manager, for Fyffes North America Inc., in Coral Gables, FL.

This sun-yellow variety represented 90.8% of category dollars, up 2.7%, for the year ending Sept. 13, 2025, according to NielsenIQ data.

Guatemala, Ecuador and Costa Rica consistently supply the largest portions of the U.S. banana market. At the same time, Colombia and Honduras are other significant suppliers, based on data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity, Boston, MA. The U.S. currently imposes a 10% tariff on bananas imported from these countries.

"While bananas remain a powerhouse of the North American produce department, the category does face challenges," explains Bil Goldfield, director of corporate communications for the Charlotte, NC-headquartered Dole Food Company.

"Climate change and extreme weather are reducing yields, forcing significant new investment in soil health, water management and disease mitigation," he explains. "Meanwhile, geopolitical factors (Ukraine war, tariffs, new demand in Asia and Eastern Europe) and rising input costs are driving production and delivery costs higher."



Bright, well-stocked banana displays, from green to ripe yellow, encourage impulse buys and highlight freshness. PHOTO COURTESY CAMPISI PRODUCE CONSULTING

Despite challenges, importers and marketers agree the Cavendish banana isn't going anywhere as America's favorite banana variety.

2. TEST SPECIALTIES

Specialty bananas appeal to a range of niche consumers, and they coexist as a complementary option for those seeking variety, culture or premium value, according to Sofia Acon, president of Kapi Kapi Growers, in Miami Beach, FL. "Growing consumer interest in plantains inspired us to expand into this category, and we now grow and ship them regularly as part of our offering. Signage that explains the variety and how to use it helps reduce hesitation."

Most plantains and other specialty bananas are displayed in bulk. However, in response to a retail buyer's request, Melissa's/World Variety Produce in Vernon, CA, has introduced a 2-count pack with a scannable UPC brand code to ensure a correct ring.

"Plantains and baby bananas are our two fastest growing specialties and make up 80% of specialty banana sales for us," says Robert Schueller, Melissa's director of public relations. "A smaller portion size is the appeal for baby bananas for kids, and for the consumer who usually cuts a Cavendish in half."

Melissa's offers customized signage for proper identification and information about specialty bananas.

For red bananas, says Gustavo Carranza Gonzalez, director-produce manager for bananas N.A. at Fresh Del Monte, in Coral Gables, FL, "target gourmet and adventurous eaters."

3. OFFER ORGANIC & FAIR TRADE

Conventional and organic Cavendish bananas are the two top banana category SKUs sold at Sunset Foods, a five-store chain based in Highland Park, IL. "Organic is more of a niche, maybe because of the cost difference," says Vince Mastromauro, director of produce operations.

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The average cost of organic bananas was 87 cents per pound for the year ending Sept. 13, 2025, based on NielsenIQ data, up 3 cents from the year before. This marks a 24-cent difference between conventional and organic bananas. However, organic bananas represented almost 15% of banana category sales for the year ending Sept. 13, which was up 16.9%.

"The demand for organically grown bananas is growing due to health and wellness trends, consumer influence and value perception, and environmental and ethical concerns," says Tracie Levin, controller at M. Levin & Company, on the Philadelphia Wholesale Market, in Essington, PA, and one of the largest banana wholesalers, ripeners and distributors on the East Coast.

Fair trade banana volumes have grown by 15% in the U.S. since 2022, driven by major retailers switching their organic banana program to organic fair trade, according to Kim Chackal, co-owner and vice president of sales and marketing for Equifruit, in Montreal, Quebec, North America's market leader in fair trade-certified bananas.

Chackal cites a recent study from Globescan that found recognition of the Fairtrade label has increased by 118% in the U.S. since 2019, and 68% of consumers in the U.S. are willing to pay more than the regular price for fair trade products. "This speaks to a rapidly growing appetite for fair trade bananas in the U.S., and I think we're going to see a lot of development here in the coming years."

4. GET RIPE RIGHT

There's a widely held notion that all consumers want perfectly yellow fruit. Findings from the 2024 Dole National Banana Survey reveal that 29% of Americans prefer to eat bananas that are at least partially green, with 6% opting for them to be primarily green. This trend toward greener, unripe fruit is even more pronounced among organic customers.

"We advise our retailers to offer a variety of ripeness levels to meet the diverse preferences of their shoppers, from green to yellow," says Dole Food Company's Goldfield. "We also work with our partners to help them tailor their banana displays to local shopper habits, whether greener fruit for health-conscious organic buyers, yellow fruit for traditional uses, or a combination."

The ripening of bananas is typically carried out by wholesalers, importers, or specialized distributors, says Fresh Del Monte's Gonzalez. "Retailers like Walmart and Kroger may have their own ripening rooms or contract ripening services."

Gary Campisi, president of Campisi Produce Consulting, in Rogers, AR, and ripening trainer for Thermal Tech, in Blythewood, SC, says the advantage for retailers to ripen their own fruit is controlling the banana color more precisely. "The challenge of this strategy is having state-of-the-art ripening rooms that are easy to operate, and an excellent training program established to keep ripeners focused on producing excellent results."

What's new is the ability to utilize AI in automated ripening with Thermal Tech ripening rooms, Campisi adds. "This new AI system utilizes a combination of data, predictive technology, and artificial intelligence to help ripeners take the guesswork out of ripening and provide consistently ripened bananas each day."

5. BUILD SEVERAL DISPLAYS

Front-of-department banana displays drive impulse purchases and signal freshness, says Gonzalez. "Middle or back displays can



Strategic placement of bananas at the front and throughout the produce department helps boost sales of this staple fruit, which anchors produce departments nationwide.

PHOTO COURTESY FYFFE

pull shoppers through the department, increasing exposure to other produce."

Bananas are the anchor of the tropical display at New Seasons Markets, says Salchenberg. "We proudly display them with marketing material that calls out our partnership with Organics Unlimited G.R.O.W. program. We also cross-merchandise bananas on mobile racks at the registers and for grab-and-go in the prepared foods department and coffee bars for the lunch crowds and morning grab-and-go snack crowd."

Specialty bananas are best displayed on their own, rather than alongside Cavendish bananas, recommends M. Levin & Company's Levin. "Merchandising the specialty bananas with other ethnic and tropical fruit and produce is ideal."

There are three tried-and-true ways to merchandise bananas, according to Fyffe's Rodriguez. "First, it is setting up secondary displays. Second, offer more yellow than green fruit and handle it with care when setting up displays to prevent bruising. Third, zero out-of-stocks: rotate daily, handle gently, and refill frequently."

6. FOCUS ON THE FRUIT'S VALUE-ADD

Supply chain volatility, rising freight costs, climate change, tariffs, labor costs, and disease threats are among the factors poised to make bananas more expensive in the future, says Anthony Serafino, president and principal at the Exp Group LLC, in North Bergen, NJ. "Instead of retailers promoting bananas as a loss leader on a flyer ad for 29- to 49-cents per pound, and losing money, they should promote the banana's value-added benefits, such as its contribution to health and wellness."

Mastromauro, at Sunset Foods, maintains bananas at an everyday price. "We received a price increase earlier this year, up about 10 cents. But at the end of the day, bananas are a staple, and you absorb it."

"Bananas have strong potential to expand beyond their role as a low-cost staple into a versatile, health-forward product category," says Kapi Kapi Growers' Acon. "Consumers increasingly prioritize wellness, energy, and natural ingredients, which positions bananas as an easy, affordable superfood."



Bright, colorful citrus displays remind shoppers that citrus is a natural source of vitamin C and wellness.

PHOTO COURTESY MELISSA'S

Citrus Road Map: 6 Ways to Drive Sales

From coast to coast, citrus remains a bright spot in produce.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Citrus first took root in the U.S. during the age of exploration, and centuries later, the industry continues to thrive — though its center of gravity has shifted west.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) data for the 2023-2024 season, California dominated production, accounting for nearly four-fifths (79%) of the nation's citrus crop. Florida followed with 17%, while Texas and Arizona each contributed the remaining 4%. Coast to coast, the season spans from October to May or June.

Add summer imports, and the fresh citrus category represented 6.9% of produce sales for the 52 weeks ending Sept. 13, 2025, as provided by NielsenIQ Retail Measurement, Total Store data.

However, it's when U.S.-grown citrus is available that the broadest variety of SKUs is available to both retailers and their customers alike.

"Citrus is on customers' taste buds when it's wintertime," says Vince Mastromauro, director of produce operations for Sunset Foods, a five-store chain based in Highland Park, IL.

"Top movers for us are the Halos (mandarins), Sumos (dekopons) and heirloom navels. However, we will also carry a traditional California navel, Cara Caras, tangerines, two types of grapefruit, and, of course, lemons and limes. Occasionally, we'll carry some bagged lemons and limes, but with the oranges and grapefruit, bulk sells better."

1. GO MAD FOR MANDARINS

Mandarins are the largest citrus sub-category, representing 39.7% of dollars per NielsenIQ data. So, give them space.

"Stem and leaf mandarins, both bulk and bags, and dekopons dominate the category throughout the season," says Jeff Salchenberg, produce program and category manager at New Seasons Market, a 22-store chain headquartered in Portland, OR. "The mandarins are easy to peel and are perfect for snacking and lunch boxes. The dekopon has quickly become a customer favorite."

Over the past few seasons, mandarins have outpaced oranges in growth by nearly three times, says Wiktoria Dabrowska, sales and marketing coordinator for Fresno, CA-based Fowler Packing, which distributes its citrus under the Peelz brand.

This season, Al Bates, president of Sun Pacific Shipping in Bakersfield, CA, which distributes its mandarins under the Cuties brand, says, "organic volumes of mandarins will be up by 25%."

Organic citrus represented 5.8% of total citrus sales, based on NielsenIQ statistics, with organic mandarins totaling 23.8% of organic citrus dollars.

Creekside Organics, will debut its organic Dulce mandarins, a variety that starts before clementines. "This makes our Fruit World brand the first to market on certified organic mandarins from California," says Bianca Kaprielian, co-chief executive of the Bakersfield, CA-based grower.

Growers say prime promotional windows for conventional and organic mandarins are Thanksgiving week, December, February, March and April.

To differentiate its Halos-brand mandarins in-store and drive incremental sales, Wonderful Halos, the mandarin brand of the Los Angeles, CA-headquartered Wonderful Company, is launching a new core point-of-sale (POS) display lineup, according to Zak Laffite, president of its subsidiary, Wonderful Citrus.

"The colorful 'So Sweet' bin bases will showcase Wonderful Halos as an ideal snack choice that is sweet, seedless, and easy-to-peel. To further maximize visibility with shoppers during key selling periods, the Halos POS lineup will also include new seasonal accessories with winter holiday and basketball themes."

Dekopons, a mandarin-orange cross available from January through March, sell themselves, says Sunset Foods' Mastromauro. "Customers get excited to see them in store. You don't have to advertise them. As long as they're available, and they're a nice size, you can't keep them in stock."

2. POSITION LEMONS AND LIMES AS EVERYDAY STAPLES

Lemons, at 16.9% of citrus category sales based on NielsenIQ data, and limes at 16.2%, combine to 33.1% and are the second most valuable citrus category.

"Lemons and limes are top movers in the category because they

are so versatile," says Mastromauro. "For years, we sold them by the pound. Now, we sell them by the each or two or three for \$1, depending on price."

Beyond commodity Lisbon or Eureka lemons and Persian or Tahitian limes, seedless lemons, Meyer and Pink lemons are gaining in popularity as are Key limes,

sweet limes and finger limes, according to Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, in Vernon, CA.

Seedless lemon consumption has grown by more than 40% over the past year, according to Wonderful's Laffite.

"We've expanded operations beyond

California to Mexico, and now offer year-round distribution, including at major retailers, such as Whole Foods, Walmart, Trader Joe's and Kroger, among others. We offer 1- and 2-pound bags of Wonderful Seedless Lemons for heavy lemon users and those seeking convenience without having to remove the seeds."

Meyer lemons, available domestically from September to May, are a star, albeit only representing 1% of lemon category sales, per NielsenIQ data.

"Pink lemons are gaining ground because they combine novelty with versatility and they are Instagram-worthy items that, like finger limes, deliver on the consumer desire for discovery," says Alex Jackson, vice president of sales and procurement for Frieda's Branded Produce, in Los Alamitos, CA. "This season, we're reintroducing Frieda's Finger Limes, in both conventional and organic."

3. MAKE THE MOST OF ORANGES

Oranges represent 23% of citrus dollars based on NielsenIQ data. Of this, navels make up 66.4% of dollars, with 12.9% for Cara Caras and 1.7% for blood oranges. Overall, organic oranges are 21.8% of the organic citrus category, up 21.8% in the last 52 weeks.

"Our California navel program starts in October and runs through May," says Doug Stewart, director of sales and citrus at Kern Ridge Growers LLC, in Arvin, CA. "We had a mild summer, so there's a good color break on our early varieties. As far as sizing, we've got 40s all the way down to 138s out there, so a nice run of sizes, whether for cartons, RPCs, bags or bins."

Last year, Bee Sweet Citrus introduced its premium variety line, which includes Royal Red oranges. This year, it's adding Heirloom Navels. "Each variety is packaged in elevated graphics that highlight its characteristics," says Jason Sadoian, sales representative.

"Cara Caras and blood oranges are among the fastest-growing specialty varieties this season, gaining traction due to their unique flavor profiles and versatile usages," says Cassie Howard, senior director of category management and marketing, Sunkist Growers, Valencia, CA. "Cara volume sales are up 29% compared to a year ago, with the 3-pound Cara bag driving the category."

On trend is a greater demand for sour



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oranges, as more chefs are using them to cook, according to Jordan Feek, director of marketing for DLF International Inc., in Fort Pierce, FL. "We've replanted about 4,000 sour orange trees in one of our groves."

Texas supplies super sweet oranges, says April Flowers, marketing director for Lone Star Citrus Growers, in Mission, TX. Varieties include early, Marrs, Pineapples and Valencias.

4. DON'T FORGET GRAPEFRUIT

Grapefruit represents 4% of citrus dollars based on NielsenIQ data. Of this, pink and red varieties make up 67% of dollars, with 4.4% for pummelos. Overall, organic grapefruit is 5.6% of the organic citrus category, up 15.6% in the latest 52 weeks.

"Our bread and butter is Texas-grown sweet Rio Red grapefruit," says Flowers. "Thanks to the low acid and bright red flesh of our Rio Reds, our fans anxiously await the Texas citrus season. Full production runs from the end of October to mid-March."

This season, Wonderful Citrus is launching new packaging and positioning of the company's Texas-grown sweet grapefruit, formerly Sweet Scarlett's, says Laffite. "The fruit will hit the shelves in time for the December holidays, supported with in-store displays, signage, and digital content to help introduce Texas Sweet Grapefruit to new, younger audiences."

Fowler Packing's Golden Gem grapefruit and pummelos are also part of the premium variety line the company introduced last year.

5. INTRODUCE SHOPPERS TO SPECIALTY CITRUS

Specialty citrus represents only 0.2% of citrus category dollars per NielsenIQ data, and includes Buddha's-hand, calamondin, sudachi, yuzu, and kumquats, the latter of which makes up 28.8% of sales.

"Specialty citrus is truly having a moment," says Frieda's Branded Produce's Jackson. "Our Popjoys kumquats, Limequats, and now Mandarinquats are gaining ground because they combine novelty with versatility. Availability has stretched thanks to our grower partnerships in California, with Mandarinquats available January through April, and Limequats remain a hot, limited-time option."

Jackson adds that the best way to introduce these items is through bold merchandising and education. "Shoppers need to see them in-store for several weeks, so they



From mandarins to lemons, citrus shines during the winter season, offering retailers vibrant displays, strong sales opportunities, and a way to connect with health-conscious consumers. *PRODUCE BUSINESS/AIMEE TENZEK PHOTO*

become familiar, view them as retailer-endorsed, and have the chance to repurchase."

6. THE EYES HAVE IT

Displays remain the strongest sales driver across the category.

"Shoppers are drawn to abundance, variety and color," says Creekside Organics' Kaprielian, emphasizing that multi-variety, side-by-side displays encourage discovery.

Wonderful Citrus' Laffite notes that the grower's large in-store displays for its Halos mandarins drive 23% faster velocities than non-displayed items. At the same time, Lone Star's high-graphic bins and 5-pound Winter Sweetz bags continue to lead grapefruit sales.

Citrus sales during winter are a hit with customers at Sunset Foods. "When we're in the peak season, we'll combine a variety of citrus items and put them on ad," says Mastromauro. "We'll have lemons and limes, heirloom navels and the sumos, so shoppers will see the variety of citrus items

we have on sale in the winter. I'll also use the tagline, 'Get Your Vitamin C,' to make that connection to health and the value-added benefits of fresh citrus, especially in January."

Citrus suppliers are stepping into the 2025-2026 season with strategies designed to energize sales and excite shoppers. For example, Sunkist Growers is expanding its "Sunny Days" brand platform into retail, featuring new POS materials, updated bins, and storytelling that links its citrus legacy to wellness trends.

At Fowler Packing, the new "Nothing Peelz Better" campaign connects with consumers, both online and in-store, through streaming ads, influencer content, Instacart promotions, a Planet Fitness partnership, and in-store sampling events.

As the domestic citrus season gains momentum, the retail formula for success is clear: build big, tell authentic stories, and keep everything the citrus category offers top of mind — and at the top of shoppers' carts. **PB**



The "Fresh From Florida" campaign builds brand awareness and keeps Florida produce top of mind.

PHOTO COURTESY FDACS

Strong Season Ahead for Florida Tomatoes

Favorable weather and support for U.S.-grown produce brighten prospects for tomato season.

BY MIKE DUFF

The outlook for Florida tomatoes looks good as the weather has been kind to the Sunshine State, even if costs and foreign competition have been rough on growers.

At a time when consumers are rethinking sourcing, Florida tomatoes have gotten a lift from retailers and consumers who support locally and domestically grown produce.

Mike Servello, chief executive, Bargain Grocery, Utica, NY, says as Florida tomato season begins, he pivots from greenhouse tomatoes to Sunshine State products for their solid quality and availability. He notes that the Florida crop provides him with what he needs, especially in slicing tomatoes.

"In season, it's the bulk of your East Coast tomatoes, and it's good," he says.

Based in Lakeland, FL, Publix Super Markets goes out of its way to inform and promote Florida tomatoes. In a recent guide on its website, Publix informed consumers that Florida-grown tomatoes are at their peak through May and that the "vibrant red beauties develop to maturity on the vine before they're harvested and handled with care." It backs that up with a video presentation emphasizing that the tomatoes Publix receives from its home state growers are vine-ripe so that they "grow bold and juicy."

With an antidumping duty imposed on Mexican tomatoes by the Trump administration making headlines (following the July termination of the 2019 Tomato Suspension Agreement), a consciousness about purchasing products grown in the United States may provide a further boost to Florida tomatoes. Already, the White House has issued a statement saying the July tariff imposition is making a difference in support of domestic tomato production.

IN THE SEASON

Given the good weather conditions in Florida this year, expectations are for a solid crop, trade policy aside. Susie McKinley, director, Division of Marketing and Development, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Tallahassee, FL, notes that Sunshine State tomatoes should be set to meet market demand.

Major markets for Florida tomatoes include the Eastern Seaboard and Canada, according to McKinley, and Florida tomatoes supply the foodservice, retail and processing industries.

Robert Guenther, manager, Florida Tomato Committee, Maitland, FL, says the Florida tomato season's official start was Oct. 15, which commences the ability to pack and sell Florida tomatoes across the country. This is dictated by the USDA Federal Marketing Order on Florida tomatoes. "Traditionally, the season starts in the central Florida region and moves down to places such as Immokalee and Homestead as the winter season comes to Florida. Then it will migrate back up the state as spring and early summer commence."

Guenther says Florida tomatoes make their way across the U.S., as well as over the U.S. border. "Florida tomatoes are sold in all 50 states, Canada, and Caribbean countries," he says. "The crop traditionally favors foodservice as its primary customer, but you will find a wide range of Florida tomatoes available at retailers across the country."

Procacci Holdings Co. of Philadelphia, PA, is a Florida tomato grower by virtue of owning Gargiulo Inc., which grows tomatoes in Immokalee and Myakka City, FL. Joseph Procacci III, vice president for business development, says the company has significant distribution in the U.S. Northeast out to Chicago, with some tomatoes going as far as Kansas City, mostly via wholesalers and distributors.

"Most of it goes to the Northeast," he says. "That's where the most mouths are."

Conditions have generated high hopes for the Florida tomato crop, he adds. "If you look at this calendar year from January to now, the weather has been very favorable in Florida. You need full sun, cool nights to make a tomato crop. That's why in the wintertime in Florida, it's just so perfect. It's perfect growing conditions."



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Procacci says quality will be “fantastic” and price will be a strong market this fall.

Guenther expects a strong market for Florida tomatoes this season. “It’s still a little early to predict quality and price, but based on plantings and production, we are expecting strong quality of a wide range of varieties.”

“Input cost continues to be an issue, as with many other fresh produce items,” he cautions. “Weather can also impact the market for Florida tomatoes, given hurricane season and a cold snap that can occur in the Florida growing regions.”

Paul (Graves) Williams, president, Gadsden Tomato Co., Quincy, FL, also says the season looks good so far. “There could be a hurricane coming we don’t know about, but right now it’s been perfect growing conditions.”

Williams says his business is split between retail and foodservice. “In our two slots, we pack about 2 ½ million boxes of tomatoes. All our major customers are wholesalers.” From there, he says about half of the tomatoes he grows go to big retailers and half to foodservice.

GETTING ATTENTION

FDACS works with retailers to promote Florida tomatoes in a variety of ways. Promotions generally feature “Fresh From Florida” branding to establish a unified theme across initiatives.

“Promotions can be customized and may include a combination of circular ads, digital ads, in-store announcements, merchandising assets, recipes, social media campaigns, sampling events and more,” says McKinley. “Retailers can drive sales of Florida tomatoes by engaging in ‘Fresh From Florida’ branded promotions. For example, Florida tomatoes will be featured by The Fresh Market in a holiday meal during a ‘Fresh From Florida’ sponsored livestream cooking demonstration this December.”

In its outreach efforts, FDACS keeps the “Fresh From Florida” branding prominent.

“The widely recognized ‘Fresh From Florida’ brand is supported by a consumer advertising campaign,” says McKinley. “Retailers benefit from the extensive reach of the advertising campaign, which includes a mix of advertising on TV, radio, print, digital display, social media, online shopping platforms, cash back and coupon apps, retail floor graphics, shopping cart advertising and more.”

KEEPING AN EYE ON TRADE

Change in the trade environment should have a significant impact on Florida tomatoes, says Guenther.

“Imports continue to be the major source of tomatoes in the United States, accounting for over 70% of the tomatoes available in the United States,” he says. “Certainly, the decision by the U.S. government to terminate the 30-year U.S.-Mexico suspension agreement levels the playing field for domestic tomato growers. American farmers now can plan, invest and expand knowing they aren’t undercut by dumping.”

In July, the Trump administration terminated the 2019 Tomato Suspension Agreement, first signed in 1996, which established a floor price for Mexican tomato exports to the U.S. Upon terminating the agreement, the Department of Commerce implemented an antidumping duty on all imports of fresh tomatoes from Mexico.

“Stronger domestic production means a more resilient supply chain,” says Guenther. “By keeping American growers competitive, we reduce dependence on imports and avoid the risk of sudden shortages or spikes. Stable, fair pricing ensures growers can stay in



Favorable weather conditions have generated high hopes for this year’s Florida tomato crop. Florida-grown tomatoes include cherry, grape, Roma, round and heirloom varieties.

PHOTO COURTESY FLORIDA TOMATO COMMITTEE

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **“Retailers can drive sales of Florida tomatoes by engaging in ‘Fresh From Florida’ branded promotions.”**

Susie McKinley, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL

- **“The decision by the U.S. government to terminate the 30-year U.S. Mexico suspension agreement levels the playing field for domestic tomato growers. American farmers now can plan, invest and expand knowing they aren’t undercut by dumping.”**

Robert Guenther, Florida Tomato Committee, Maitland, FL

business and keep producing for decades to come. Every acre of tomatoes supports local communities, farm workers, truck drivers, packers and suppliers. By ensuring fair competition, we’re protecting thousands of jobs and keeping the rural economy strong.”

Gadsden Tomato’s Williams says endemic problems make the future of Florida tomatoes problematic, as pricing suppression from foreign competition and higher production costs have been making it harder for growers to make a living even with good crops.

Procacci says with some of the tariffs and pressures on imports, “there may be more demand for domestic products.” Yet, he says, it’s still a wait-and-see situation. And, of course, labor costs continue to weigh into the cost of operations.

“As a domestic grower, we’re continuing to see costs rise,” says Procacci. “As a U.S. grower, I’m hoping that we start to command a higher price for our product.”

Despite the challenges, Guenther says that U.S. retailers should be confident that Florida tomatoes will satisfy their shoppers, and emphasizes that Florida provides “strong stable supplies, good quality, and stable prices from tomatoes which are the top vegetable bought by consumers in the United States in terms of sales data.”



Bright, well-stocked onion displays showcase the variety and versatility of the category, with imported sweet onions from Peru and Mexico helping U.S. retailers maintain a steady, promotable supply and strong sales during the winter months.

PHOTO COURTESY NEW SEASONS

Evolving but Stable: A Look at US Onion Imports

Peru is the predominant source for onion imports, but Mexico and Chile help keep supplies steady.

BY LISA WHITE

America's onion imports are evolving due to economic changes, regulations and consumer trends. Yet, overseas market supply has been strong and steady.

According to Volza's Onion Import data of United States, from November 2023 to October 2024, there were 3,789 onion importers in the U.S., importing from 4,071 suppliers globally.

PRODUCE BUSINESS recently reported that Peruvian onion production has climbed to 591,000 tons by 2025, enabling a reliable, year-round U.S. supply.

"Peru and Mexico are the primary sources [of onion imports], with some supply from Chile," says Peter Pelosi, vegetable transportation manager at A&J Produce Corp., Bronx, NY. "Because [fall is] the Southern Hemisphere's growing season, quality and supply are strong during our winter months. We've seen steady growth, roughly 5% year over year, as consumer demand for sweet onions expands."

He adds fewer countries are attempting exports to the U.S. and Canada because of strong domestic production and strict import standards. Also, growing demand for sweet onions has spurred more domestic production of these varieties.

THE CURRENT CLIMATE

Timing is a major factor when it comes to this segment.

"In general, our Peruvian sweet onions are available from Labor Day right through to Vidalia season," says Blake Dasher, chief exec-

utive, G&R Farms Produce, Glennville, GA. "That timing allows us to maintain a seamless year-round supply of sweet onions for our retail partners, bridging the gap until the Vidalia crop comes back into season in Georgia."

Cliff Riner, vice president of ag production and grower relations at G&R Farms, notes the excellent quality of this year's crop. "We're seeing superb consistency across the board — onions that deliver the sweetness, crisp texture, and beautiful appearance our customers expect. It's a crop we're very proud of and expect to thrive through the season."

According to Steven Shuman, G&R Farms' general manager and vice president of sales, the company is projecting an increase of about 3% to 5% over last year.

Olivia Kelso, food safety, marketing and sales, JJB Family Farms, Escondido, CA, is seeing a big demand for onions from Mexico this year. She notes that Mexican white onions are prevalent from February to May, while organic whites from Mexico are big from March through June. Peruvian yellow sweets typically hit the states at the end of October or early November.

White onions out of Mexico are more popular, since the quality has improved over the years, says Kelso. "Conventional onions markets are oversupplied and will remain that way for possibly the next 12 months."

Potandon Produce, Idaho Falls, ID, works primarily with U.S. growers to offer yellow, red, white and sweet onion varieties, while also supplementing with select imports from Peru and Mexico. "This approach supports our commitment to a consistent, year-round onion supply for the Green Giant Brand," says John Anderson, director of product supply.

"By balancing strong domestic production with trusted import partnerships, we're able to work with the best partners to maintain high quality standards, reduce supply interruptions and deliver dependable onions in every season."

ISSUES & CHALLENGES

In recent years, onion importers have faced a number of trials. “Challenges include tariffs,” says Pelosi at A&J. “Although none are on Peru, there is 25% on Mexico and 0-15% on Guatemala.”

“The opportunity is a consistent supply of sweet onions during the winter months, which keeps retail shelves full and consumers engaged. Peru will have to fill any gap in supply created by tariffs.”

Pelosi adds that, with demand for Peruvian onions increasing, prices could rise.

“Retailers benefit by locking in early pricing and securing shipments in advance,” Pelosi notes. “The challenge is managing higher freight costs and tariffs, while ensuring product quality after long transit. The opportunity is steady, promotable product that maintains the sweet onion category year-round.”

Kelso at JJB Family Farms says the company is faced with inaccurate information with arrival times, last-minute supply changes, fluctuating weather and world market conditions.

“A long-term challenge is that the onion is a high cash required crop,” Kelso says. “Growers depending on bank funding, whether overseas or local, will struggle over the next 12 to 24 months due to an excess of onion supplies.”

VARIETY IS KEY

Offering a steady and diverse supply of onions with proper promotional support helps ramp up the category’s sales and profits.

G&R Farms grows several Peruvian sweet onion varieties, says Riner. The bulk of the Peruvian sweets are Century, but it also grows Sweet Magnolia, Macon, Plethora and Campo Lindo. “Each has been carefully selected for flavor, size, adaptability and performance,” he explains. “The unique advantages include the mild flavor profile, high water content and low pungency. This makes them great to eat raw or cooked.”

The company offers a range of packaging options, including 2-pound mesh bags for retail shoppers, 40-pound bulk boxes and pallet-sized bins. It also works with customers on custom pack sizes.

As far as preference, Kelso notes that sweet onions out of Peru are a short day sweet onion that many retailers believe are the sweetest. There are U.S. intermediate onions that may meet standards, but all customers have different preferences.



Full, well-maintained displays and clear variety separation help customers make quick decisions. Pairing onions with potatoes or meal ingredients also drives sales.

PHOTO COURTESY SHOPRITE

“We encourage decision makers to eat the onion and let the flavor talk,” she says. “With social media and other intel out there, they will find out [what’s popular]. Each seller has the task of measuring price elasticity and consumer satisfaction. We hope they buy our whites today, and we buy theirs tomorrow, but every year is different. What we need to do is read the market and listen to the people who say, ‘I don’t know, let’s find out what this year brings us.’ They are the wise ones.”

Pelosi at A&J says the predominant onion varieties in winter include Texas 1015s (round sweet onions) and flat sweet varieties, such as Bermuda and Spanish onions.

“The region where our Peruvian sweet onions are grown provides excellent conditions for sweet onion production,” he adds. “The climate is marked by mild, steady temperatures and sandy, loamy soils similar to those in Georgia. Rainfall is extremely low during our growing window, which is ideal for cultivating sweet onions because it reduces disease pressure and helps ensure clean, high-quality bulbs. This year’s growing conditions didn’t deliver any big surprises, resulting in an exceptional crop.”

G&R Farms’ vice president of operations, Jon Dorminey, recently visited the company’s Peruvian operations, meeting with its full-time production manager and other team members. “Favorable conditions, like those in Georgia, have led to an outstanding 2025-26 product, with great shelf-life,” says Riner.

According to Shuman at G&R, pricing this season has remained stable. “While we’ve seen only slight increases, those are

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **“Onions are a staple, but shoppers respond when the category looks fresh, clean and easy to shop.”**

John Anderson, Potandon Produce, Idaho Falls, ID

- **“Retailers benefit by locking in early pricing and securing shipments in advance.”**

Peter Pelosi, A&J Produce Corp., Bronx, NY

not expected to impact consumer-level pricing. That stability is something we know both retailers and shoppers value.”

There has been a big influx in organic onion imports, and this is in line with increased consumer demand. According to the Organic Produce Network, with \$249 million in total sales, organic onions achieved a notable dollar growth of 6.5% in 2024, equal to \$15.2 million above 2023.

G&R Farms offers organic Peruvian sweet onions, and this year, its organic program has grown significantly, with about a 20% increase in organic shipments compared to last season.

“Out of our total Peru volume, organics represent a meaningful share and continue to show steady demand growth year-over-



Peruvian sweet onions bring dependable quality, mild flavor, and strong seasonal supply to U.S. retailers, ensuring consumers enjoy flavorful onions year-round.
PRODUCE BUSINESS/AIMEE TENZEK PHOTO

year,” says Shuman. “The increase is a testament to consumer preferences. This year, Millennials and Gen-Z are buying more organic produce, prioritizing a healthy mind, body and lifestyle.”

FOCUS ON FLAVOR

When marketing and promoting imported onions, it's key to focus on flavor.

“Peruvian onions offer several key advantages,” says Shuman. “Their mild, sweet flavor closely mirrors what consumers love about Vidalias. They come to market during the U.S. off-season, which means consumers can count on a seamless year-round supply. Lastly, the consistent growing conditions in Peru, combined with our precision farming practices, make for a reliable product in both quality and flavor.”

Pelosi at A&J notes that November through January is the key promotional window, as this is when sweet onions are abundant and align with holiday and winter cooking.

“It's important to keep an open mind and have action plans to promote the product after sellers see it,” advises Derrell Kelso, manager at JJB Family Farms. “We need to keep the end user in mind, communicate and match supply with promotions.”

JJB Family Farms is currently working on a Peruvian organic sweet program that will start in November 2025, extending the season to when the company transitions into Georgia sweets.

“Due to the holidays, the variety that overshadows during the winter months is a yellow or sweet onion,” Olivia Kelso says. “Families create more stews and soups to which the yellow onion complements and holds the flavors of the broths. They eat these and other veggies that create each dish. Red onions are not a big import, as the U.S. market has done a great job of supplying the states [with this variety]. Also, the white onion market continues to be strong.”

Derrell Kelso adds that it's important to support U.S.-grown onions unless the country is out of product or the quality is failing to meet standards.

“USA-grown is what consumers prefer if it is available,” he says. “Be careful when sacrificing customer satisfaction over margins or relations; what is best for the consumer is always what should be best for everyone.”

When promoting and marketing imported onions, experts agree that consistency and visibility are key.

“Onions are a staple, but shoppers respond when the category looks fresh, clean and easy to shop,” says Anderson at Potandon Produce. “Full, well-maintained displays and clear variety separation — yellow, red, white and sweet — help customers make quick decisions. Pairing onions with potatoes or meal ingredients also drives incremental sales. Updated packaging with clear color cues adds convenience and brand confidence at shelf level.”

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Metro Detroit's diverse market spans a wide range of cultures and income levels, says Joe Santoro, senior produce buyer at Nino Salvaggio Market, Detroit, MI.

PHOTO COURTESY NINO SALVAGGIO MARKET

Fresh Flavor Resurging in Detroit

Investment and diverse consumers provide produce opportunities.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Detroit is in the midst of an economic revival. According to the City of Detroit, its population growth rate doubled that of the State of Michigan in 2024 and beat the national average.

"Development and investments in the city have grown, and the food scene is vibrant," says Dominic Russo, general manager of Rocky Produce in Detroit, MI. "We've seen a lot of investment in the downtown area, and the city is surrounded by suburb little down-towns with their own dynamic food scenes."

Detroit makes for a diverse culinary landscape in terms of types of cuisine and the fresh produce needed to make those meals, states Jordan Grainger, vice president of sales and business development for Ben B. Schwartz & Sons in Detroit, MI. "Aside from a dynamic demographic mix, Detroit has lower commercial real estate costs than other major cities, attracting professionals who want to open their own restaurants. We've seen explosive growth in the Detroit food scene in recent years."

U.S. Census data indicates over half of the city's population is Black, and there is a growing Hispanic population. Other ethnicities include Asian and Native American. "Detroit and Southeast Michigan are diverse in culture and cuisine," says Dominic Riggio, president of

Riggio Distribution in Detroit, MI. "The retail and restaurant scenes cater to that diversity."

Detroit is one of the most unique and inspiring produce markets in the country because its population reflects a true blend of cultures, traditions and evolving diets, explains Sarah Randazzo DeLapp, marketing director at Joe Randazzo's Fruit & Vegetable in Detroit, MI, with four stores. "We pride ourselves on carrying one of the largest selections of fruits and vegetables in the Midwest, which means we're able to support the wide range of cuisines and traditions that make Detroit different from any other city."

Having a mixed customer base, including students and faculty, affects the produce mix at University Foods in Detroit, MI, according to Norman Yaldoo, owner-operator. "We handle a lot of categories and specialty produce," he says. "Demand for unique items is growing because of international customers and social media influences."

Metro Detroit encompasses not only ethnic diversity but socio-economic diversity as well. "Our market is unique because of our diverse customer base, both ethnically and also from high-end to value-focused consumers," says Joe Santoro, senior produce buyer at Nino Salvaggio Market in metro Detroit, MI, with four stores.

RETAIL TRENDS

According to a report by Retailstat, Detroit's grocery store landscape "witnessed a slow but steady improvement in recent years" with at least 471 grocery stores and anticipated growth of more stores. The report notes expansion in suburbs and downtown by large retailers, such as Meijer, Target and Whole Foods.

Independent retailers play a crucial role. “Particularly in downtown, people depend on and have relationships with their neighborhood shops to get high-quality produce,” says Grainger. “There is immense loyalty to local businesses in Detroit.”

Major Detroit independent supermarkets include Harbortown, University Foods, Detroit People’s Food Co-op (a Black-led, community-owned grocery cooperative), Savon Foods Super Market and Glory Supermarket.

Joe Randazzo’s flagship location has served Detroit for over 70 years in an area often referred to as a food desert, explains Sam Randazzo Jr., produce buyer. “We’ve built our reputation on providing fresh fruits and vegetables where access hasn’t always been available and affordable,” he says. “By sourcing from local farms when possible and buying in volume like a wholesaler, we keep costs down and pass those savings onto our customers.”

Another defining factor of Detroit’s produce marketplace is the variety of diets. “We’ve seen an increasing demand for plant-forward lifestyles,” says Randazzo Jr. “Vegans, vegetarians, dairy-free and gluten-free customers rely on our wide selection of produce to support their dietary needs. We believe managing dietary restrictions shouldn’t have to be expensive.”

Convenience continues to trend. “We’ve seen an increase in value-added,” says Santoro. “Cut fruit and chopped vegetables are consistently on the rise for us.”

Joe Randazzo’s offers home delivery through Instacart. “Our grocery buyer has brought in convenience items, such as salad kits, and we offer fresh-cut fruit and vegetables to allow affordability to meet convenience,” says DeLapp.

RESTAURANT TRENDS

Detroit is experiencing a restaurant renaissance. Jeremy Gal-

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **“We pride ourselves on ensuring everyone in our community can enjoy fresh, healthy food regardless of their income.”**

Sam Randazzo Jr., Joe Randazzo’s Fruit & Vegetable, Detroit, MI

- **“Detroit has welcomed a number of restaurants helming different cuisines in the last few years. This has trickled down into a need for more specialty produce.”**

Jordan Grainger, Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Detroit, MI

li, wholesale delivery manager for Joe Randazzo’s, says Detroit’s adventurous diners, and global flavor seem to be thriving. “We’re seeing new kinds of food from all over the world,” he says. “Places are serving up new twists on Japanese, Mexican, and even African street food. The new trend is all about bringing new flavors to the city.”

Restaurant trends drive variety. “Our food scene is not only growing in size, but also in diversity,” says Grainger of Ben B.

Detroit’s close connection to local farms and its thriving restaurant scene keep produce at the center of everyday life, states Randazzo Jr. “From chefs sourcing authentic, high-quality ingredients to families stocking up on seasonal favorites, produce is part of what makes Detroit’s food scene so unique,” he says. “Our role as a family business is to keep that tradition alive — bridging cultures, supporting local farmers, and making sure fresh, healthy food is accessible to everyone.”

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Wholesalers Put Value In The Middle

Detroit wholesalers partner and expand to serve the food scene.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Detroit wholesalers are the lifeblood of the region’s produce distribution stream. “Our Detroit produce terminal brings in some of the best produce anywhere in the country,” says Joe Santoro, senior produce buyer at Nino Salvaggio Market in metro Detroit, MI, with four stores. “Independent retailers like us are looking for top-shelf produce, and they find it for us.”

The two largest and most well-known wholesale hubs in the Detroit area are the Detroit Produce Terminal and the Eastern Market. “These markets are massive distribution centers for everything from produce to flowers, and they primarily serve other wholesalers,” says Jeremy Galli, wholesale



Ben B. Schwartz & Sons supports Detroit’s fast-growing food scene by delivering premium produce and value-added services — from repacking and bagging to labeling — to meet the needs of independent retailers and restaurants across the Midwest. Pictured is Ryan Elfline, chief financial officer.

PHOTO COURTESY BEN B. SCHWARTZ

delivery manager at Joe Randazzo's Fruit & Vegetable in Detroit, MI.

The Eastern Market, in addition to housing some distribution companies, includes an upscale retail-type market. "Local growers use this market to sell to the public," says Dominic Russo, general manager of Rocky Produce in Detroit, MI.

SERVING CUSTOMERS

Detroit's strong independent retailers are known for the quality of their products. "We make sure they can always deliver on their promise," says Jordan Grainger, vice president of sales and business development for Ben B. Schwartz & Sons in Detroit, MI. "We stay competitive by always delivering only the best produce, and have expanded to include value-added services, such as repacking, bagging, and more, so however people need their produce, they can get it."

The independent retailers in Detroit drive the market, states Russo. "They are very strong and hold a high standard," he says. "The level of care they have in their



Andrews Brothers is one of the wholesalers on the Detroit Produce Terminal. Pictured (L-R) are: Shaun Boyd, Charlie Palazzolo, Anthony Baulsamo, Jeff Abrash, David O'Brien, Jim Boggio Jr. and Bob Ventimiglia. *PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO*



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WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"There's a large customer base for value-driven produce in Detroit. Those types of customers move a lot of produce when they get the right price."**

Dominic Russo, Rocky Produce, Detroit, MI

- **"We take great pride in offering the best produce at the best value to our customer. That's why we're down shopping the terminal — so we can find the best deals and pass that on to our customers."**

Joe Santoro, Nino Salvaggio Market, Detroit, MI

departments is unbelievable. They move a lot of produce."

Detroit wholesalers help customers offer value. "Our customers have come to expect the best quality and value," says Santoro. "We take great pride in offering the best produce at the best value to our customer."

Customers at University Foods in Detroit, MI, seek out good deals and freshness, states Norman Yaldoo, owner-operator. "We buy quality," he says. "We buy No. 1 produce, and keep it at a low price."

Quality, service, and cost have long been the factors in selling produce in Detroit, explains Dominic Riggio, president of Riggio Distribution Co. in Detroit, MI. "Trends in packaging and varieties come and go, but quality, service, and cost determine success."

Agility is another benefit for wholesale customers. "Our customers find value in shopping from us because we offer flexibility," says Russo. "They can buy as many times a week as they want."

Santoro shops the market six days a week. "It allows us to be nimble," he says. "We lean on our experience to make an educated guess on what we need, but things happen. So we can be nimble when we're buying every day."

Having customers at the high-end and at the value-end means bringing in something to meet everyone's needs, states Russo. "We have an ideal blend of different types of customers, which allows us to move a lot of produce," he says.

ENHANCING PERFORMANCE

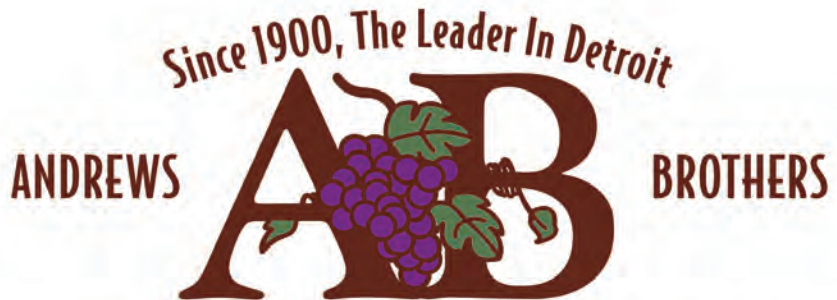
Detroit wholesalers add services, expand areas, and employ technology to better serve customers. "As our customers' needs change, we're not limiting our service to them," says Russo. "We're doing more to ensure our customers have what they need to be successful."

Yaldoo emphasizes the relationship with wholesalers is important. "We need to meet the expectations of our consumers, so we must have a supplier that backs us up."

Ben B. is experiencing increased demand

in value-added services, including everything from bagging to repackaging. "Consumers want to buy produce in different quantities and preparations, so it's important that we're able to prepare commodities in a number of ways," says Grainger. "We've always considered ourselves a partner, not a vendor, and in that spirit, we're focused on expansion."

Ben B. is now serving new markets, such as North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Arkansas and Missouri, and offering new



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services including white labelling, repack-
ing, mesh bagging and more. "We're also
working on making it easier to order and
track deliveries with our proprietary ERP
platform," says Grainger. "Our passion has
always been delivering the highest quality
produce and always will be; we're just
focused on making it better and for more

people than ever before."

To stay competitive, Joe Randazzo's
is constantly implementing technology,
including online ordering, inventory
management and route optimization. "It
makes business more efficient and easier
for our customers," says Galli. "While price
is always a factor, we win customers by



PHOTO COURTESY BEN B. SCHWARTZ

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A ★★★★★ I



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as long-term partners rather than just a
supplier."

LOCATION ADVANTAGE

Detroit is ideally centrally located on
the Canadian border and connected to an
international airport and major freeways,
while also being near a thriving Midwest
grower community. "Detroit is also close
to Leamington, Canada, which is the
greenhouse capital of North America,"
says Grainger. "This gives us easy access to
nearly any produce item possible, while
also allowing us to serve a wide range of
U.S. locations quickly."

Its location in the upper Midwest
provides proximity to the local growing
regions of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Ontario
and beyond, explains Riggio. "At the same
time, we can service customers in those
same regions very efficiently," he says.

Russo notes Rocky Produce brings in
many local items to support the growers
and take care of customers. "We act as a
one-stop shop for local, which benefits the
customers," he says.

The Detroit market has a unique connec-
tion to farms in Michigan and the Midwest,
explains Galli of Joe Randazzo's. "This allows
wholesalers to get fresh, seasonal produce
directly from growers, a major plus for local
restaurants and grocers," he says. "We are
able to provide restaurants with fresh, local
and seasonal ingredients, definitely an
advantage for them as well."

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Get Shoppers in the Holiday Spirit

Nut and dried fruit merchandising can maximize year-end produce sales.

BY STEVEN MAXWELL

Nuts and dried fruits are a holiday staple for generations of U.S. shoppers, but their popularity appears poised to increase, thanks to awareness of the importance of healthy eating.

Taken as a whole with dried fruits, Research & Markets estimates that the category is likely to reach over \$23 billion in value terms by 2030, an increase from \$18 billion in 2023.

RIDE THE SEASONAL WAVE

The holiday season is one of the most important times of the year for walnuts, according to Robert Verloop, executive director and chief executive of the California Walnut Board and California Walnut Commission (CWB), Folsom, CA. He cites Circana research that shows an estimated third of annual sales occur during the fourth quarter. "In-shell walnuts remain a nostalgic favorite for both décor and snacking," he adds.

"The holiday season is all about sharing and celebrating," says Joseph Setton, executive vice president of Terra Bella, CA-headquartered Setton Farms, a specialist in both raw, roasted, and processed pistachios.

The company's product line ranges from raw pistachio kernels for cooking and baking to dark chocolate-covered pistachios for an "irresistible holiday treat." Setton says the company's Premium Burlap Gift Bag is a classic holiday favorite and seasonal best-seller, offering extra-large, dry roasted and salted pistachios.

Setton Farms has recently expanded its USDA organic-certified facility, allowing it to introduce new organic pistachio options.

Setton says retailers can drive sales by highlighting pistachios as a healthy and convenient snack. "Shoppers are especially drawn to no-shell, flavored varieties that combine ease with bold taste."



Eye-catching displays and creative cross-merchandising help nuts and dried fruits shine during the holiday season — from walnuts to pistachios, retailers are tapping into snacking trends.

PHOTO COURTESY SETTON FARMS

To help drive the seasonal lift, Verloop recommends retailers increase walnut visibility and use creative merchandising strategies, such as showcasing display bins, boxes and gift baskets. He suggests promoting walnuts for seasonal recipes and entertaining occasions, and including nuts in digital offers or loyalty app features.

The CWB is currently implementing what Verloop describes as an "aggressive marketing initiative tying California walnuts to the joy of the season and positioning them as an integral part of holiday baking, cooking and entertaining." The program includes influencer collaborations, plus connected TV and streaming commercials, covering a range of platforms.

EXPAND SHOPPERS' CARTS

Headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, Wonderful Pistachios will be bringing back its No Shells Sweet Cinnamon pistachios for the holiday season after a successful debut in 2024. The variant, available for a limited time, will feature a refreshed look and new, larger 11-ounce and 22-ounce bags through Costco and Walmart.

Diana Salsa, Wonderful Pistachios' vice president of marketing, says retailers can maximize sales by leveraging impactful point-of-sale (POS) displays. "Retailers that feature Wonderful Pistachios POS displays are proven to drive two times' sales velocities compared to retailers who do not use

them," she says. "These displays capture the customer's attention at key decision-making moments, creating an opportunity for an impulse purchase."

According to Jacob Basecke, executive vice president of Stockton, MO-based Hammons Black Walnuts, the holiday season is the peak time for black walnuts, and the company offers a full line of products, from retail packs to bulk and foodservice options.

For the 2025 season, Hammons has introduced a retail-ready, compact shipper display designed to allow retailers to merchandise black walnuts while maximizing floor space. "Black walnuts perform best when their uniqueness is highlighted," says Basecke.

For date specialist Bard Valley, based in Yuma, AZ, the holiday season is an important time. "To draw attention to dates at the holidays, we give retailers secondary merchandising vehicles like shippers, racks, display cases, display pallets, that all help make dates front and center for the holidays," explains the company's vice president of sales and marketing, David Baxter.

Bard Valley has recently launched several new date varieties, including Ajwas, Sukkari, Khalas, and Khudri, which Baxter believes should add excitement to the category. The company is also preparing to introduce several new flavors of mini Medjools, which Baxter says are unique to the category.

To make the most out of dates in-store, he recommends ensuring they are as visible to shoppers as possible. "Most people like dates, but a lot just don't know it yet. We have a very high repeat purchase rate in the category — between 40-50%. That is to say, of new consumers who try, about half will repurchase."

The Atlanta, GA-based National Peanut Board hopes to increase consumption among Gen Z via a new campaign featuring on-site activations and influencer partnerships, among other activities. The board will also launch a new commodity brand for USA peanuts in early 2026.

Lauren Williams, the Peanut Board's director of communications, recommends retailers capitalize by creating holiday-themed displays that tap into the product's rustic appeal, as well as including recipe cards or QR codes linked to the organization's range of seasonal dishes featuring peanuts.

Similarly, Eric Boonschaft, vice president of marketing at Hampton Farms in Charlotte, NC, says retailers can maximize sales by "leaning into the seasonal traditions and social occasions that make in-shell peanuts relevant," including family gatherings, holiday parties, and sports watching.

PERFECT COMBINATIONS

Effective cross-merchandising can help drive nut and dried fruit sales in store, and Baxter says Bard Valley has enjoyed successful brand partnerships in both the physical, retail world as well as the digital one. "When we combine with something that is simple and takes the eating experience to the next level, we find a lot of success."

"One of our most successful in store co-promotions has been in our partnership with the California Walnut Commission. We have done a 'Buy dates, get Walnuts free' promo at a lot of retailers, and it always shows a great return."

For Hammons' black walnuts, the company has found success by featuring black walnuts beside regional or locally sourced products to "emphasize their authentic American origin."

Verloop says CWB research has found 76% of shoppers are more likely to purchase walnuts when displayed alongside fresh produce, recommending cross-merchandising as one of the best ways to inspire new usage ideas and increase basket size.

He suggests pairing walnuts with apples, pears, cranberries, sweet potatoes and green beans — all of which often feature in holiday dishes.

Salsa says pistachios work well positioned near like-minded products such as protein bars, beef jerky, and in the produce section to align with consumer perceptions around health, energy and convenience.

"This approach reinforces our better-for-you food message and helps consumers naturally associate pistachios with smart, satisfying snacking choices," she says.

OTHER MERCHANDISING OPTIONS

Verloop also recommends sampling as one of the most effective ways to engage shoppers and drive conversion. "Offering small tastings, such as walnuts paired with dates, cheese or in a salad, helps remind consumers how flavorful and adaptable they can be," he says.

Likewise, Basecke at Hammons says sampling baked goods or desserts that feature the company's signature black walnuts "can be highly effective since the bold flavor often sells itself."

Clear, simple signage also makes a difference, according to Verloop, who suggests highlighting key nutrition benefits — in the case of walnuts, their high plant-based omega-3 ALA content — to connect with today's wellness-minded shoppers.

In a similar vein, Setton recommends "eye-catching display shippers" as an effective

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- "When the product is front and center, and you give consumers an idea of how to use them, that's where the magic happens and sales really take off."

David Baxter, Bard Valley, Yuma, AZ

tive tool to boost sales. "Setton Farms' pre-loaded, easy-to-assemble displays feature bold graphics, strong health callouts, and flexible placement options that fit easily in any produce section," he says.

"We also work closely with retailers to tailor promotional programs. Simply put, impactful displays and strategic promotions keep pistachios top of mind and in more shopping carts."

For Baxter, effective in-store marketing in the category is "really is all about merchandising and educating the consumer."

"When the product is front and center and you give consumers an idea of how to use them, that's where the magic happens and sales really take off."

PB



Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella, Inc.

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Local Wholesalers: A Vital Link

BY JOHNNY KARRAT

In today's produce industry, the middleman has never been more important. Not just any middleman, but the ones who can bridge the gap between what farmers grow and what end users need.

At the center of this shift are local wholesalers who also serve as processors, transforming raw local produce into ready-to-use, high-demand products for the market, while simultaneously distributing bulk product to meet larger-scale needs.



Generally speaking, farmers don't peel, slice, dice, or package their vegetables. Nor should they. Their expertise is in planting, tending and harvesting crops.

Yet the market increasingly demands both fresh-cut produce (washed greens, peeled carrots, diced onions, portioned fruit) and large volumes of bulk product for restaurants, distributors and retailers. Some farms can process a few items, but the growing demand is getting to be too much for them.

This is where local wholesalers step in to handle both. By adding the labor, equipment, and food safety standards necessary to turn raw product into value-added items, and by distributing those items and bulk product efficiently, they enable farmers to access markets they couldn't reach on their own.

The benefits extend beyond the farmgate. For end users, like restaurants, institutions, meal prep companies, grocery chains and distributors, these middlemen solve problems that raw product alone can't.

Processed fresh-cut items provide convenience, consistency, and a ready-to-use quality. Bulk distribution ensures that high-volume buyers can get the quantities they need reliably, without managing dozens of small farm accounts. Together, processing and distribution create a seamless flow from farm to table at both large and small scales.

This dual role of wholesaler and processor creates a streamlined supply chain that benefits every link: Farmers gain access to stable,

large-scale outlets for both bulk and value-added products. Buyers get a reliable supply of fresh, uniform product in the formats they need. And processors themselves help reduce waste by utilizing crops in multiple ways, maximizing value for growers while minimizing loss.

The ripple effect is especially powerful for grocery retailers, where shoppers increasingly demand both local sourcing and convenience.

Fresh-cut produce is one of the fastest-growing categories in the store, while bulk items remain essential for traditional departments, prepared foods and high-volume kitchens. Most farms don't have the capacity to process or distribute for these markets. Local processors and wholesalers make it possible for retailers and distributors to meet consumer demand for local, high-quality products, something national suppliers often can't deliver with the same speed, flexibility, or attention to detail.

In short, the middleman is no longer just a connector, they are the transformer and distributor.

They take the farmers' harvest and prepare it, package it, and move it efficiently to where it's needed, whether in bulk or as value-added fresh-cut items. Without them, farmers would struggle to reach broader markets, and buyers would struggle to get the products they need in the form their customers expect.

The next time you see perfectly peeled, diced, or packaged produce, or bulk crates of fresh vegetables arriving on time, remember, it didn't just come from the farm. It came through the local wholesaler and

processor — the essential middleman who makes modern produce distribution possible, for farmers and buyers alike. **PB**

Johnny Karrat is the fourth generation of his family in the produce industry and is director of sales and operations for Capital City Produce, based in Troy, NY. His great-grandfather was a wholesaler, his grandfather was a broker, and his father worked at the brokerage and ran his own trucking company before eventually forming wholesaler Capital City Produce in 2012. Capital City Produce is a broker, wholesaler, re-packer and processor of fresh produce.

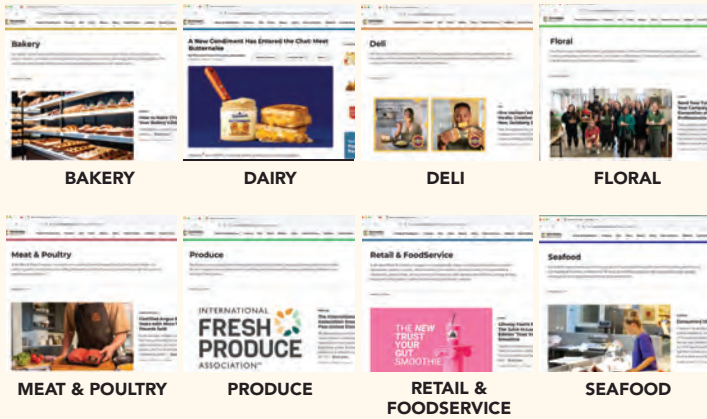
When you see perfectly packaged produce, or bulk crates of fresh vegetables arriving on time, remember, it didn't just come from the farm. It came through the essential middleman.



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Celebrating the UK Fresh Produce Industry's Finest

The FPC Fresh Awards, organized by the Fresh Produce Consortium, were presented Sept. 26 in London. The awards are renowned for uniting individuals across the fresh produce industry to commemorate achievements, engage in networking opportunities, and forge lifelong connections.

Peter Durber, founder and managing director of Tropifresh, received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Durber is an industry pioneer who has shaped the U.K.'s access to Caribbean, African and tropical produce for more than four decades.

With a small London warehouse and a van, Durber established Tropifresh and built a market in the U.K. for exotic and tropical fruits and vegetables. The company outgrew its original location and moved to the old Spitalfields market, and later New Spitalfields Market, where it continues to trade. Today, Tropifresh is a stand-out leader in exotics, not only in the U.K., but across Europe, guided by Durber's passion to support the grower and serve the customer.

Other highlights of the awards include:

- Greosn was crowned Fresh Produce Business of the Year.
- Dyson Farming was recognized as Technology Champion of the Year for its pioneering use of agritech innovation.
- Thanet Earth was honored with the first-ever Net Zero Impact Award.
- Tanya Peters, MDS, was selected as the Rising Star of the Year.
- Rebecca Emery, of Pro-Force, was selected Manager of the Year.
- Riviera Produce was voted Best Place to Work.
- Clock House Farm was given the Sustainability Excellence in Supply Chain Management Award.
- Fyffes was recognized for its environmental sustainability contribution, winning the Ethical Sustainability Excellence Award.
- Emily Pinkney, of Sysco GB, won Climate Champion of the Year.
- Altered Carbon won the Agritech Excellence Award.



Fyffes' Imogen Christmas (center, with award); Toni Direito; Lucy Mitchell; Roger Crudge; John Hopkins; and fellow Fyffes colleagues, pictured receiving the Ethical Sustainability Excellence 2025 award at the annual FPC Fresh Awards gala ceremony held in London.

PHOTO COURTESY FYFFES

- Food Forensics won the Innovation Excellence Award for its Sampling App.
- Fresh4U Produce, London, won the Wholesale Fruit and Veg Supplier of the Year.
- Primafruit was named the Supermarket Fruit and Veg Supplier of the Year.
- Delifresh was named Foodservice Supplier of the Year.
- The Summer Berry Company won the U.K. Grower of the Year.
- Aldi won the Multiple Fruit and Veg Retailer of the Year.
- Tesco won the Online Fruit and Veg Retailer of the Year.

FPC is recognized as the voice of the United Kingdom's fresh produce industry, playing a key role in supporting the growth of all aspects of the U.K.'s domestic and global supply chains for the fruit, vegetable, and flower industries.

PB



Greosn was named the Fresh Produce Business of the Year at the 2025 FPC Fresh Awards ceremony Sept. 26. This accolade, recognized as the "winner of the winners," highlights the company's contributions to the fresh produce industry.

PHOTO COURTESY GREOSN



Thanet Earth won the Net Zero Impact Award at the FPC Fresh Awards. The award was accepted by Rob James (right), technical director. Also pictured is Adam Harrison, environmental and sustainability technologist.

PHOTO COURTESY THANET EARTH

Climbing Kilimanjaro, Cultivating a Produce Business

BY M. JILL OVERDORF

There's a moment, just before dawn on summit night, when the wind cuts across the upper slopes of Kilimanjaro and the only light comes from the narrow beams of headlamps. You've been climbing since 1 a.m., breathing thin air at nearly 19,000 feet. Each step is deliberate and slow. It is a moment that distills everything that came before: months of preparation, days of steady ascent, teamwork, resilience and strategy.

As I made my way along the 64-mile Northern Circuit, I found myself reflecting on my decades in the produce industry. Around mile 40, the parallels between climbing a mountain and succeeding in this business were striking.



1. PREPARATION DEFINES THE CLIMB. Before setting foot on Kilimanjaro, there are months of preparation.

The same is true in produce. Long before a product lands on a menu or shelf, there's crop planning, seed selection, breeding trials, food safety audits, logistics coordination and marketing strategy. The companies that treat preparation as strategy are the ones ready when the climb begins.

2. TEAMS MAKE THE ASCENT POSSIBLE. Kilimanjaro is not a solo climb. My Northern Circuit team included four guides, 24 porters, two cooks and five fellow hikers. Each role was essential.

In produce, the team extends from seed breeders to field crews, logistics coordinators to chefs, marketers to cold chain managers. Success depends on coordinated effort along the value chain. Just as every climber contributes to the summit push, each partner in the produce world plays a role in getting from seed to service.

3. THE CAMPS ALONG THE WAY. The Northern Circuit unfolds over 10 days, passing through camps that act as physical and psychological milestones. Each camp represents strategic progress — stage gates to acclimate, reflect and celebrate.

In produce, these waypoints mirror milestones: a successful trial, a new distribution foothold, a packaging breakthrough, or a perfectly timed menu placement that makes diners stop and notice.

Just as camps help climbers adapt to altitude, strategic moves in produce build resilience and market strength. Menu placement becomes more than culinary real estate; it's the thoughtful positioning of produce at the right moment and altitude to thrive. Honoring these stages builds long-term trust.

4. PACE DETERMINES ENDURANCE. On Kilimanjaro, “*polé*” (Swahili for “slowly, slowly”) is survival strategy. Moving too quickly on lower slopes can lead to exhaustion or altitude sickness later. The Northern Circuit's slower timeline allows climbers to build strength and acclimatize.

In produce, pacing growth is just as critical. Rapid expansion can outpace infrastructure and strain supply chains. Thriving companies expand deliberately, aligning growth with capacity, logistics and demand.

Thoughtful menu placement works the same way. Seasonal spe-

cials and targeted features let consumers acclimate to new flavors and formats, building loyalty without overwhelming.

5. WEATHER HAPPENS: ADAPTABILITY WINS. No matter how well you plan, Kilimanjaro's weather will surprise you. One day, the sun beats down; the next, storms turn trails to mud. Climbers adapt.

In produce, weather is both literal and metaphorical. Climate change shifts growing patterns; logistics disruptions reroute flows; consumer trends pivot overnight. Survivors aren't those expecting perfect conditions, they're those who adapt with agility.

Menu placement benefits from this mindset. A bumper crop might prompt a quick restaurant special; a short season might inspire a limited-time retail feature. When conditions shift, agile operators find new routes to keep produce visible.

6. STRATEGY MEETS GRIT. On the Northern Circuit, summit night begins at School Hut around 1 a.m. Headlamps cut through the dark as climbers ascend steep switchbacks in thin air.

In produce, “summit night” might be peak harvest, a national launch, a retail reset or a crisis response. It's when strategy meets execution and grit. Summit night isn't the time to improvise; it's when every part of the organization functions in harmony. Companies that thrive are those that train for summit night daily.

7. CELEBRATE THE SUMMIT. Reaching Uhuru Peak as the sun rises is breathtaking. But the summit isn't the end, you still have to descend.

In produce, summits can be exhilarating: a product goes viral, a menu feature becomes iconic, a retailer adopts a new variety. But what happens after matters just as much.

Integrating wins into sustainable practices determines whether you can climb again. A buzzy menu placement is valuable only if it drives lasting demand, improves logistics and deepens partnerships. A successful season is the foundation for the next, not the finish line.

8. THE MOUNTAIN CHANGES YOU. Perhaps the most profound lesson from Kilimanjaro is that the mountain changes you. You arrive with a plan; you leave with perspective. The climb humbles you and reveals what you and your team are capable of.

The produce industry does the same. It teaches resilience, rewards patience and celebrates creativity. Each menu placement builds cultural relevance and reminds diners that fruits and vegetables are not afterthoughts; they are the foundation of flavor, sustainability and nourishment.

Hiking the Northern Circuit and building a produce business may seem worlds apart, but the parallels are undeniable. When I reached the summit, I didn't just celebrate the view. I thought about every camp, every step, every storm, and every member of my team who made the ascent possible.

That's how I see the produce industry: not as a single summit, but as a series of strategic ascents, each one building on the last. And like any great climb, it's not just about reaching the top. It's about how the journey shapes you — and how, step by step, you shape the journey.

PB
M. Jill Overdorf is founder and president of The Produce Ambassador.

Famous Software: Supporting the Fresh Produce Industry for 50 Years

A native of California's central valley, Wayne Holm began his technology career during the Vietnam War, when he served in the data processing unit at the Pentagon. After completing his military service and an accounting course at Fresno City College, Holm continued expanding his technological expertise by coding accounting systems for local companies.

Eventually, Holm branched out on his own and joined forces with John Dietz and Harvey Kuffner to create what is today, Famous Software LLC.

"Our founder, Wayne Holm, was just a country kid with a dream and an entrepreneurial spirit," says Kirk Parrish, managing partner. "Wayne, Harvey and John understood that their success depended on establishing a strong partnership with their customers. By listening to their challenges and developing solutions to address those needs, they were able to build trust that achieved mutual success. Those principles created a solid foundation for growth and is why we've been in business for over 50 years."

Today, Famous Software is still headquartered in Fresno, CA, with a staff of more than 80 employees.

"We have been, and always will be, dedicated to supporting the fresh produce industry," says Heather Hammack, president. "Famous ERP is purpose-built to meet the unique needs of the industry we serve. Our team has a passion for fresh produce, and our customers



Wayne Holm joined forces with John Dietz and Harvey Kuffner in 1975 to create Famous Software LLC. Holm is pictured at a trade show in 1995. PHOTO COURTESY FAMOUS SOFTWARE

rely on us to help them solve tough challenges."

Famous Software's diverse customer base includes distributors, wholesalers, growers, packers, shippers, exporters, brokers and labor contractors across North America.

"We believe in culture, and we believe in Famous' culture," says Anthony Serafino, president of EXP Group in North Bergen, NJ. "We feel that if you are going to partner with a company, the synergies of both should align. Famous checks all the boxes for us."

With more than 1,500 installation sites and over 20,000 users, Famous is one of

the leading technology providers in the fresh produce industry.

Throughout 2025, Famous Software will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in a variety of different ways, including leveraging a new, celebratory logo.

"For 50 years, Famous Software has been dedicated to empowering the fresh produce industry with innovative solutions, strong partnerships, and a passion for our customers' success," says Hammack. "We take pride in our team's achievements and our ongoing commitment to supporting our customers' growth. The core values established by our founders in 1975 continue to guide our business, and we remain grateful for their enduring devotion to our company and industry." **PB**

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Altar Produce, LLC	38-39	760-357-6762	altarproduce.com	Heartland Produce Co.	16	262-653-1000	heartlandproduce.com
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Carb Americas	38-39	954-786-0000	carbamericas.com	MIXTEC Group	16	562-652-2299	mixtec.net
Consalo Family Farms, LLC	21	856-839-0264	consalofamilyfarms.com	New York Apple Association, Inc.	41	585-924-2171	applesfromny.com
Crystal Valley Foods	38-39	305-591-6567	crystalvalleyfoods.com	Northland Potato Growers	40	218-773-3633	northlandpotatoes.com
D'Arrigo New York	31	718-991-5900	darrigonny.com	Produce Blue Book	9	630-668-3500	bluebookservices.com
Dole Food Company, Inc.	2	704-213-3478	dole.com	Riggio Distribution Company	56	313-843-0840	riggiodistribution.com
EV Produce International, Inc.	46	956-215-8872	evproduce.com	Rocky Produce	58	313-841-7780	rockyproduce.com
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